

With a career spanning four decades, John Divola is as distinctive for his commitment to the photographic community as for his thoughtprovoking work. Divola was born in Los Angeles in 1949. After graduating with a BA from California State University, Northridge, he entered the MFA program at the University of California Los Angeles. There, under the tutelage of Robert Heineken, the artist began to develop his own unique photographic practice, one that merges photography, painting, and conceptual art. In addition to his own studio practice, he teaches contemporary art in the underserved California inland empire and writes on current photographic practice for a national audience. Though his influence and practice are widely recognized by curators, critics, scholars and publishers alike, *As Far As I Could Get* will be the first solo presentation of Divola's work which remains under-studied and under-represented.

The story of John Divola's photography starts with his series *Vandalism* in 1974 while he was still a graduate student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Without a studio of his own, the young photographer sought out spaces throughout Los Angeles in which to work. Treating these abandoned houses like a studio, Divola embraced the holes in the walls, the graffiti scrawled on surfaces, and the debris scattered on the floors as evidence of an unseen number of actors who had similarly utilized the empty space.

For Divola, these remnants were akin to the photographic process. Like the graffiti in the house, negatives are the result of light marking an empty emulsion. Furthermore, photography, like vandalism, implies both a maker ("the photographer") and an action ("to photograph"), and yet the photograph itself is merely a vestige of that causal relationship. Armed with this analogy, Divola began to make his own spontaneous marks in the space and to explore the results photographically. The resulting images challenge basic assumptions about photographic imagery.

Divola continued to take interest in spaces that were seemingly uninhabitable as he began to photograph the empty neighborhoods in the mid-1970s after the Los Angeles's Department of Airports acquired and removed more than 2,800 homes directly impacted by aircraft noise. The action resulted in the re-location of more than 7,000 residents, and their homes, although now vacant, were not completely dormant. Broken windows and doors hanging on their hinges were the result of interested interlopers. These *Forced Entries* (1975) attracted Divola as he presented groupings of two to six photos, with images that pivot around a point of entry, moving in sequence from the exterior to the interior. Like the houses themselves, the images are permeable; the force of Divola's presentation makes it easy to enter these images and to experience the emptiness of these spaces.

In 1990, Divola turned his attention to more metaphysical environments and mystical forces. His Untitled series captures the moments when handfuls of white flour are thrown against a freshly painting backdrop, transforming ordinary elements into mystical shapes and highlighting the distance between reality and representation.

A more recent body of work was captured (almost by accident) as Divola was driving through the desert of the Morongo Valley in Southern California, during his work on the series Isolated Houses (beginning in 1998). During the drive, the photographer frequently encountered dogs that would chase after his truck. A dog owner from his earliest years, Divola felt an affinity for these animals that were swept up in the joy of the chase and was inspired to capture them in the midst of their pursuit.

Also on view at SBMA is Divola's Dark Star and Theodore Street series, his newest body of work. In these series, Divola continues his explorations of photographic reality, utilizing both the reduced form of a dark circle (in the Dark Star series) and the remnants of a vandalized desert home (in Theodore Street). Although the theme and analytical approach harkens back to his earlier work, Divola's process has radically shifted. To create these large-scale, highly detailed prints, the artist utilizes an image capture system in which hundreds of photos are stitched together into one amazing gigapixel image.

This exhibition is a collaborative project led by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and shown simultaneously at SBMA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Pomona College Museum of Art from October through December 2013. Though Divola's photographic series are diverse in subject matter, this approach as one exhibition among three Southern California venues emphasizes the consistent conceptual and performative threads that run through Divola's entire body of work.

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