

A quiet man who supported himself over the years driving a delivery van, Bronx native Alvin Baltrop left an important body of work after his untimely death in 2004 that only now is garnering the serious attention it deserves. Like the startling images of Peter Moore, Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar, and Gordon Matta-Clark, the photographs of Alvin Baltrop memorialize New York City at a breaking-point moment amid ruin and chaos. As such they constitute an important document, remarkable both for its social import as well as for its groundbreaking visual dare. Rarely shown during his life time, Baltrop images reports us back to that conflicted era, when the city was on the brink of a financial crisis; and they convey the raw energy that characterized some of the city's most impassioned grassroots campaigns for survival. Focusing for the most part on the derelict warehouses sited alongside Manhattan's West Side piers, Baltrop's images are the most extensive documentation of the underground gay culture that populated an area by the Hudson River made inaccessible due to the collapse of a segment of the West Side Elevated Highway in 1973. Sited a few blocks southwest from the Meat Packing District, the area also became a center for drug smuggling, and prostitution. Baltrop images captured everything, including leisurely sunbathing, cruising, sexual acts, and crime scenes. With a great sensibility to architecture, Baltrop portrayed his subjects with a heightened sense of drama, instilling his scenes with a great dose of humanity. While the interest on Baltrop's work often focus on the libidinous atmosphere he captured in his photographs, it's important to situate that moment as pivotal in the LGBTQ community in its struggle for inclusion and civil rights.

*The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop* is organized by Sergio Bessa, Bronx Museum director of curatorial programs, and will feature over 120 photographs career drawn from the Bronx Museum's permanent collection and from private collections. In addition, the artist's personal archive, which is housed at the Bronx Museum, will be shown to the public for the first time. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Bronx Museum will partner with Italian publisher Skira to produce a 200-page, amply catalog illustrated and with essay contributions by Hilton Als, Douglass Krimp, Sergio Bessa, and a chronology organized by Mia Kang.

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