

OPEN EYE GALLERY



ALVIN BALDROP AND GORDON MATTA-CLARK: THE PIERS FROM HERE

7 DECEMBER 2013 – 9 FEBRUARY 2014

www.openeye.org.uk

Perhaps more than Matta-Clark could have imagined, Baltrop's photographs portray the "joyous situation" Matta-Clark said he wanted to achieve there; and they constitute rare and indispensable evidence of the proximity and simultaneity of artistic and sexual experimentation in the declining industrial spaces of Manhattan during the 1970s.'
- *Art Forum*

From **7 December 2013 – 9 February 2014**, **Open Eye Gallery** is proud to bring together, for the first time in the UK, the work of photographer **Alvin Baltrop** (1948 – 2004) and that of the 'anarchitect' **Gordon Matta-Clark** (1943 – 1978), whose pivotal role in the field of photography has been often overlooked.

The exhibition focuses on the area of the Piers in New York City during the mid 1970s, and speaks of the state of abandonment and dilapidation these underwent as a consequence of the oil crisis that reconfigured the geography of the city as well as the international market and trading system.

The New York piers act as a mirror or counterpart of Liverpool's docklands. Historically linked via the transatlantic route that since Colonial times, connected Europe to the Americas, the Piers in New York and the docks in Liverpool experienced a similar process of transformation. Unproductive and deserted, the New York 's waterfront was gradually reclaimed by an invisible population who used it for a variety of activities, spanning gay cruising, drug-dealing and smuggling to prostitution, but also bringing together an underground community of visual artists, musicians, film-makers, performers and photographers, from the likes of Vito Acconci and Dan Graham, to Joan Jonas and David Wojnarowicz.

Whilst **Gordon Matta-Clark** was pursuing the idea that art could act as a catalyst for urban regeneration and land re-appropriation, **Alvin Baltrop** investigated life at the margins, mapping hedonistic displays of flesh, occasional sexual intercourse, corpses that could be mistaken for sleeping

squatters (and vice versa) and other traces of humanity hidden amongst the interstices of society, notwithstanding the sense of freedom and liberation originating in the sexual revolution.

In 1975 **Gordon Matta-Clark** illegally entered and took over Pier 52, a huge corrugated iron structure, almost classic in its majesty and, to put it in Gordon's words, "completely overrun by the gays". There he created one of his famous 'cuts' entitled *Day's End*, a spectacular anti-monumental intervention brought to life by the rotation of the sun, which entered the building, thus reflecting in the water of the Hudson River. As Matta-Clark was creating this architectural installation made of light, shadows and water, **Alvin Baltrop** kept documenting the activity of the other occupants of the Piers. The encounter resulting from their different approaches is documented in this exhibition, that represents an occasion to look back at those years, reflecting on gentrification and regeneration across the ocean and at the simultaneous disappearance of the underground (sub)culture.

This exhibition is in collaboration with The Alvin Baltrop Trust and Third Streaming, New York and the Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark and David Zwirner, New York/London.

Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool, is one of the UK's leading photography spaces. Under the direction of new artistic Director **Lorenzo Fusi**, this exhibition follows the launch of Tim Hetherington: You Never See Them Like This, which is on display until 24 November 2013.

Editors Notes:

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Alvin Baltrop & Gordon Matta-Clark Press Preview & Private View:

Press Preview: 12.30 – 3pm, Friday 6 December

Press Preview: 6 – 8pm, Friday 6 December

Gallery Opening Hours:

10.30am - 5.30pm

Tuesday to Sunday during exhibitions.

Closed on Mondays (except bank holidays) and during exhibition changeovers.

About Alvin Baltrop:

Photographer and artist, Alvin Baltrop (1948 – 2004) was born in the Bronx, NY and lived and worked for most of his life in New York City. From 1975 to 1986, Baltrop photographed the Piers along the Hudson River. Built in the mid-1800s for maritime and industrial use, these wood and metal sheds had fallen into disuse by the 1960s as shipping needs migrated to New Jersey. While he worked in the West Village, Baltrop captured a full range of human activity. He documented the groups of people that created casual meeting places and semi-permanent homes, and photographed individuals with whom he developed close relationships. Set against the waterfront's deteriorating grid, Baltrop's images portray a space at the city's margins. The Piers were a place where sex radicals, artists and everyday people came together, sometimes because they had no other options and at other times because it was exactly where they wanted to be.

About Gordon Matta-Clark:

Gordon Matta-Clark (1943 – 1978) was an American sculptor, filmmaker, photographer and draughtsman. The son of painter Roberto Matta, he studied architecture in Ithaca, NY, at Cornell University (1962–8), where he mostly mixed with artists compelled and frustrated by the limitations

imposed by modernist architecture. There he met Robert Smithson, whose interests in land art and the theory of entropy (concerned with dissipating energy) were a significant influence on him. On completion of his studies he moved to New York and became a well-known figure among artists in SoHo. He is best known for a series of 'building cuts' (1972–8) in which he carved sections out of old buildings, treating them (in the manner of modern sculptures) as spatial compositions. Member of a collective of practitioners who, operating under the loose term *Anarchitecture*, believed in art and architecture as a means for social change, Matta-Clark pierced and sliced buildings documenting the transformations in films and photographs subsequently exhibited in galleries. These were often presented alongside fragments of the buildings themselves. One of his most celebrated works, *Splitting* (1974), consisted of a vertical cut through an old frame house in Englewood, NJ. He also produced an enormous and diverse body of drawings, some simply sketches for projects, others finished works in themselves.

About Open Eye Gallery:

Founded in 1977 Open Eye Gallery is an independent not-for-profit photography gallery based in Liverpool. One of the UK's leading photography spaces, Open Eye is the only gallery dedicated to photography and related media in the North West of England. Open Eye has consistently championed photography as an art form that is relevant to everyone. It promotes the practice, enjoyment and understanding of photography by creating challenging and entertaining opportunities to experience and appreciate distinctive, innovative photographs.

As well as presenting a programme of international, high-quality exhibitions Open Eye houses a permanent Archive containing photographs dating from the 1930s to the present day.

In November 2011 Open Eye re-launched in a brand new purpose-built home in one of the city's most prestigious and prominent new developments on the Liverpool Waterfront. The gallery opens onto a large covered public square and is split over two floors. Open Eye Gallery hosts an international programme of cutting edge exhibitions showcased all year round, including periodic exhibitions reflecting on the gallery's Archive. Open Eye also commissions Wall Works - large-scale graphic art installations for the external facade of the gallery. The gallery's position at the heart of the regenerated Waterfront - next to the Museum of Liverpool and a stone's throw from Tate Liverpool and Albert Dock - cements its commitment to the city and its vibrant cultural life.

About Lorenzo Fusi, Director, Open Eye Gallery:

Lorenzo moved to Liverpool in 2009, when he was appointed as the International Curator of the Liverpool Biennial. He curated the 2010 and 2012 reiterations of the biennial exhibition. During this time, he became first involved with Open Eye Gallery as a result of the institutional collaborations and cultural partnerships that characterise the UK biennial from its inception. Prior to this appointment, Lorenzo was Chief Curator at Palazzo delle Papesse and *sms contemporanea* (Siena, Italy). Lorenzo took his post of Artistic Director at Open Eye Gallery in Spring 2013.

Image credit:

Alvin Baltrop, *Pier 52 (Gordon Matta-Clark's "Day's End", building cuts with two people)*, from *The Piers* series, 1975-1986 © The Alvin Baltrop Trust represented by Third Streaming, New York

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