



Contacts:

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
Katrina Carl
805.884.6430
kcarl@sbma.net

Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Stephanie Sykes
323.932.5883
ssykes@lacma.org

Pomona College Museum of Art
Justine Bae
909.607.7543
justine.bae@pomona.edu



Left: John Divola, *From Dog Chasing Car in the Desert, D10F08*, 1996 – 2001. Inkjet print. Courtesy of George Eastman House.
Center: John Divola, *As Far As I Could Get, 10 Saank, R02F09*, 1996. Pigment print. Courtesy of the Artist.
Right: John Divola, *Zuna #63*, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper. Courtesy of the Artist.

John Divola As Far As I Could Go

Collaborative Exhibition Represents Photographer's First Career-Spanning Presentation

On View:

Pomona College Museum of Art	September 3 – December 22, 2013
Los Angeles County Museum of Art	October 6, 2013 – July 6, 2014
Santa Barbara Museum of Art	October 13, 2013 – January 12, 2014

August 21, 2013 – With a career comprising four decades, John Divola is as distinctive for his commitment to the photographic community as for his thought-provoking work. Divola's influence within the field of photography is widely recognized by curators, critics, scholars and photographers throughout the country; yet, his work has remained largely uncelebrated. Many of his former students have achieved illustrious careers and far more recognition, even as Divola continues to mentor and inspire both undergraduate and graduate students in contemporary art practice.

As Far As I Could Go is the first over-arching presentation of Divola's work and is a collaborative project led by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA), shown simultaneously at SBMA, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and the Pomona College Museum of Art (PCMA) in the fall of 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.

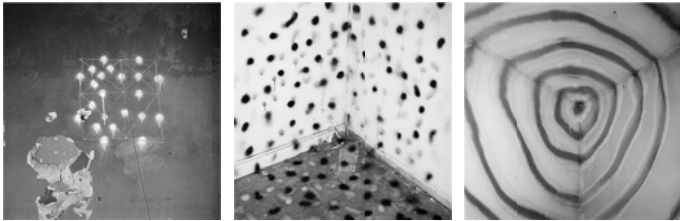
Divola was born in Los Angeles in 1949. After graduating with a BA from California State University, Northridge, he entered the MFA program at the University of California Los Angeles. There, under the tutelage of Robert Heineken, the artist began to develop his own unique photographic practice, one 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.

John Divola's photographs range widely but the intellectual rigor from which they spring is unvarying. Whether testing the visual limits of photography by vandalizing abandoned houses, interrogating the iconography of the divine through paint, flour, and film, or emphasizing the distance between image and reality through the blurred figure of a running dog, Divola's work is simultaneously fun and philosophical, visually appealing as well as intellectually stimulating.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

On view: Six series of John Divola's work representing more than 80 individual photographs



Left to right: John Divola, *74V18, 74V01, 74V62*, 1974. Gelatin silver prints. Courtesy of the Artist.

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.



Left to right: John Divola, *Faded Entry, Site 43, Interior View A; Faded Entry, Site 43, Exterior View A*, 1975. Gelatin silver prints, printed 1982. Courtesy of the Artist.

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 *Faded 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.

John Divola, *Untitled C*, 1990. Gelatin silver print. Courtesy of the Artist.



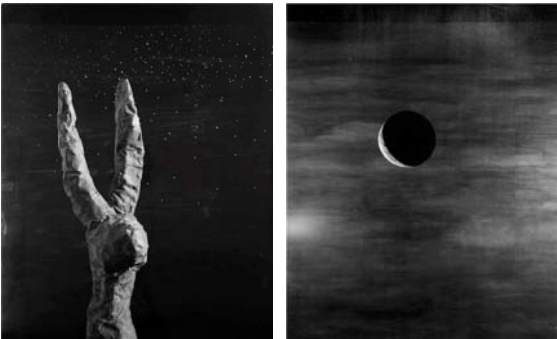
A more recent body of work was captured (almost by accident) as Divola was driving through the desert of the Morongo Valley in Southern California, during his work on the series *Isolated House* (beginning in 1998). During the drive, the photographer frequently encountered dogs that would chase after 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.

John Divola, *From Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert, D24 Run Sequence*, 1996 – 2001. Inkjet print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase.

Also on view at SBMA is Divola's *DarkStar* and *TheatreStreet* 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 *DarkStar* series) and the remnants of a vandalized desert home (in *TheatreStreet*). 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.

LACMA

On view: Four series of John Divola's work in the Ahmanson Building, 2nd Floor



Left to right: John Divola, *Rabbit, 87RBA1*, 1987 and *Man, 88MOA1*, 1988. Internal Dye-diffusion Print. Courtesy of the Artist.

The series *20x24 Polaroid* is Divola's earliest work exhibited at LACMA, shot between 1987 and 1989. Hastily fabricated sculptures created out of impermanent materials attempt, on one level, to approximate actual physical objects in the world—branches, a rabbit, the moon, etc. At the same time, the roughly-hewn surfaces and tacky-tacky backdrops insist on the artificiality of what is depicted. These works express Divola's ambivalence to the idea of photography as a descriptive medium with a one-to-one relationship to the real. Photography, in this case, is not employed in the service of documentary truth, but instead is held up as a crucial interlocutor in a creative exercise.

Artificial Nature (2002) offers a clear example of Divola's interrogation of the human impulse to master the natural world. The work is a collection of 36 continuity stills from films made between the 1930s and the 1960s. These photographs, taken on film sets to establish consistency across multiple cuts (to ensure that the placement of objects remains constant from take to take), document fabricated landscapes contained within the artificial space of the film studio. Representing the diversity of natural topographies and weather patterns, the images also include accessories such as signage and clapperboards, highlighting the distance between ourselves and the natural world—a distance that is only accentuated by cinematic representation.



Seven Songbirds and a Rabbit (1995) is a series of details from the Keystone Mast collection of stereographic negatives housed at the California Museum of Photography, University of California Riverside. Stereoscopy, a three-dimensional imaging technology popular from the mid 19th to the early 20th century, exemplifies photography at its most deceptively naturalistic. When Divola began to examine the original glass-plate negatives in the Keystone collection, he found a wealth of detail, such as the birds and rabbit nestled amidst the foliage that gave the series its title.

The series *As Far As I Could Go* (1996–2010), five works of which are included in the LACMA exhibition, has Divola once again engaging with the natural environment, but this time in a more performative vein. Divola positioned his camera on a tripod, set the timer for ten seconds, and then ran straight into the

John Divola, *As Far As I Could Go, 10 Seconds, R02F33*, 1996. Pigment print. Courtesy of the Artist.

established frame. At one level, this was a completely dispassionate endeavor. On another level, because the resulting pictures depict a man in a landscape, not in a controlled experimental setting, the viewer cannot suppress a frisson of physical and emotional tension. The works engage the viewer with the natural landscape—a landscape altered by human presence and staged to serve as a theater for creative activity.

Pomona College Museum of Art

On view: Selections from the **Zuma** series, representing 15 works



Left to right: John Divola, **Zuma #25**, **Zuma #23**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper. Courtesy of the Artist.

In the early mornings and late evenings throughout 1977 and 1978, John Divola repeatedly photographed the gradual destruction of an abandoned house on Zuma beach in Malibu, California. Exposed to the sun and wind, the property was also altered by human intervention, including fire-fighting practice, graffiti of local vandals, and Divola's own improvised mark-making. In the aptly-named **Zuma** series, the photographer framed this transformative interior against the steady horizon.

Divola notes, "These photographs are the product of my involvement with an evolving situation. The house evolving in a primarily linear way toward its ultimate disintegration, the ocean and light evolving and changing in a cyclical and regenerative manner. My acts, my painting, my photographing, my considering, are part of, not separate from, this process of evolution and change."

Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue showcases John Divola's overarching themes and is the first publication to examine the artist's entire career, placing the photographer within a broader historical context. Ten major bodies of work are shown in-depth—cross referencing works in the three venue's checklists but expanded where needed to give the reader a clear understanding of his career. Included are essays by Britt Salvesen (Curator, the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings Department, LACMA) on existentialism and nature of reality, Kathleen Howe (Director, Pomona College Museum of Art) on the natural and built environments, Karen Sinsheimer (Curator of Photography, Santa Barbara Museum of Art) on performative aspects and indexicality, and an interview/conversation between Divola and Simon Baker (Senior Curator of Photography, The Tate Modern, London), providing an overview of Divola's career and his pioneering art practice within a broader context, and will highlight specific conceptual themes, influences and philosophies that permeate Divola's artistic investigations.

Related Programming

Saturday, September 7, 5–7 pm

Public Reception

Pomona College Museum of Art

Thursday, September 26, 7 pm

Artist Talk with John Divola

Pomona College Museum of Art

Sunday, October 13, 2:30 pm

California State of Mind Photography on and about the West Coast

Artist talk with critical theorist Colin Gardner and writer Dick Hebdige
Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Tuesday, November 5, 7 pm
The Landscape and Things in the Way

Artist talk

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Friday, November 15, 5:30–7:30 pm
Atelier: The Earth is the Bottom of the Sky

Created as a studio for the imagination and offering its audience an evening of intimate, and intriguing interactions with art and artists in the galleries, highlighted by performance, dance, music, and specialty hors d'oeuvres and cocktails

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Sunday, November 17, 2 pm
Film Screening: Seven Chances

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Throughout the Exhibition
Family Resource Center

This family-friendly gallery is reinstalled featuring special exhibition-based art projects for all ages.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art

About Santa Barbara Museum of Art

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Open Tuesday – Sunday 11 am – 5 pm, Chase Free Thursday Evenings 5 – 8 pm

805.963.4364 www.sbma.net

About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, and innovative collaborations with artists, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA 90036

Open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday 11 am – 5 pm; Friday 11 am – 8 pm; Saturday, Sunday 10 am – 7 pm

323.857.6000 www.lacma.org

About Pomona College Museum of Art

The Pomona College Museum of Art houses a substantial permanent collection as well as serving as a gallery for the display of temporary exhibitions. Important holdings include the Kress Collection of 15th and 16th century Italian panel paintings; more than 5,000 examples of Pre-Columbian to 20th century American Indian art and artifacts; and a large collection of American and European prints, drawings, and photographs, including works by Francisco de Goya, José Clemente Orozco and Rico Lebrun.

330 N. College Avenue, Claremont, CA 91711

Open Tuesday – Sunday noon – 5 pm, Thursday noon – 11 pm

909.621.8283 www.pomona.edu/museum