

# BRONX MUSEUM

## *The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop*

Opening August 7, 2019 at the Bronx Museum of the Arts

The exhibition memorializes the late artist, as well as the grassroots passion and raw energy of New York City's underground gay culture of the 1970s and '80s.

**On View: August 7, 2019 to February 9, 2020**

**Opening Reception: August 7, 2019, 6-8PM**



Alvin Baltrop. *The Piers (man wearing jockstrap)*, n.d. (1975-1986)

(Bronx, NY — August 7, 2019 to February 9, 2020) — The **Bronx Museum of the Arts** is pleased to present *The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop*, on view from **August 7, 2019 through February 9, 2020**. The exhibition gives long due recognition to the late photographer, featuring over 120 photographs by the Bronx native documenting the underground gay culture of New York City's West Side piers throughout the 1970s. This includes a suite of works from the artist's personal archives that, up until now, have never been seen by the public.

# BRONX MUSEUM

Baltrop's work was largely unrecognized in his lifetime. Having passed away in 2004, it is only now that his photographs are garnering the critical attention they deserve. 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. The explicitly sexual nature of many of his works are an important benchmark in capturing the LGBTQ community's struggle for inclusion and civil rights.



Alvin Baltrop, *The Piers (Sunbathing platform with Tava mural)*, n.d. (1975-1986)

Focusing on the derelict warehouses situated alongside Manhattan's West Side piers, Baltrop's images extensively chronicle the underground gay culture that flourished along the Hudson River, in an isolated section alongside the collapse of a segment of the West Side Elevated Highway in 1973.

A few blocks southwest of Manhattan's Meatpacking District, the area also became a center for drug smuggling and prostitution. Baltrop's images captured leisurely sunbathing, cruising, sexual acts, and crime scenes. With a sensibility to architecture, Baltrop portrayed his subjects with a heightened sense of drama, instilling his scenes with humanity.

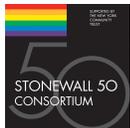
# BRONX MUSEUM



Alvin Baltrop, *The Piers (collapsed architecture)*, n.d. (1975-1986)

Baltrop's works constitute an important document, remarkable both for their social import as well as for their groundbreaking visual dare. They return us to that conflicted era when New York City was on the brink of a financial crisis and convey the raw energy that characterized some of the city's most impassioned grassroots campaigns for survival.

Curated by Sergio Bessa, the Director of Curatorial Programs at the Bronx Museum, *The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop* draws from the Bronx Museum's permanent collection, private collections, and Baltrop's personal archives, housed at the Bronx Museum. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Bronx Museum will partner with Italian publisher Skira to produce a 200-page, richly illustrated catalog with essay contributions by **Sergio Bessa**, **Adrienne Edwards**, **Allen Frame**, **Mia Kang**, and a reprint of **Douglas Crimp**'s 2008 seminal essay for *Artforum*, which was the first time Baltrop's work was written about in an art magazine.



This exhibition is presented in conjunction with the Stonewall 50 Consortium.

## About Alvin Baltrop

Alvin Baltrop (1948–2004) began photographing with a twin-lens Yashica camera in his early teens growing up in the Bronx. During his time serving in the Vietnam War, he photographed fellow sailors doing chores or at leisure before receiving an honorable discharge in 1972. From there, Baltrop went on

# BRONXMUSEUM

to attend New York City's School of Visual Arts from 1973 to 1975. It was during that period that Baltrop began documenting the gay communities in the West Village area and along the piers. Baltrop received little critical recognition and had few exhibitions in his lifetime, save a nomination by artist John Drury for a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award in the late 1990s.

## About the Bronx Museum of the Arts

The Bronx Museum of the Arts is an internationally recognized cultural destination that presents innovative contemporary art exhibitions and education programs and is committed to promoting cross-cultural dialogues for diverse audiences. Since its founding in 1971, the Museum has played a vital role in the Bronx by helping to make art accessible to the entire community and connecting with local schools, artists, teens, and families through its robust education initiatives. In celebration of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Museum implemented a universal free admission policy, supporting its mission to make arts experiences available to all audiences. The Museum's collection comprises over 1,000 modern and contemporary artworks in all media and highlights works by artists of African, Asian, and Latin American ancestry, as well as artists for whom the Bronx has been critical to their development. Located on the Grand Concourse, the Museum's home is a distinctive contemporary landmark designed by the internationally recognized firm Arquitectonica.

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