

# Art in America

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## Whitney Biennial

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Katarina Burin: *Room Dividers*, 2007, inkjet prints on boards with aluminum frames; at Andreas Grimm.

it and their transit into the marketplace. Without describing the additional works pictured in it, or others on view "behind the desk," I can say that Ho's endeavors suit their occasions and locations with sly finesse and something it may sound odd to characterize as bravura, though this is the impression "Happy Birthday" left me with each time I visited. It's always a considerable lagniappe to experience work that's not a one-trick pony, an agglomeration of tics or a pastiche of hastily found "artable" shreds and shards, but rather can stand, as does the kouros, obdurately on its own.

—Gary Indiana

## Mark Morrisroe at Clamart

Mark Morrisroe is remembered as the exemplary member of a group of Boston area photographers who came to prominence in the late 1970s and early '80s—among them Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, David Armstrong and the Starn Twins. Morrisroe's work is distinguished for its intimate autobiographical approach, precociously queer attitude and painterly use of the photographic medium. He produced more than 2,000 portraits, many of them self-portraits, as well as photographs and other photo-based

works, often related to his performance work and short films. Morrisroe died in 1989 of HIV-related causes at the age of 30.

This show, which is the first of his work in New York in nearly 10 years, featured 27 photographs—mostly Polaroids from the early to mid-1980s, including portraits of friends and lovers, along with a number of his remarkable self-portraits. Familiar figures of the '80s art world to pass by Morrisroe's lens included his future East Village dealer, the legendary, beautiful Pat Hearn (*Pat Hearn #2* [Polaroid #597], 1982), whom Morrisroe met at the Boston Museum School while Hearn was a student of performance art, and Jack Pierson (identified as "Jonathan"), who is the subject of a large number of intimate portrait and ensemble images.

The portraits are often carefully styled nudes in makeshift theatrical settings, and they sometimes have the appearance of grainy sepia-toned film stills; the influence of Jack Smith is widely evident, and, to some degree, that of Lucas Samaras, too. Other images—especially the self-portraits—are quite informal, or have the uncanny realism of family snapshots. For many of these pictures Morrisroe used a 195 Polaroid Land camera. This allowed him to make several unique works in short stretches, as the prints develop quickly, and to intervene directly in the process—one that emphasized the materiality of the photographic object. Some of these images are highly solarized. Some look like they were taken in the 19th century, or underwater, and bear all sorts of indexical marks—fingerprints, pressure marks, blotches and scrapes.

This intentional disregard for photographic hygiene extended to the use of handwritten annotations, which sometimes frame the images. *Big Paul Henderson Strikes an Artistic Pose* (1983/85) features the title crudely written in the margins around a portrait in the old-school homoerotic manner of, say, George Platt Lynes or Horst, albeit a bit camped up. The writing gives the work a

kind of punk "brut" or, dare I say, "outsider" quality. While the notations gather our attention around, to borrow Roland Barthes's words, "the desired object, the beloved body," in some cases they also seem to make an awkward display of the young artist's signature. Despite the work's insistent materiality, and no doubt in part due to the artist's legend, to which this reviewer willingly submits, the overall effect is unfinished and ephemeral. It is as if these were the fragmentary documents of a lost performance—of a revolt against dullness, austerity, depression.

The half-dozen or so self-portraits were among the most striking images in the show. *Self Portrait in Drag* (Polaroid #86), 1980, features a sexy young Morrisroe striking a pose in his kitchen in black fishnets, garters, heels, a wig and dark glasses. *Self Portrait at Home with Diane Arbus* (1985), perhaps intended as an homage, portrays the artist in his underwear sitting on an unkempt twin bed in a messy room with a glaring bedside lamp, the title written in the margins in big ink letters. *Self Portrait with Tattoo* (1982) is a snapshot of Morrisroe from the hips up, standing nude in what looks like a living room. An erotically charged ensemble of smooth lean muscle, high cheekbones, almond eyes, flatfoot, tuft of pubic hair and, of course, tattoo, it is a stunning icon of punk, queer beauty, and epitomizes Morrisroe's legacy.

—Peter Gallo

## Katarina Burin at Andreas Grimm

Katarina Burin, a Berlin-based artist, makes meticulous architectural drawings and photo-based collages. They evoke modernist ideals, while acknowledging the difficulty of translating pure form into functional structures for an imperfect world.

Often, the optimistic clarity of classic 20th-century design is tempered, in Burin's drawings, by layers of marks—pencil lines, pale ink washes, rectangles of color—that obscure the buildings. *Holiday Home of the Trade Unions* (all works 2007) represents, with elegant, concise lines, an imaginary building reminiscent of midcentury modernism. Drawn

over background washes of yellow and black ink, it has the visual shorthand and the rigor of blueprint drawings. There's a satisfying contrast between the precise rendering of the built structure and the abstracted trees and undefined spaces beyond. The text of the title runs across the foreground, naming the building for an obsolete conflation of leisure and labor.

Some of her photo-based pieces depict real structures that have suffered damage. In *Room Dividers*, inkjet prints, fitted into vertical metal frames that run from floor to ceiling, reproduce photographs of Eileen Gray's famous summer house in southern France, E-1027, which has fallen into disrepair. Burin doesn't focus on the iconic design, however, or on the house's troubled his-

## Big PAUL HENDERSON



Mark Morrisroe: *Big Paul Henderson Strikes an Artistic Pose*, 1983, printed in 1985, silver gelatin print, 10 by 8 inches; at Clamart.

tory, but on matter-of-fact interior details, like a sink and a modest worktable. It reinforces the theme that even legendary figures must attend to mundane features.

Sometimes Burin contrasts precise, hard-edged collage with sprayed ink and sensitively drawn lines. On other occasions she relies on her exquisite drafting, which is on display in *Hotel International*, a vertically formatted drawing of a hotel that never existed. It has the old-world character of a Lartigue photograph but is too dreamlike to seem real.

Burin also takes found photographs and conceals parts of