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Mark Morrisroe

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AUTHOR: ALEX FIALHO

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It is easy to see how Mark Morrisroe's tempestuous biography—teenage hustler; bohemian bad boy in Boston's punk and artistic circles of the early 1980s; boyfriend to a young Jack Pierson—has often overshadowed the formal resonance of the photographer's work. Yet overshadowed might serve as an operative word, as Morrisroe's practice revels in darkened traces, hazy atmospheres, and grainy scenes. "Hello from Bertha" provides a lens into the impressive range and processes of Morrisroe's too-short career (he died of AIDS-related complications at the age of thirty). Charting work made between 1981 and 1989, the exhibition brings together Polaroids, photogravure, cyanotypes, lithography, and transferred Super 8 film, among multiple other mediums.

Prominently displayed in the gallery's main room are five of Morrisroe's "negative sandwich" C-prints. With these, he printed from a color negative original and a black-and-white negative copy mounted on top of each other, resulting in a vintage, filtered effect. For example, in *Figure Study*, 1985, Morrisroe's meticulous darkroom manipulations tint the picture of a lone curled figure—both vulnerable and sensuous—in a muted pink registration. Morrisroe then highlights scratches, dust, and dotted specks on the negative with spot toner, and scrawls the title, date, and his signature onto the mat margins of the print. Approaching photography with the attitude and grit for which he is known, Morrisroe textured his images through an irreverent stance toward an "immaculate" finished print.

For the photogram *Double Male Nude in Grass (Negative)*, c. 1987, Morrisroe introduces a page of male pornography as the "negative" to the enlarger. The outcome is an overlaid image that conflates the nude figures from the verso and recto of the single titillating tear-out. Rather than a clear commingling, however, the landscape becomes an obfuscated and darkened depiction, whose individual features are hard to distinguish. Morrisroe's accomplishment lies in this photographic play with the provocative tension between clarity and obscurity, light and shadow.

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