

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MARK MORRISROE (1959-1989) HELLO FROM BERTHA

January 9 – February 15, 2014

*Opening reception:**Saturday, January 11, 2014**6:00 – 8:00 p.m.*

ClampArt is very pleased to announce the gallery's third exhibition of photographs by artist Mark Morrisroe (1959-1989). The title, "Hello from Bertha," refers to a signature image by the artist from 1983-4, which is a "promotional still" for Morrisroe's Super 8 film of the same name, which itself "was a trashy drag drama based on the eponymous 1946 Tennessee Williams one-act play about a dying, penniless prostitute in a low-class bordello."¹ Morrisroe stars as Bertha, with Stephen Tashjian (a.k.a. Tabboo!) playing Goldie, and Jack Pierson (née Jonathan Pierson) as Lena. Typical of Morrisroe's work in all media, "Hello from Bertha" complicates issues of identity often by use of sexual ambiguity with the artist and his circle playing the roles of the main subjects.

Mark Morrisroe's work is often contextualized in terms of performance. The fact that the artist was a notorious myth-maker "who continually reworked his own biography into a colorful synthesis of fact and fiction"² significantly fuels such interpretation. The details of Morrisroe's life—both real and fabri-cated—certainly are part and parcel of his artistic oeuvre. No one who knew the artist during his short lifetime can refrain from commenting upon Morrisroe's enormous personality (whether it be described as sweet or obnoxious, caring or cruel), as his day-to-day pursuit of life seemed an artistic endeavor in and of itself. However, as attests artist Rafael Sánchez (a close friend of Morrisroe's from Jersey City toward the end of his life), perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on "the lie" and "the bad boy" when interpreting the work, and the "plasticity" of Morrisroe's photographs—their ability to generate multiple meanings depending on curatorial context—and their "poetic capacity for conveying the essential mutability of existential experience" should be more deeply considered.³ Thus is the central thesis of Fiona Johnstone's 2012 essay, "The Explosive Side of Subjectivity: Mark Morrisroe's Photographic Practice."⁴

ClampArt's exhibition includes examples of many different facets of Morrisroe's art-making from Xeroxes and Polaroids to gum prints and cyanotypes, in addition to his celebrated and complex Chromogenic print "negative sandwiches." Johnstone writes that Morrisroe was "fascinated by the multifarious possibilities offered by the darkroom, experimenting with a broad range of photographic processes."⁵



While the outlandish and tragic details of Morrisroe's biography are relevant to a full understanding of his practice, it is also essential to look beyond the facts and the fictions of a life of contradictions to a close examination of the beautiful objects that remain for a more complete appreciation of the significance of the artist's contribution to the art of our times.

For more information and images please contact Brian Paul Clamp, Director, or see www.clampart.com. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Image: Mark Morrisroe (1959-1989), "Hello from Bertha," 1983-4, Chromogenic print (negative sandwich) retouched with ink, 16 x 20 inches, © Estate of Mark Morrisroe (Ringier Collection), Fotomuseum Winterthur

1 Stuart Comer, "Lipstick Traces: The Films of Mark Morrisroe," *Mark Morrisroe*, Beatrix Ruf and Thomas Seelig, eds. (JRP-Ringier/Fotomuseum Winterthur: Winterthur, Switzerland, 2011), p. 309.

2 Fiona Johnston, "The Explosive Side of Subjectivity: Mark Morrisroe's Photographic Practice," *Changing Difference: Queer Politics and Shifting Identities—Peter Hujar, Mark Morrisroe, Jack Smith* (SilvanaEditoriale/Galleria civica di Modena: Modena, Italy, 2012), p. 125.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 126.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 124-137.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 129.