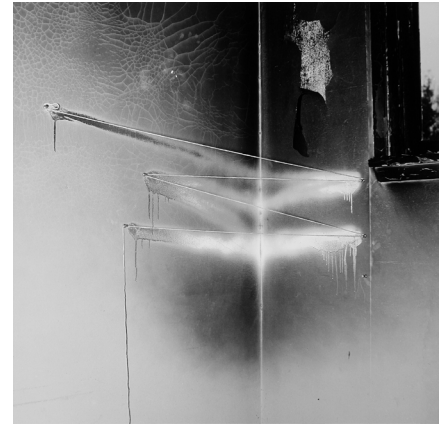


John Divola
The Ghost in the Machine
January 9 – February 22, 2025



Over the course of a career spanning five decades, California-based artist John Divola has redefined the possibilities of the photographic medium, blending its observational precision with expressive experimentation. Challenging traditional notions of photography's role as merely a transparent document of reality, Divola's work explores the intersections of photography with painting, performance, installation, and, more recently, artificial intelligence. *The Ghost in the Machine*, on view at Yancey Richardson Gallery from January 9 through February 22, 2025, brings together works from Divola's latest series, *Blue with Exceptions* (2019–2024), alongside selections from his seminal early series, *Vandalism* (1973–1975). This exhibition offers a rare opportunity to trace the evolution of Divola's practice and his enduring fascination with the process of image-making. A reception with the artist will be held on January 9, 6–8pm.

Since 2015, Divola has created numerous photographic projects at the abandoned George Air Force Base in Victorville, California. The Base was closed in the early '90s and now stands as a relic of Cold War-era militarization and environmental neglect. In *Blue with Exceptions* (2019–2024), his most recent project at the site, Divola captures its physical deterioration and layers of marks left by time, nature, human activity, and his own earlier interventions, creating a dialogue between the spectral presence of history within the abandoned spaces and the gestural possibilities of photography, between what remains and what is lost. As the artist notes: "Photographs can accommodate a broad range of interpretations, from the concretely informational, social, political, and esthetic to an index of a specific life and its engagements. I aspire to embrace that messy complexity."

On view in the project gallery are a number of works from Divola's seminal *Vandalism* (1973–1975) series, the first instance in which he intervened in a space in order to photograph it. Illegally entering and photographing abandoned homes in greater Los Angeles, Divola spray-painted the interiors with patterns such as grids, spirals, and dots, engaging in a form of physical and conceptual mark-making that pushed his process beyond purely documenting what he saw. Using black, white, and silver paint to align with the tonal range of the black-and-white silver gelatin prints, his interventions played with perspective, light, and depth, at times disorienting the viewer and questioning photography's conventional role as a transparent window to the world. By photographing his acts of "vandalism," Divola affirmed his approach to the photograph as both documentation and artifact, where the artist's physical engagement with a space becomes inscribed within the image. Years later, Divola revisited similar themes in his *Abandoned Paintings* (2006–2008) series, recontextualizing discarded amateur artworks, deteriorated by time, by photographing them within derelict interiors.

In *Blue with Exceptions*, Divola takes this gesture further by introducing AI-generated imagery into his work; idealized images of songbirds are inserted into the dilapidated interiors of the Base and then re-photographed. His interest in the interplay between the symbolic and the specific is highlighted here, as he juxtaposes the specificity of the decaying site—laden with social and historical significance—and the amorphous, non-space of AI-generated visions. There is a palpable sense of fragility within these tightly-framed images, as if the birds might be trying to break free from the crumbling walls that confine them. These uncanny pictures within pictures open up questions about the role of technology in shaping our perception of reality. Indeed, the artist sees the songbirds as symbols of environmental sensitivity—a metaphorical “canary in the coal mine”—which he links to the “dawning of the Anthropocene” and humanity’s fraught relationship with the natural world.

Divola’s work across these series reflects a fascination with how imaging technologies—whether photography, painting, or Artificial Intelligence—interact with specific environments. The George Air Force Base offers a socially and politically charged space to explore these tools’ ability to preserve, distort, and reinterpret reality. At the same time, Divola’s practice resists being reduced to commentary on military, technological, or environmental themes; it is just as much about process, observation, and the creative possibilities that arise from his engagement with these spaces. *The Ghost in the Machine* invites viewers to explore the layered complexity of Divola’s work, where histories converge, technologies collide, and the boundaries between presence and absence blur.

Born in Los Angeles in 1949, Divola earned a B.A. from California State University, Northridge in 1971 and an MFA from University of California, Los Angeles in 1974, where he studied under photographer Robert Heinecken. Since 1975, he has taught photography and art at numerous institutions including California Institute of the Arts (1978–1988), and since 1988 he has been a Professor of Art at the University of California, Riverside. Divola was featured in the 1981 and 2017 Whitney Biennials and was the subject of a three-museum retrospective in 2013 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and the Benton Museum of Art, California. His various projects have been published in 11 monographs.

Since 1975, Divola’s work has been featured in numerous exhibitions in the United States, Japan, Europe, Mexico, and Australia, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Art Institute of Chicago; Tate Modern, London; and Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris. Divola’s work is held in numerous prestigious collections including multiple New York institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, as well as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; The Tate, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Among Divola’s awards are multiple Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1973, 1976, 1979, 1990), a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship (1986), a Fintridge Foundation Fellowship (1998), a City of Los Angeles Artist Grant (1999), and a California Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship (1998).

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Images:

John Divola, *GAFB F7418 (10_27_2023)*, 2019-2024. Archival pigment print, 36 x 48 inches.

John Divola, *Vandalism (74V13)*, 1974. Vintage gelatin silver print, Image: 11 x 11 inches, Frame: 14 x 18 inches.