

THOMAS BARROW

Modest Structures: Caulked Reconstructions 1977-83

March 14 - April 14, 2019



From the Series - Modest Structures - Water Tank, 1983
reconstructed gelatin silver prints with caulking, staples, and spray
paint, 18.5 x 21.5 inches

Derek Eller Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of historical works by New Mexico based photographer Thomas Barrow entitled *Modest Structures: Caulked Reconstructions 1977-83*. This pivotal body of work introduces Barrow's unique three-dimensional photo-based objects comprised of paper, silicone caulk, staples, and spray paint.

Prior to this series, Barrow's canonical *Cancellations* (1974-1981) were a direct response to the documentary approach to the American landscape as practiced by the New Topographics photographers including Lewis Baltz and Bernd and Hilla Becher. Like his contemporaries, Barrow photographed banal urban spaces and open terrain throughout the Southwest but then, in an act

of subversion, he tore through the emulsion of the negatives with an ice pick, marking them with an X.

However, with the *Caulked Reconstructions*, Barrow took this one step further. Here, his photographs of the urban deserts of New Mexico and Arizona are torn apart and reconfigured using construction adhesives. By progressing from the destruction of the negative to that of the print, Barrow transformed his 2-dimensional photographs into one-of-a-kind sculptural objects. The photographic image functioned merely as raw material rather than as the ultimate product, and the veracity of that image was also called into question.

For example, in *Caulked Rest Stop* (1979-80), the elements of a composition -- scrub brush on a dusty hill, the bench of a picnic table, a sign with a stick figure walking a dog, a low, striated mesa — are re-arranged, invoking a location which is at once vaguely familiar and alien. These patchwork parts are stitched together with staples and finished with a thick impasto of industrial caulk along with spray paint in day-glow orange and olive green. Were it not for the title, *Caulked Rest Stop*, we might have difficulty reading this highly obfuscated image as that of a quiet highway relief station.

Since the 1960s when he was a student of Aaron Siskind, Barrow has pioneered new photographic methods and challenged the structural limits of photography. As such, he holds a firm place in the history of fine art photography, yet remains under recognized. His photographic sculpture, seen in its nascent stages as the series *Caulked Reconstructions*, later became even more dimensional with assemblages combining polaroids and an array of found objects. Through this work, Barrow can be considered on a spectrum which includes Man Ray, Robert

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Rauschenberg, Gordon Matta-Clark, Robert Heinecken (a counterpart working at the same time in Los Angeles), and contemporary artists like Katie Grinnan and Rachel Harrison.

Thomas Barrow (b. 1938) has been featured in recent group exhibitions *Site Reading* at The Morgan Library, NYC, *Longer Ways to Go* at The Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, AZ, and *A Machinery for Living* (curated by Walead Beshty) at Petzel Gallery, NYC. His works is included in numerous public collections including Nelson Atkins Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art, and The Museum of Modern Art. Barrow had a mid-career retrospective at LACMA and SFMoMA in 1986. *Modest Structures* will be his third solo exhibition at the gallery.

Derek Eller Gallery is located at 300 Broome Street between Eldridge Street and Forsyth Street. Hours are Wednesday-Sunday from 11am to 6pm and Tuesday by appointment. For further information, please contact the gallery at 212.206.6411 or visit www.derekeller.com.