

**TOM BIANCHI**  
**FIRE ISLAND PINES**  
**POLAROIDS 1975-1983**

**JUNE 29<sup>th</sup> – September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

Opening Reception: Thursday, June 29th, 6-9 pm

Book Available:  
TOM BIANCHI, FIRE ISLAND PINES, Polaroids 1975-1983  
Image: Tom Bianchi, Untitled 250, 30 x 30 in. Edition of 5



THROCKMORTON FINE ART is pleased to announce our summer exhibition, a show of Polaroid images of Fire Island Pines from 1975-1983, by the celebrated photographer Tom Bianchi. The exhibition contains dozens of exuberantly and sexually-charged SX-70 Polaroid images taken between 1975 and 1983. Bianchi documented the gay community at play in one of the few places where they then could be openly gay—Fire Island Pines.

The images in the exhibition, are color, limited edition, enlarged prints of the Polaroids. The photographs are whimsical and playful. Yet they also harken to the long tradition in art of celebrating the male physique.

The Pines is a mile-long sliver of some 600 modest and grand houses, on a 36-mile-long barrier island, 60 miles east of Manhattan along the Long Island coast. *Fire Island Pines: Polaroids 1975-1983* is a homage to the free spirited community that was Fire Island Pines in the “golden” age of the 1970s. This “paradise” was a refuge for as many as 10,000 gay men each weekend who pulled little red wagons from the harbor to their homes and reveled at afternoon “Tea Dances” and legendary bacchanals. For many, it was the first chance to openly walk hand-in-hand on the beach with a romantic partner.

It is nearly impossible for younger generations to understand just how circumspect gay men had to be in that era. There were laws against homosexual activity and men risked their reputations, livelihoods, and sometimes their very lives, if discovered. In the cities, police decoys trolled for arrests, and blackmail threats caused many men to bottle their desires for emotional and physical intimacy.

We are fortunate that Bianchi earned the trust of enough gay men to allow him to record their lives in the rare place where they could feel safe and accepted. Many were wary of having their pictures taken. But by sharing the Polaroids with them, the men he shot could see that Bianchi was celebrating them.

It has taken over thirty years for us to see his book of Polaroids in print. Publishers long found the book “too queer” to be commercial: “the public” did not want to see homosexuals. Despite impressive endorsements from those in the art world, including Andy Warhol and Sam Wagstaff, Bianchi put the book on hold as the AIDS pandemic devastated the gay community. The box he used to store the images became a mausoleum.

Yet Bianchi still views those years, 1975-1983, as “magical.” The blazing sun, the naked bodies in the surf, and the dance music attracted a mix of world-class celebrities, models, designers, and artists “the best and the brightest.” They gave Bianchi his creative voice: “In the Pines, my dreams of being an out gay man and artist became possible.”

Fortunately, Bianchi’s weekend artwork came to the attention of Betty Parsons and Carol Dreyfuss who gave him his first one-man show in 1980. Betty Parsons the legendary dealer who introduced abstract modern art through masters such as Jackson Pollack, Mark Rothko, Clifford Still, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg. That show gave Bianchi the courage to discard his law degree and become a full-time artist.

When his lover died of AIDS in 1988, Bianchi turned his focus to photography, employing the camera to heal psychic, sexual and social shame. He has exhibited at galleries and museums in the United States and beyond. His works are held in many private and public collections. Bianchi has produced twenty-one books exploring sexual identity.

The moving memoir Bianchi wrote for *Fire Island Pines Polaroids 1975-1983*, together with the photographs, recorded the birth and development of a new culture at a critical time in America’s political and aesthetic life. Much of the good we see accomplished today for gay civil liberties and queer consciousness began on the beach at Fire Island. Bianchi was there, ensuring that the beauty of the moment would live on.

“Every emerging minority needs not only a record of its grievances but also an idealized image of its expectations. Tom Bianchi has given us one version of gay happiness – an earthly paradise where handsome men love one another on white sands under an eternally cloudless sky. These photographs are at once formal and intimate, for they bring both rigor and tenderness to glimpses of real people”. – Edmund White

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