

# PIER 34

*Something Possible Everywhere*

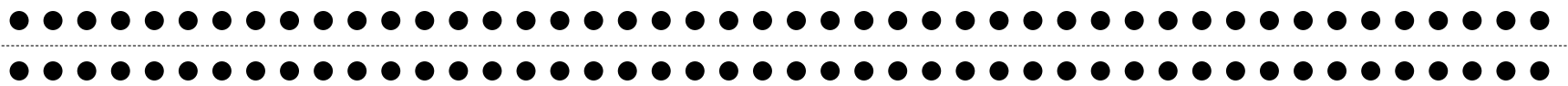
NYC 1983-84

# PIER 34

*Something Possible Everywhere*

NYC 1983-84

Jane Bauman  
Mike Bidlo  
Paolo Buggiani  
Keith Davis  
Steve Doughton  
John Fekner  
David Finn  
Jean Foos  
Luis Frangella  
Valeriy Gerlovin  
Judy Glantzman  
Peter Hujar  
Alain Jacquet  
Kim Jones  
Rob Jones



September 30–November 20

**Opening reception:** September 29, 7–9pm

Curated by Jonathan Weinberg

Featuring photographs by Andreas Sterzing

Organized by the Hunter College Art Galleries

## 205

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New York, New York

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Bill Mutter  
Michael Ottersen  
Rick Prol  
Dirk Rowntree  
Russell Sharon  
Kiki Smith  
Huck Snyder  
Andreas Sterzing  
Betty Tompkins  
Peter White  
David Wojnarowicz  
Teres Wylder  
Rhonda Zwillinger

**HUNTER**  
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Photographer Unknown, Andreas Sterzing on Pier 34, 1983

## THE PIER

### ANDREAS STERZING

In Spring 1983, a few months after I arrived in New York from Germany as a young photographer, by coincidence, two people told me on the same day about an abandoned pier building on the Hudson River where artists were working. I was looking for a story and this sounded intriguing.

Pier 34, or “the Pier” as we called it, instantly charmed me with its serene, otherworldly atmosphere and its majestic dereliction: the disintegrating grandeur of a glorious past, a vast dilapidated and rotting space reaching out into the fast-moving river. It was like entering a different world with the sound of water and wind drifting in through broken windows and holes in the floor, mingled with the continuous hum of traffic from the nearby Westside Highway.

Walking up a grand marble staircase with chunks of its walls missing, I heard voices and laughter upstairs. In a large open space with a huge arched window facing east towards Canal Street, I found a group of artists working on a long wall. Rhonda Zwillinger was there embellishing her Marilyn Monroe posters, Stephen Lack and Peter White worked on murals, and

Ruth Kligman had finished a fragile Madonna-like fresco.

They told me about the galleries in the East Village where they showed their work. I took pictures of them and walked around some more. Farther along the wall were large faces, looking a bit like Easter Island sculptures, and above them, a long piece like a Jackson Pollock drip painting. In another room was a huge cow’s head with its tongue sticking out, and in a room at the other end were three more Pollock-like pieces and a detailed painted cartoon with a flying pterodactyl. My new friends told me this was work by David Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo, the two artists who had started the Pier 34 project and had told their friends about it, inviting and encouraging them to go and work there.

Stepping out into the gigantic hangarlike space with many gates and windows facing the river on both sides, light streaming in through cracks and holes in the roof, I found it was quieter the farther I went, wind, water, and the occasional Circle Line boat the only sounds.

I had stumbled upon a unique New York story. I wanted to work for magazines, and this could be the way in for me.



Andreas Sterzing, *Alain Jacquet at the Pier, 1983*

Over the following weeks I returned to Pier 34 many times to explore and photograph. Each time I found new areas in this labyrinthine building that had been magically transformed by art into a surreal museum, strangely both beautiful and ugly. Work was painted on or stuck to walls, and sculptures were made from found materials. I met David Finn, who built his life-size human-like figures at the Pier this way, displaying a group of them on the grand staircase, lounging near the entrance as though they were having a conversation, inviting people to explore or scaring them from going farther. Luis Frangella had painted a beautiful Roman head in one room, and I photographed him in another

conventional spaces such as galleries or clubs, as the East Village art scene began to heat up.

I took my pictures to Germany, where all the big magazines wanted them, and *Stern* bought them right away. They planned to publish a feature story with eight double-spread photos, but, just as it was scheduled to run in October, the U.S. invaded Grenada, and the story was canceled. It was not until early 1984 that it was published, but on a smaller scale. By then all of us had moved on. The East Village art scene was in full swing; I was friends with many of the artists I had met at the pier and continued to photograph them while working on other stories.

But my photos of the building and the artists who worked there—the story of this remarkable place in time—kick-started my career as a magazine photographer, leading to my subsequent work for German magazines in the U.S.

Over the next ten years many of the artists who had worked at Pier 34 died during the HIV/AIDS crisis. Keith Davis, Luis Frangella, Richard Hoffman, Peter Hujar, Huck Snyder, and David Wojnarowicz are just a few of a whole generation of creative minds silenced before they had reached their full potential. The world would be a different and maybe better place today if they were still with us.

This exhibition celebrates the people of Pier 34 and their art. This was a time of freedom, relatively cheap New York rents, great idealism, chaos, creativity, and a strong feeling of community. The building was dangerous and falling apart, grass growing inside, snow drifting in, fascinating and creepy. The pier sprang to life like a flower out of the rubble of consumer society,

room whose walls he had covered floor-to-ceiling with male and female torsos. I also photographed Judy Glantzman who, like Luis, painted some of her murals with a brush attached to a stick.

I met Jean Foes and Keith Davis, who had collaborated on an intricate piece, just as Keith was putting more red paint on the tip of one of his cock paintings. Alain Jacquet, armed with cans of spray paint, showed me his pacifier pieces, one of them sprayed in white on an outside wall of the building's front elevation. With many other artists, meetings were often fleeting encounters and impromptu portrait sessions, and, even if I wrote down names and details of the people I met and photographed, afterwards I sometimes failed to remember or identify my pictures.

In June 1983 there was an opening with lots of people at Pier 34 and the Port Authority Police got wind of the event. They kicked everybody out, arrested a few people and took away a sculpture of a squatting figure by Bill Downer.

After this, the pier was closed off. Stenciled and spray painted "No Trespassing" signs appeared everywhere. Nevertheless, it was still easy to get into the building, and, with ever more artists coming in to work and with summer approaching, the magic was lost. The fragile life that had been breathed into the building was smothered and overwhelmed by the number of people working there. Art was being taken away, destroyed, or painted over.

David, Luis, and a few others had already moved on to another pier nearby, and most of the first wave of artists working at Pier 34 were again showing their work at more

and was transformed by human ingenuity and artistic intervention. This place was a playground for expressing oneself without limits or rules. For a brief while, until it became too popular, everyone there respected everyone else, in a blossoming of utopian creative anarchy. The building was demolished in 1984, leaving only a few pilings visible in the water at low tide, and was replaced by a stone marker and walkways leading to a ventilation tower for the Holland Tunnel. Those of us who were fortunate to have met, worked, and become friends at Pier 34 have never forgotten this unique and magical artistic experiment.



Andreas Sterzing, *Bill Downer Sculpture Being Arrested at an "Opening," June 1983*

**Note about the slide show by Andreas Sterzing**

For the Pier 34 exhibition I decided to present some of my work in a similar way to how it was first shown in nightclubs in New York City, as an analogue slide show on a loop, using carousel projectors. The original projection consisted of 140 slides in one carousel, but here I am using two projectors simultaneously, each showing 80 slides.

By a stroke of good luck, I discovered that Pierre Mohamed, a photography student at Falmouth University, where I teach, had been given a large can of bulk duplicating film ten years past its expiration dates. He was happy to let me use some of it to create the duplicate slides. The low contrast and muted colors of the slightly degraded film stock lend a vintage feel to the images, in keeping with the ephemerality and makeshift character of the Pier 34 project.





Above: Andreas Sterzing, *David and Mike working at the Pier ("Hearts + Minds")*, 1983

Following: Andreas Sterzing, *Pier 34 Demolition (Wojnarowicz's Gagging Cow and Richard Hambleton's Shadow Painting are visible)*, 1984

This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition *Something Possible Everywhere: Pier 34 NYC, 1983-84*

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