

Mark Morrisroe

Opening June 24, 2021
34 East 69th Street, New York

Appointment bookings available
on davidzwirner.com



Mark Morrisroe, *Sweet Raspberry/ Spanish Madonna*, 1986
© Estate of Mark Morrisroe (Ringier Collection)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of works by the photographer and filmmaker Mark Morrisroe, curated by artist Ryan McGinley, at the gallery's East 69th Street location in New York.

Known as Mark Dirt in his Boston punk days, Mark Morrisroe (1959–1989) was, in the words of his former boyfriend Jack Pierson, "magnetic and scary, ... the most extreme person I had ever encountered."¹ Within his short life, Morrisroe produced a body of work that examined queer kinship, the performance of gender, and the intimacy of risk while experimenting formally with his chosen Polaroid medium. After capturing thousands of images as well as appropriating stills from his Super 8 films, Morrisroe further manipulated his photographs through a number of unconventional techniques, producing distinctive dreamlike prints. In landscapes and portraiture, he documented his circle of friends, lovers, and himself. Many of Morrisroe's subjects, including David Armstrong, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Nan Goldin, Pat Hearn, and Pierson, attended Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts or the Massachusetts College of Art; this group would become known as the Boston School. This selection of photographic work lushly re-creates the social context of a band of iconoclastic artists at the cusp of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and remembers a figure who lived and documented life at the periphery.

It's a photographer's job to introduce work from an older generation to a newer generation of image makers.

¹ Oral history interview with Jack Pierson, January 16–17, 2017. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

All the young photographers these days love film. Mark Morrisroe's work is as gritty-dreamy as film gets. You can feel his hand in every print with their frenzied pen marks and scratched emulsions. His own special unpolished film sandwich.

I learned about Mark in 1999, a decade after he had died, right when I started creating my own photos.

I saw one of his self-portraits in a homoerotic photo anthology and thought, Who is that nude guy with a cast in that gritty photo?

A few years later, I made the connections that brought me deeper into his work. My brother died of AIDS in his early thirties, around the same time Mark passed away.

Later in my life, I became very close with his early Boston crew; Jack Pierson and David Armstrong became my early mentors.

I identify with Mark's story: a radical queer hustler, addict in a torn T-shirt, who photographed his close friends and lovers with an artistic vision.

—Ryan McGinley

Mark Morrisroe was born in 1959 in Malden, Massachusetts, to a single mother who was an alcoholic. Embracing the inheritance of his tumultuous life, he began hustling at the age of thirteen, was shot by a client at the age of seventeen, and eventually entered the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, on a scholarship. By then, Morrisroe was fully engaged within the city's cultural milieu and cemented his reputation as an enfant terrible and ambitious careerist. His commitment to experimentation permeated his existence as well as his practice: he formulated his distinctive "sandwich prints" by "reshooting a photograph, producing an intermediate negative, and exposing the photographic paper through the two sandwiched negatives."² This unorthodox processing resulted in blurry, atmospheric images that physically layered various subjects with any formal missteps and floating grime. Morrisroe would often inscribe the photographs with youthful marginalia, which further reveals the tender familiarity he shared with both strangers and confidants.

The artist moved to Jersey City in 1985 and made his New York solo debut at Pat Hearn Gallery a year later. He presented a solo exhibition with her again in 1988 before passing away at the age of thirty from AIDS-related complications in 1989. Hearn mounted memorial exhibitions devoted to Morrisroe's work in 1994, 1996, and 1999. His work was featured in the 1995 Boston School group exhibition, curated by Lia Gangitano, at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. A major posthumous solo exhibition, curated by Beatrix Ruf and Thomas Seelig, was shown in 2010 to 2011 at Fotomuseum Winterthur, where the Estate of Mark Morrisroe is held by the Ringier Collection. A version of this exhibition, curated by Richard Birkett and Stefan Kalmár, was presented at Artists Space, New York, in 2011.

Ryan McGinley is a New York-based photographer. His early photos displayed the unseen intersection of skateboard and graffiti culture with a strong queer focus. At the age of twenty-five, he became the youngest artist to have a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. For more than a decade, McGinley has road-tripped continuously throughout the United States to create work that incorporates the human body within the American landscape. On Thursdays, he can be found fighting for trans lives with the Stonewall Protests in downtown New York. McGinley frequently presents his work in solo exhibitions at galleries and museums worldwide.

² Brooks Adams, "Beautiful, Dangerous People," *Art in America* (February 28, 2011), accessed online.

Mark Morrisroe is a part of *More Life*, a focused series of curated solo exhibitions presented on the fortieth anniversary of the ongoing HIV/AIDS crisis. For more information, please visit davidzwirner.com.

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