

Christine Osinski: From Staten Island @ Sasha Wolf

By Loring Knoblauch

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Christine Osinski's black and white photographs from mid 1980s Staten Island are full of small, unassuming memories. Grounded in fleeting glimpses of modest New York neighborhood life, they look back to a time when teenagers lingered on sidewalks and houses bore the trappings of unpretentious aspiration.

More than half of the images on view in this consistently evocative show capture the telling, almost invisible gestures of the local kids, from pudgy young boys in pulled up shorts to more worldly teenage girls warily drinking beers sitting on the back of a parked Cadillac. Awkward pre-teens look away timidly or stand self consciously in their knee high tube socks (a look I remember well from my own early 80s style), while boys just a few years older are flexing their muscles and showing off their go-karts and girls with feathered hair and name tag necklaces are posing in matching sashes and short shorts. Osinski's summertime portraits have an effortless ease to them, a casual genuine warmth for all the uncool stages of growing up.

Other images in the show document the quietly quirky houses in the neighborhood, with their front portico columns and neatly trimmed spiral evergreens. Osinski has a subtly tuned eye for unexpected details and ironies: roof fixing ladders criss-crossed in angled patterns, the perfectly edged strips of front lawn grass, the treeless dirt expanse flanking the new houses in the aptly named Forest View Estates, and the ornate putti sitting atop dull brick pillars. Images of grimy kids playing in front of houses with overgrown driveways, plastic pools, hanging motors being repaired and crashed cars never tread into criticality, but linger in easygoing, observant openness.

In the end, these prints are full of the tiny meaningful details that remind us of a specific time and place. But the shy look or the trying to be cool swagger of the everyday kids in Osinski's images is more than simply nostalgic. The craftsmanship in these photographs is consistently high, and the nuance in the modern prints does justice to the richness in the portraits. We've been transported to a Staten Island of the past, but the small human truths found in these photographs are universal.