

# THE NEW YORKER

PHOTO BOOTH

## SOAKING UP NEW YORK CITY'S POOLS AND BEACHES

By Max Campbell, JULY 1, 2016

Originally a munitions-supply depot for New York State's National Guard, the Central Park Arsenal Building has lived many lives since it was erected, in 1848; as a short-term home to some collections of the Museum of Natural History, police precinct, temporary haven for a menagerie of P.T. Barnum's animals. Now it is the headquarters of the city's Parks Department, and its upstairs gallery exhibits six to eight art shows each year highlighting local history and the natural environment. Currently on display, not far from a displaced carousel horse and around the corner from a landing wallpapered with Employee of the Month plaques, is "SPF16: NYC Pools and Beaches in Contemporary Photography," a collection of photographs from all five boroughs, made in the past thirty or so years by the acclaimed photographers Juliana Beasley, Damion Berger, Rona Chang, Bruce Davidson, Tobias Hutzler, Bruce Katz, Michael Kirby Smith, Wayne Lawrence, Greg Miller, Christine Osinski, Thomas Roma, and Lauren Welles.

Two aerial photographs by Hutzler help to place the exhibition and hint at the enormous scale of the city's aquatic retreats---fifty-five outdoor pools and fourteen miles of beaches. Hanging out the side of a helicopter in 2014, Hutzler captured the W.P.A.-era heft of McCarren Pool and, hovering far above Coney Island, shrunk umbrellas and towels to rainbow specks that invite a "Where's Waldo?" sort of urge to search for sunbathers. In the work by Damion Berger and Michael Kirby Smith, our perspective is reversed---we're in the deep end, looking up through the water as swimmers mix through the pool like watercolor paints. You might see in these scenes a serene escape from the demands of life above the surface, or the threat of inhaling a lungful of water, depending on how you swim.

Between sky and water we settle into the sand and onto the pool deck, to summer scenes of playfulness and joy. A young man presses fist into palm to show Christine Osinski lean muscles in "Boy Flexing, Staten Island." In a black-and-white photograph by Thomas Roma, five boys turn and grab for each other's bodies in a king-of-the-hill struggle. There is the forceful brightness of Juliana Beasley's images from Rockaway Beach, a sampling of her profile of the area's impoverished and elderly residents. Caught in the light of Beasley's flash, older New Yorkers enjoy the calmer pleasures of the beach, a cold soda, or something nice from the ice-cream truck. These and other photos in the show are a testament to the democratizing force of the city's beaches: here, all are welcome to unwind and take sun into their skin.

Last but never least there is the enchantment of summer love, romantic or familial. At Asser Levy Pool, Greg Miller captures a girl and a boy who are obviously close but have their gazes turned away from one another, and another girl pressed close to a boy at the pool's edge. In photographs that were show twenty years apart, Miller and Bruce Davidson each capture a poolside pregnant woman surrounded by family, with a daughter or husband's hand resting on her stomach. In a photograph by Wayne Lawrence from his series about Orchard Beach---the Bronx Riviera, as the project titles it---two girls with swim caps stretched tightly over their hair perch symmetrically on the knees of their father, who squats at the ocean's edge. How many more years, one wonders, until they're too old to hag out with dad and would rather strike out for summer fun on their own?