Pier 54 is an exhibition conceived as a tribute to and a reaction against Pier 18, a legendary project organized by artist and curator Willoughby Sharp in 1971. For the original iteration, Sharp invited 27 artists to create an event or an action to take place on the abandoned Pier 18 in the Financial District of New York City. Artists responded in a variety of ways: some carried out performances, others created sculptures and installations or sent simple instructions for do-it-yourself works to be executed by someone else. All the events were photographed by artists Harry Shunk and János Kender, and subsequently exhibited in photographic form at the Museum of Modern Art in the summer of 1971. Among the participants—who, in keeping with a largely gender-biased art world at the time, happened to all be male—were Vito Acconci, John Baldessari, Jan Dibbets, Dan Graham, Gordon Matta-Clark, Mario Merz, Allen Ruppersberg, Richard Serra, William Wegman, and many others.

Both a re-enactment and an exercise in historical revisionism, Pier 54 took place during the summer of 2014 on Hudson River Park’s Pier 54—a disused pier located at 11th Avenue and West 13th Street. The pier is visible from the High Line and preserves many historical memories and architectural vestiges of Manhattan’s West Side, a neighborhood that has been swiftly transformed in the past decades. High Line Art invited 27 contemporary artists—this time all women—to realize projects that responded to the location and engaged with the changing landscape of the waterfront.

The original Pier 18 actions were never meant to be public performances: the various events and interventions were only staged for the camera and were documented by artist duo Shunk-Kender as a series of black-and-white photographs. The actions were recorded in a sequence of photographs, to suggest the durational quality of these projects. Similarly, the events on Pier 54 were not open to the public, aside from unsuspecting passersby. At times quietly imperceptible, and at others exuberant and poignantly subversive, the works and actions forming Pier 54 were captured by photographer Liz Ligon as a series of black-and-white photographic documentations, turning the actions themselves into a mysterious presence hidden in the fabric of the city.

Pier 54 is presented as a photography exhibition mounted at 120 Eleventh Avenue from November 6 to December 13, 2014, and on the High Line as part of High Line Channel 14 from November 6, 2014 to January 14, 2015.
Leonor Antunes
(b. 1972, Portugal)
mesh mail dances: eight transitions between one figure to the next

Using the pier as her backdrop, Leonor Antunes asked a dancer to hold a sheet of expanded metal mesh in a variety of configurations that alternately frame, obscure, and direct the view of the pier. Both the contours of the mesh and the model’s limbs play decisive roles in the resulting compositions.

In 1971 Mary Charlap created her first Air Mail Dance, originally titled “instructions from Paris,” by starting by drawing figures on a page and then giving them to soloists and groups of dancers, and asked them to figure out how to get from one position to another. In the autumn of 2014, it was Caroline Fermin who received a copy of one of the pages containing 32 scores, and was asked to interpret those scores on the bridge of the High Line and in each position hold a metal mesh.
White Museum, Pier 54

Inspired by her previous White Museum projects, wherein she created a square of light from a 35mm projector installed in the window of a building, Rosa Barba set up a spotlight in a room in The Standard, High Line. By shining a white square of light on the pier after dark, the artist created a dynamic sculpture composed of the hotel window, the light beam, and the frame of light on the pier.

Instructions for White Museum, Pier 54 by Rosa Barba

A strong white film-beam will project out of a window above Pier 54 from the Standard Hotel – at night.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

1. A.) From right side of building with frame
   B.) From left side
   C.) Close-Up

2. A.) Picture taken out of Hotel – windows with frame
   B.) Inside Hotel room with tub and light frame (bath tub end)
   C.) Hotel made the shower facing Pier

3. A.) Picnic Bird of Pier facing Standard
   B.) Hotel windows

Rosa Barba
August 2014
Soliloquy in Signs

Francisca Benitez turned the four months leading up to her performance into a residency on the pier, during which she spent time observing the gestures of its myriad visitors. Compiling these gestures into sign language research, for her final action, Benitez performed a “soliloquy in signs,” walking the perimeter of the pier while reciting a combination of memorized and improvised speech inspired by the day’s events.

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**Francisca Benitez**

(b. 1974, Chile)
Carol Bove invited all of the other twenty-six participating artists to join her for tea, wine, and conversation at the end of the pier after the completion of all the projects. Any artist unable to attend was invited to mail in her comments for sharing with the group.
N. Dash chose to interact directly with three of the recurring characters found on the pier during her visits: one geological engineer and two contractors listed to drill for soil samples in the seabed below. Fascinated by the matter churned up by the large blue rig that drilled through different locations up to five hundred feet below sea level, Dash drew two lines at the end of Pier 54. One was created out of the sectional poles they used for drilling and one out of the mica-faced mud dredged up from beneath the pier, both revealing the foundations of the project’s canvas and the new character of the neighborhood, which is defined by construction and renovation.
Meditation on Staying Afloat (Sink or Swim)

For her project, Liz Glynn took a humorous route with a series of actions titled “Walk the Plank,” “Sink or Swim,” “Lifeline,” and “Black Box.” For these directives, the artist cautiously teetered as far out over the water as possible on an unattached wooden plank, climbed knee-deep into the Hudson, tossed a length of rope to the empty surf, and read aloud her deepest secrets from scraps of paper before tucking them into a homemade black box and throwing them into the river to disappear below the water.
Women of the World Unite! they said.

Quoting Betty Friedan and the women's movements of the 1960s, and alluding to Julia Kristeva’s notes on the French student and worker movements of the same period, Sharon Hayes invited seven colleagues to join her in writing the slogan “WOMEN OF THE WORLD UNITE! they said.” in twelve-by-fifteen-foot letters on the pier in white aerosol chalk. The action was photographed from a helicopter flying over the Hudson River.
Material (Pier 54 – New York – 2014)

In an anthropological approach to the pier, Iman Issa gathered hundreds of small objects from the sandy detritus that had made its home on the pier. After arranging the objects on a white, one-by-six-meter plinth placed in the center of the pier, Issa labeled them according to the narratives she subsequently watched unfold between them, grouping the objects into poetically linked clusters.

Artist’s Notes

Place a 350 x 76 x 20 cm horizontally centered white plinth on the pier.

Collect signs of previous life, as manifested in material remains found on the pier.

Arrange elements from your collection on the plinth.

Arrangement could be based on composition or on a constructed narrative.

Come up with potential narratives or functions for the chosen elements and assign them numbers accordingly. Elements belonging to the same story or function should get the same number.

Title:

MATERIAL (PIER 54, NEW YORK, 2014)
I wanted a fire...

Interested in the history of the West Side piers as a former site of cruising and carousing, Margaret Lee invited famed drag queen Vivacious to participate in a photo shoot on the pier, for which the performer modeled multiple colorful, homemade costumes with the backing of a blaring runway soundtrack.
Realizing her action from afar, Maria Loboda invited an actress to perform as a contemporary Greta Garbo attempting to evade the paparazzi—a collective role played by Liz Ligon, the photographer who documented all of the Pier 54 actions—in homage to Garbo’s time in hiding after moving to New York following her retirement in 1953.

After Garbo’s retirement from Hollywood at the age of 35 in 1941 she moved New York City as her home and disguise. She decided that her face should not be photographed anymore and that from this moment her face shouldn’t be photographed anymore and was protecting her privacy very strictly. Over decades photographers and paparazzi tried to get a glimpse of her face but she always hid it behind whatever she had handy. The act of photographing/sighting Greta Garbo in various states and poses of disguise was called Garbo Spotting. She became like a legendary mystical creature of NYC which was almost impossible to witness.

Possible clothing options for the performer:
- Slacks and sweaters
- Sunglasses, large, black
- Trench coat well cut
- Small shoulder handbag black or other leather “bucket bag”
- no floppy hats
- no shawls on her head
- navy, mink, black, white color scheme
- it should look temporary classy and casual
- not a copy of Garbo’s Style from the 50’s but still a bit eccentric
- jewelry: one large “statement ring” (optional)

Accessories to hide the face:
- New York Times Newspaper
- Coat
- Hands
- Bag
- iPhone or whatever is handy

The performer should casually stroll or sit or witness other performances on the Pier while the Photographer tries to make some pictures of her. She is always hiding her face behind either her coat, a newspaper or her hand.

The Paparazzi aesthetic, casual, quick snapshot. Sometimes with other people in the frame, walking, sitting, looking out at the water and so on.
Continuing her ongoing Tide and Current Taxi project, Marie Lorenz rowed herself and the photographer around the pier in her handmade rowboat, exploring the stalactites found underneath, dripping from the limestone in its cement floor, as well as the pilings found to the north that formerly comprised the foundation of Pier 15.
Curtain Blocking

Interested in the pier as its own framing device, Shana Lutker rented an eight-foot-tall crimson theater curtain, which she used to frame a variety of views from the pier— including landmarks and landscape alike.

*SHANA LUTKER*
(b. 1978, United States)

A stage curtain wakes up on a pier. Waiting for a cue, it tries to find its best angle for the performance.
Directions for a photographer and a DJI Phantom Aerial UAV Drone Quadcopter

With Dan Graham’s Pier 18 project in mind, Liz Magic Laser invited a drone quadcopter operator to photograph Liz Ligon in her act of photographing the drone, thus forming a dance of dueling surveillance techniques, both contemporary and historical, human and robotic.

PHOTOGRAPHER – Photograph the drone from a variety of angles with a range of water, sky, asphalt and buildings in the background – Capture the drone at a variety of scales – close up, medium and wide – try to stay out of the drone’s shot.

DRONE – Descend from the sky with the pier in view – trace the periphery of the pier – spiral inward – closing in on the photographer – get as close to the photographer as possible without endangering her – try to keep the photographer in view – close in on her – speed off to the end of the pier – dip down toward water and fly off.
Perhaps the artist most deeply engaged with the actions of the original Pier 18 project, Jill Magid wrote twenty-seven postcards—one addressed to each of the original participants—some humorous, some angry, and some romantic.
Close Encounter

Reflecting on the history of the West Side piers as sites for clandestine male sexual activities, MPA staged a “close encounter” between two women on the pier. For her action, the photographer was instructed to sit and wait in The Standard, High Line searching for an unannounced couple sneaking onto the pier, who themselves had no idea as to the location of the photographer. The reciprocal unknowing was captured in the photographer’s spying shot.
Virginia Overton performed a contemplative and romantic action by watching the sun set on a breathtakingly beautiful July evening, as Liz Ligon documented the passing watercraft and changing sky.

*Untitled (Sundown over the Hudson from Pier 54)*

Watching The Sun Set: Take photographs from the end of Pier 54 of the sun setting across the Hudson River over New Jersey. In case the weather is bad, I'll bring a placement that has a nice sunset picture on it. We can always take a picture of that instead.
68 Piles at Sunset

With Jan Dibbets’s sunset-based Pier 18 action as inspiration, Leah Raintree photographed the sixty-eight piles alongside one edge of the pier over the course of two and a half hours straddling the setting of the sun. By keeping the exposure time of each photograph consistent, she achieved a subtle grayscale gradient over the set of the photos.

Pier 54, 68 Piles at Sunset
August 19, 2014
Walk the length of Pier 54, documenting each exposed pile, center framed. Begin at sunset in the northeast corner. Move from east to west along the north facing edge, looking out into the waters of the Hudson. Document through fencing and barricades when present, concluding after a record of each pile has been made.
untitled (Baltrop and friends)

For her two-part action, Emily Roysdon instructed Liz Ligon to find a specific piling whose image the artist had previously emailed to the photographer as a clue. For her second part, Roysdon instructed: “the photo—a view from a distance, shot from above at an angle, a photograph of a woman facing north near the edge of the pier, reading a book topless, a quiet image, lots of breathing room, sparse.”
LaToya Ruby Frazier staged a photo shoot in which she was captured waving flags printed with historical photographs taken in the vicinity of Pier 54, in homage to the pier’s former industrial role as a site for moving both goods and people—a site both of abstracted labor and personal history.

LaToya Ruby Frazier
(b. 1982, United States)
Aki Sasamoto pushed a thirty-pound cube of ice from one end of the pier to the other, using a mop handle and wearing cement platform shoes. Once at the end of the pier, Sasamoto filled a mop bucket with water from the Hudson, changed into ski boots that had been molded into cement blocks and mounted on top of wheeled office chair bases, and, with the wheeled bucket strapped to her waist, proceeded to awkwardly mop her way back toward the front of the pier.
Number 18/Number 19

Xaviera Simmons staged a photo shoot featuring five dancers recreating scenes from historical photographs found by the artist when she was doing research into the history of the piers as sites for artistic and sexual experimentations.

Score for Number 18.

1. Performances over the course of 3-4 hours
2. Image as catalyst for movement
3. Choreography/Performance Image
4. A conversation between movement and Image
5. Image as catalyst for movement

• Constructing a pier-based dictionary of gesture and movement
• Repetition of gestures and movements
• Instructions in the form of image
• Constructing a vocabulary of movement based on the archival images

• History of the piers (60’s – 80’s) paying attention to Gay Male body vernacular
• Historical references to the Gay Male history of the piers and gathering historical photographs
• Simple repetitive actions and exercises that use image as catalyst for gesture
• Building a visual dictionary/encyclopedia of movements on the pier
• Extending ideas found in Underscore at The Aldrich and Archive as Impetus at MoMA.
Mika Tajima invited two contortionists to spell out the words “Free Body Culture” with their bodies—an act highlighting the strained human body against the backdrop of the rapidly developing architecture of the Meatpacking District and Chelsea waterfront.
Erasure

Completing her action fictionally, Andra Ursuta created a digitally rendered sculpture of a hand erasing the end of the pier, which had partly collapsed into the Hudson River a number of years prior.
Past Present

Highlighting the graphic gestures found written in the tar lines crisscrossing the pier, Sara VanDerBeek, upon her first visit to the pier, photographed a series of small, graphic moments inscribed on the pier’s surface. She subsequently instructed the photographer to rediscover and rephotograph those same signs—a memory action activated by the premise of the entire Pier 54 project.
Location Services
The first action hosted on Pier 14, Allyson Vieira’s Location Services took the flattening perspective of Google Maps as its cue. Observing that the pier appears like a skyscraper when looking at it in Google Maps, Vieira photographed a view of it on her iPad at different locations on the pier, starting at the front gate. As Vieira, the photographer, and the iPad moved closer to the end of the pier, their blue dot walked slowly "up" the silhouette of the pier.

Enable Location Services
The My Location feature on Google Maps lets you center the map on your current location. You must have Location Services turned on to view your location in Maps and to use your location to fund local resources.

Here’s how to enable Location Services:
1. Go to your device’s Settings menu and select Location.
2. Select the location options you want to use:
   • Enable Google Location Services.
   • Enable Wireless networks to allow the phone to determine your approximate location by using Wi-Fi and mobile networks.
   • Enable GPS services to allow your phone to determine street-level accuracy. GPS works best when you have a clear view of the sky.
   *Note: Exact instructions for your Android device may vary. Not all location options may be available for all devices. Some options may be found in a different settings menu.
Carrying out an action with simultaneously vehement and graceful undertones, Marianne Vitale spent one early July morning flinging sardines to the local seagulls, offering an avian riverside breakfast.
Interested in the West Side piers’ more illicit and romantic past, Anicka Yi staged an abstracted interpretation of a romantic cruising encounter in the form of two actresses seducing each other from inside two plastic bubbles.
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ABOUT HIGH LINE ART
Presented by Friends of the High Line, High Line Art is the public art program which commissions and produces public art projects on and around the High Line. High Line Art presents a wide array of artwork including site-specific commissions, exhibitions, performances, video programs, and a series of billboard interventions. Curated by Cecilia Alemani, the Donald R. Mullen, Jr. Curator & Director of High Line Art, and produced by Friends of the High Line, High Line Art invites artists to think of creative ways to engage with the uniqueness of the architecture, history, and design of the High Line and to foster a productive dialogue with the surrounding neighborhood and urban landscape.

ABOUT THE HIGH LINE AND FRIENDS OF THE HIGH LINE
The High Line is an elevated freight rail line transformed into a public park on Manhattan’s West Side. It is owned by the City of New York, and maintained and operated by Friends of the High Line. Founded in 1999 by community residents, Friends of the High Line fought for the High Line’s preservation and transformation at a time when the historic structure was under the threat of demolition. It is now the non-profit conservancy working with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation to make sure the High Line is maintained as an extraordinary public space for all visitors to enjoy. In addition to overseeing maintenance, operations, and public programming for the park, Friends of the High Line works to raise the essential private funds to support virtually all of the park’s annual operating budget, and to advocate for the preservation and transformation of the High Line at the Rail Yards, the third and final section of the historic structure, which runs between West 30th and West 34th Streets. The first section of the High Line opened on June 9, 2009. It runs from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street. The second section, which runs between West 20th and West 30th Streets, opened June 8, 2011. The third section, the High Line at the Rail Yards, opened on September 21, 2014.

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