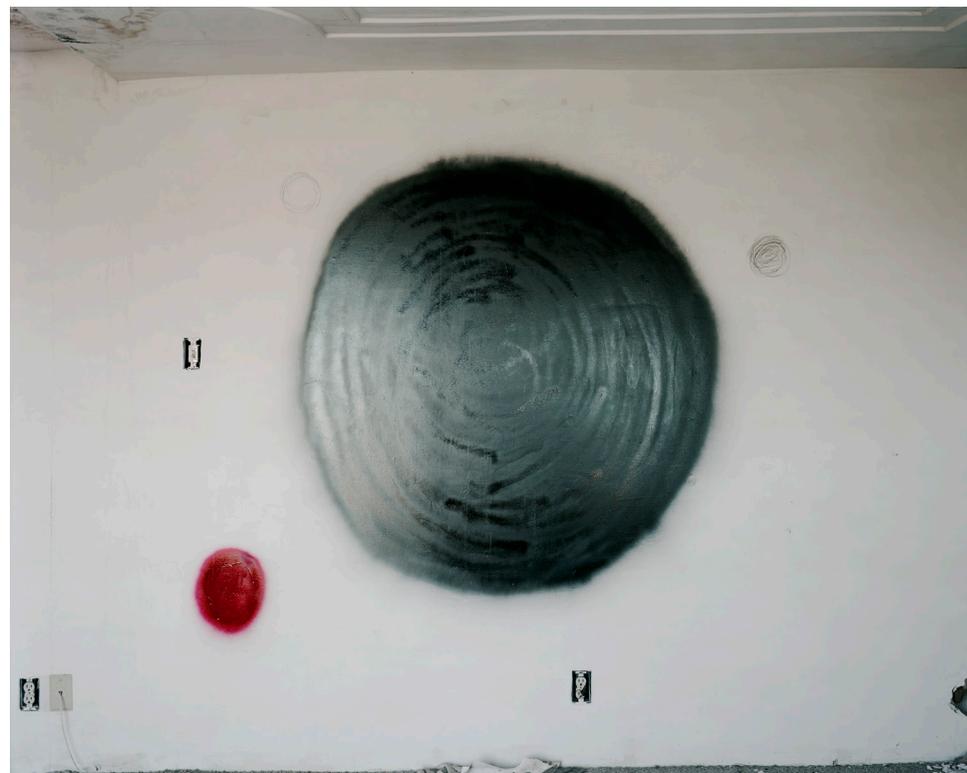


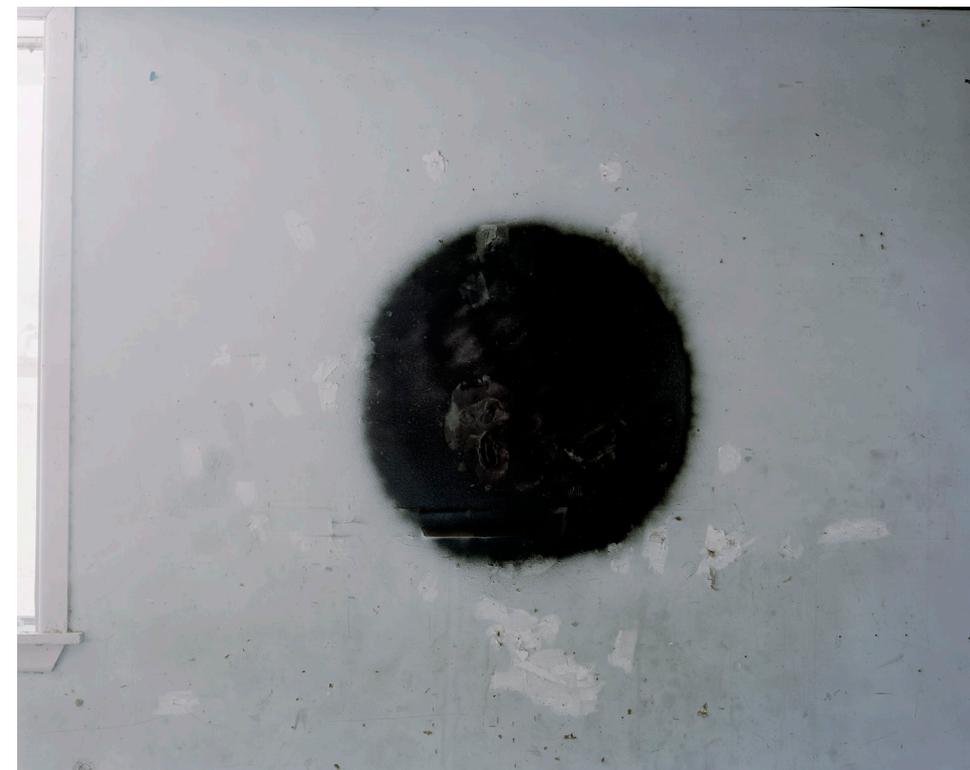
Born in Los Angeles in 1949, John Divola is perhaps the most emblematic of the Golden State's photographers. Featuring six images from his 2008 series, *Dark Star*, this compact installation touches on the central themes of Divola's practice. Disrupting traditional expectations about photography, these images of shadowy discs brushed and spray painted by the artist on the walls of abandoned homes outside of Los Angeles are at once straightforward and disarmingly enigmatic. The title *Dark Star* implies an overwhelming astronomical mass—a star whose gravitational force is so powerful it traps the light it emits. Photographed while the paint is still wet, the discs' shimmering surfaces then become something of an oxymoron, a reflective black surface bouncing light back toward the camera rather than absorbing it. Assigning these images sequential letters A, B, C, etc., rather than titles, Divola furthers the suggestion of anonymous, distant suns—perhaps one of the thousands catalogued by the scientists at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory near the artist's home in Riverside. Employing a reductive formal vocabulary akin to minimalist art, the shifting scale of the discs and their position within each room amplify the curious sense of space, some constrained by hallway closets, others expanding across empty walls, each "sun" differing in scale and its distance from the camera. *Dark Star F*, with a small red planet seemingly locked into its orbit, becomes a schematic solar system captured on a kitchen wall.

One could consider these images "anti-landscapes"—confined spaces filled with debris and broken glass in the high desert along Los Angeles' eastern flank. They imply the possibility of danger lurking just outside the frame—a sharp, dry antidote to the rolling waves and pastel sunsets of the Pacific Ocean ninety miles to the west. Yet even when photographing along the beach, as Divola did in his earlier series *Zuma*, 1977–78, he framed the sea and sky through the broken windows of burned-out



beachfront homes, rejecting any romanticism. The *Dark Star* interiors themselves are also ambiguous—something has happened, but we are not told what. Why were these homes abandoned? Where did the families go? The images suggest a sense of calm, but the narrative remains unresolved, with no possibility of discovering an answer. For all their mystery and foreboding, however, Divola's photographs ultimately become meditative, as the minimalist simplicity of his compositions gives way to subtle variations of light and color and surface.

Divola's work is seemingly at odds with itself—whimsical and abstract, but also dedicated to the formal precision of the camera and the seductiveness and saturation of his prints. Yet the subjects of these photographs were not found or discovered through the lens—



rather, they were created by the artist for the purpose of being photographed, and once photographed, stripped of their value. Much like the interiors that act as his canvas, Divola's painted interventions are abandoned after the exposure is made, their importance transferred to the photograph itself. In this fashion they subvert the traditional hierarchy of the fine arts, which places painting at its apex, dismissing it as soon as the image is exposed. The subject of *Dark Stars* is in many ways nothing—empty spaces and spray paint—yet the images assume a planetary weight, a contemplative universe uncovered in an unexpected place.



C  
A  
P

John Divola



### About the Artist

Born in 1949, John Divola has spent his life in Los Angeles. He received a BA from California State University, Northridge in 1971 and a MA and MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1973 and 1974, respectively. Since 1988 Divola has been a Professor of Art at the University of California, Riverside. His work has been featured in more than seventy solo exhibitions in the United States, Europe, Japan, Mexico, and Australia and over 200 group exhibitions. He received Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1973, 1976, 1979, and 1990 and a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1986. The subject of a dozen monographs, Divola's work is represented in more than thirty public collections.

### The Riley CAP Gallery

The Karen and Doug Riley Contemporary Artists Project Gallery presents nationally- and internationally-recognized living artists, as well as emerging talent, selected by Joslyn curators. A rotating schedule of carefully focused exhibitions examine how artists engage with the world today and respond to the issues that challenge them creatively, bringing new perspectives on contemporary art to Nebraska.

IMAGES: (COVER) *Dark Star B*, 2008; (PANEL) *Dark Star A*, 2008; (INSIDE CENTER) *Dark Star F*, 2008; (INSIDE RIGHT) *Dark Star G*, 2008;  
All archival pigment prints on rag paper, 40 x 50 inches, © John Divola. Courtesy Gallery Luisotti, Los Angeles

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