

RENA BRANSTEN GALLERY

Henry Wessel: *On the Shore*

July 8 – September 9, 2023

In celebration of summer, and in conjunction with our exhibition of paintings by Nobuyuki Takahashi, Rena Bransten Gallery is pleased to present a selection of photographs by **Henry Wessel** (b.1942 – d.2018).

The images on view here represent some of Wessel's lesser-known, unpublished work, while maintaining his underlying ethos and signature style: reveling in the oddities of this beautiful world.

A fascination in the overlapping space between the built and the natural environment is at the core of Wessel's work, seen here as images of Waikiki which was already a highly developed beach resort when these photographs were made in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Through Wessel's eye, always leaning towards humor and the absurd, we see images of lounging vacationers, rows of surf boards, exuberant children playing in the waves, a couple posing under a palm tree with an ominous figure lurking behind. The heat from the summer sun is palpable, even in black and white. Viewed now, decades after they were taken, these photographs become time capsules of culture, portraying a pre-cell phone, pre-internet era of leisure – an enviable time.

"[Wessel's] style is cool, self-effacing and based on the deep, quiet pleasures of keeping your eyes open, because the world is full of surprises." (Michael Kimmelman, New York Times, 2007).

Originally from the New Jersey, Wessel relocated to California in the early 1970s, captivated by the West Coast sunlight. He was included in the seminal 1975 "New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-altered Landscape" exhibition at the George Eastman House (Rochester, NY) in 1975, alongside contemporaries Robert Adams, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Stephen Shore, among others. Wessel was a professor at the San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, CA for thirty years. He received three National Endowment for the Arts awards and two Guggenheim fellowships. His work has been shown extensively nationally and internationally, is held in major public and private collections, and is widely published and celebrated.