

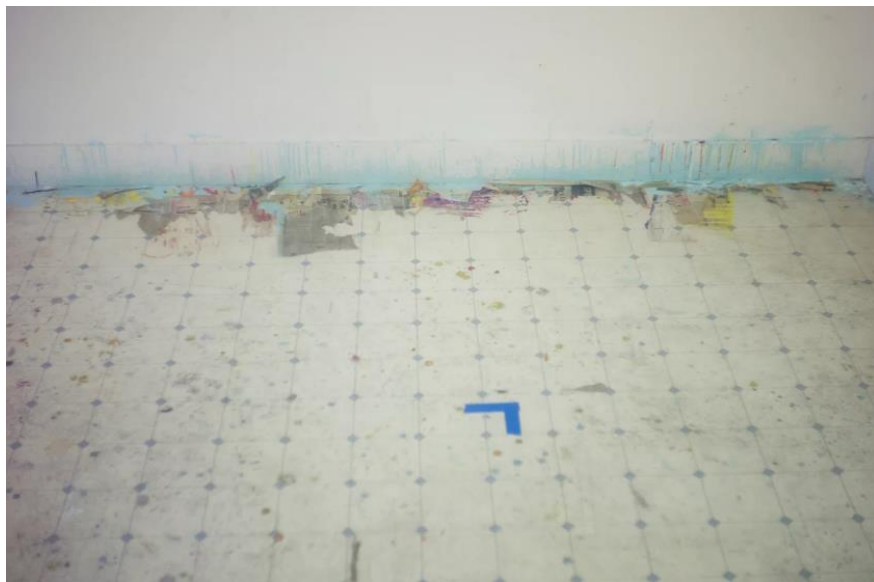
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

theguardian

My best summer photograph: sun, sand and plastic surgery

A cliff plunge, a buried grandad, a Rio carnival queen, nudes in a barn ... top photographers, including Nadav Kander and Ellen von Unwerth, pick a hot shot

Sean O'Hagan & Ben Beaumont-Thomas



Remembered Light, Untitled (Wall Drip with Blue Tape), 2012 by Sally Mann Photograph: Sally Mann/Courtesy Gagolian Gallery

Summer is a time when natural light can lend an otherness to almost any subject. From Ryan McGinley's playful homage to Renaissance nudes, to Nadav Kander's eerie inlet at Mont Saint-Michel, these shots by contemporary photographers are testament to that.

As the holiday snaps that flood Instagram show, the light can also enhance even the most clichéd chronicle of a summer vacation. We take a different kind of photograph in the sun, sensing that it makes us look better because it makes us feel better. The self we display in a selfie, or so we tell ourselves, is leaner, lither, more tanned, more relaxed and less self-conscious.

A snapshot of a sandy beach and a blue sea, especially taken through the V of tanned feet, would once have been consigned to a pile of envelopes in a cupboard, to be looked at briefly and bemusedly years later in a bout of decluttering. Now, shared in real time on Instagram, it is something else: more knowing, artful and presumptive. "I am here and you are not," is the subliminal message it carries to friends back home. Yet sunlight falling on skin or sand bestows a shimmer of lightness – literal and atmospheric – on even the most inane snapshot.

Against all of this, I can understand why even a contemporary master of deep colour such as Alec Soth would choose to shoot someone diving into a rocky swimming hole in monochrome. Here is the chill of summer, the childhood risk of summer, the dark dreamtime of an adolescent summer in which limits are being tested. It is an antidote to the dappled days of sun, sea, sand and luminous light. (*Sean O'Hagan*)

'It's the absence and presence of Cy Twombly'
Sally Mann

This was taken in Cy Twombly's studio in the dead of winter, after Cy had been gone at least six months. It was summer when he died, not in our home state of Virginia, but in Italy where he spent his summers and winters. In the spring and fall, he would alight in Lexington, the town in Virginia where we both grew up, and almost as soon as his bags were unpacked he would begin painting.

He had been a friend of my parents, to whom he gave his first sculpture. They supported him by buying, out of his arms, a painting he was carrying down the street one day in 1952. Cy had made it with pencil and house paint.

He loved our part of the south and his work reflected southerners' innately contradictory qualities of ambiguity and plain-spokenness, cruelty and kindness, illumination and obscurity. Like all southerners, he was keenly aware of death, but the shadow of mortality failed to darken his brilliance, and the famous slow pace of southern life only reminded Cy how much harder he had to work.

And work he did. Considering he was in the fall of his life, his later paintings were extravagant with colour and gesture, import and whimsy. It was the poetic force of his personality that compelled me to take pictures in his studio. These bright colours, these brilliant vestiges, suggest both an absence and a great presence. (*Ben Beaumont-Thomas*)

Sally Mann: Remembered Light, Cy Twombly in Lexington, is at Gagosian Gallery 976 Madison Avenue, New York, 22 September to 29 October.