

Art

Review

Sam Samore

P.S.1, through Mon 8



The Suicidist (#07), 1973
Photograph courtesy P.S.1

“The Suicidist,” Sam Samore’s 1973 series of black-and-white photographs, depicts staged scenes of the artist as a ruffled, bearded antihero who repeatedly kills himself by means alternately clichéd and hilarious. In one image, he lies at the base of a playground slide, limbs splayed like the wings of a broken bird. The premise is absurd: Why would someone orchestrate such an awkward demise, when far more efficient means are at hand? Funnier still are an image of Samore prone on a living-room carpet with a vacuum-cleaner hose in his mouth and another in which his head is buried deep in a sandbox. These pictures are installed alongside photographs from Samore’s related series, “The Suicidist (continued),” begun 30 years later in 2003. In these recent, larger photos, Samore reenacts scenarios from “The Suicidist,” this time clean-shaven and wearing a suit.

Each of Samore’s “suicidists” dies alone, with no witness to his tragic end, though the narrative implications of this detail remain ambiguous. The corpse floating facedown in a murky sea of placid waves in *The Suicidist (continued)*, #7, for example, might have been a determined man who chose to die far from any potential rescuer, or simply the proverbial loser with no one around him who cared. As fictional meditations on the nature of suicide, Samore’s images brilliantly cultivate open-ended readings, juggling grim statistical reality, slapstick comedy and the romance of myth. — *Jane Harris*