

Morgan Mein
Our Place, 2017

Our Place Saloon sits on Desert Shores Drive in Salton Sea, California across from a usually unpopulated motel advertising color tv and down the street from Salton Sea lake. All that took place here over the course of the last six months I intended to weigh heavily on chance, combined with my own artistic intuition.

Going into the project, I knew I was dealing with themes of what builds a home. I was going to bring sentimental objects from previous projects I've worked on and from the home I have built with my friends over the past two years. I was thinking about our single-use culture, and how so many objects get thrown away or deemed obsolete past a certain point or when we are "done" with them. What does it mean to be "done" with an object? When you move out of a place you've got three piles: "keep" "donate" "trash"; but where do the memories and connections you made get sorted in all of this? I didn't trust my memories to be enough. I needed something tangible to orient my understanding of how things are now.

I chose to have this conversation in the Salton Sea because of the decades of man-made manipulation that have already taken place there. The lake itself is a product of an engineering accident that occurred in the early 20th century. What followed was a flocking of tourists for boat racing and a blooming resort culture in the 1950s. Because of the salt deposits in the lake, the water started evaporating and the lake began to rot. Now, more than 50 years later, the pollution and salinity of the lake continue to increase as abandoned motels, vacation homes, and saloons sit on quiet streets. It was where my story fit. My things needed a home, and these homes needed things to fill them. So I set out to find the right resting place for my objects with a few formal concepts in mind. On the first venture out, with only an hour left to spare before we lost the sun we found *Our Place*, seemingly waiting for us.

I chose to return to the space once every 5 weeks for the remainder of the time in order to give myself distance from the piece. I was very inspired by John Divola's *Zuma* series from 1977&78, mainly for the way he blurred the line between what was contributed by the artist hand and what was found object. I took notes also from contemporary artist David Gilbert's portraits of his studio space. Both artists bring the viewer into intimate settings and shed a truthful light on the artistic process through their photographs. Each time I returned to *Our Place*, I created an intervention of personal items mixed with the things found in the space already, set up my medium format camera, and shot one roll. The order the images are displayed in is the order in which they were shot from November 2016 through April 2017.

I predicted from the beginning that I would grow more comfortable with the space over time and that my intuition would allow me to think bigger with each visit. What I could not have predicted was how my actions would inform my own understanding of the project. I realized about halfway through that everything I was doing was a large metaphor for the way I connect and collaborate with others. I was working on the series with multiple people, and in order to do so had to open myself up and let someone into my practice. This felt very vulnerable in the way that I know myself to be, always reaching out, opening myself up to whatever experience may come.

In much the same way, I originally thought that I would leave the items behind in the space once I was done with the project, a poetic way of letting go of the things I don't really need. But it was on my last visit that I realized how irresponsible my leaving them there permanently seemed, so I chose to bring everything out to the front of the saloon to photograph them there as a parting goodbye. I had my stay, I got my experience, so it was time for me to leave.

I said earlier that I spaced out the time between each photograph to give myself distance from the project, but it became apparent towards the end it was instead the project giving me a necessary distance from my daily life. In my ventures out to the Salton Sea I was able to reflect on why these objects meant so much to me. I was able to collaborate and to build something from nothing with people that I care about. Most of all, I think it was a way of slowing myself down, of taking the time to realize how much time was left. An anticipation of nostalgia. A proper, prolonged goodbye.

I have the people involved in this project to thank for the experiences and realizations I found over the course of making these images. In the near future I won't be able to bring with me the tangible things I hold so close, but that doesn't mean I have to let go of the impact they've had on me. To let yourself be vulnerable, to try and fail to make things work, and to ultimately allow things to be the way they are, this is the truth of *Our Place*. For it is just that, the story of all of us, my personal story made up of the histories of many that I may never know who owned these objects before I did. The hands that have physically touched these things, the ones who haven't, the people that will never know their impact or where their trash ended up. Thank you.

