

Daybreak,
George Air Force Base

“Daybreak” is one of several projects that have resulted from my engagement photographing the abandoned housing complex at what was previously the George Air Force Base, and that is now the Southern California Logistics Airport, in Victorville, California. All of the photographs in this project were made between 2015 and 2020.

George Air Force Base was established in 1941 at the beginning of World War Two and it closed in 1992. The architect, A. Quincy Jones, was hired to design approximately 600 of the housing units in the area that I have photographed, which were constructed between 1965 and 1972. The base was closed in 1992 and the housing units were abandoned and have been left to deteriorate since that time.

At some point tractors have moved through the site clearing between the buildings pushing aside trees and ground cover. This action, undertaken with such complete disregard for the structures, has resulted in a unique physical site with surprising juxtapositions and textures. Most of architecture, while on the edge of generic, is subtly modernist and distinct with hundreds of the same sized large vacant windows opening to mute spatial volumes.

The prints from “Daybreak” are interventions photographed in these spaces primarily at dawn. I was very interested in the manner in which light illuminated the space. This is in constant flux effected by time of day, time of year, weather, and the physical orientation of the sun to the site. The Daybreak images are 8x10 contact silver gelatin prints (analog). Analog photographs are, quite literally, a physical manifestation of an engagement, an industrial artifact of history. And as such, seemed appropriate to me for this project.

This site is a rich opportunity for material and atmospheric observation. I have a longstanding interest in sites involved in a linear deterioration in the context of a cyclical atmospheric environment. The site has an equally compelling social history as a remnant of the militarization of the desert west in the United States during the cold war and its current status as a superfund clean-up site.

I have an interest in gesture. Each photograph represents an index of multiple gestures. The design of the architect, the labor of the builders, the traces of past occupants, the actions of vandals attacking the walls looking for copper wire, the paint ball splatters from war games, my own painting and installations, and ultimately my gestures of selection.

At George we have the site of engagement. The engagement of the massive and deadly momentum of the cold war. The engagement of the fictive battlefield of war games after the decommission. The site of my own engagement of medium, sensibility, as well as multiple histories that are both cultural and personal. It has been said that with photography content is automatic. It is, after all, always a photograph of something.

While I am definitely interested in what that “something” is, what that “something” might mean is always a complex issue and open to contention.

I have always been drawn to the indexical nature of photographs and the observation that they are imprints of a specific time, place, and circumstance. To arise at four in the morning and load up the gear. To drive through the darkness to an abandoned military site, hide the car, and to venture, alone, into the landscape and structures. To understand this work is to appreciate the romantic character of the process. A process resulting in physical artifacts of a material engagement with reality.

Photographs can accommodate a broad range of interpretations, from the concretely informational, social, political, esthetic, as well as an index of a specific life and its engagements. I aspire to embrace that messy complexity. It is my experience that I can tangentially glimpse the existential and my reactions oscillate somewhere between the extremes of wonder and terror.