

Tracing Oblivion

Newark 2015 & St. Louis 2014

Newark

I think this is hyperobjectivity? In that I'm suggesting that this collection of material - centered around Newark, New Jersey - is attempting a viewpoint so broad that it repositions our subjectivity and makes us acutely aware of where we are.

To start let's identify Hunter as a photographer. In object and conversation, the ideas brought forth here are entrenched not in the chemistry of photography, but the conceptual riddles the media has brought to light. Repetition, authenticity, appropriation all chime in to the discursive conversation brought to the fore in this gallery. More directly, we have at play here are issues of landscape, as well as history and human consciousness. The breadth of these two topics, especially as they relate to photographic theory, calls to mind the tableau vivant. That living picture, reflects a "pleasure of producing a copy that elides the original...by doubling it." The materials here are both originals and copies, speaking new on ideas since passed.

Taken as landscape, the tableau vivant is a wild beast. Untethered by stasis, the land not only informs history but becomes the passive reliquary for its constructs. We build into the land after we survey, we bury our bones into the land after we have lived on its surface. The land becomes sentient for Hunter as it predicts and retains all our ingenuity. The readymade objects under glass suggest this; industry follows suggestions made by the land.

With subjectivity as the aperture, history then becomes a stand-in for light passing through that opening. Light, as it were, approximates physically what history performs psychically. They each give us access to that which has come before. Just as light is the medium of the camera, consciousness is the medium of history. We see all that we understand through the distortions of histories in much the same way that light potentially distorts the photographic process. The fracturing of history going on here - into geologic time, the industrial past, and the present - gives complexity to our view, bringing to life the picture. We are given points with which to chart our course that bound between epochs and ultimately yields a vast panorama.

As we move through this tableau normally entropic ideas stabilize. The dizzying expanse of time conflates into one vantage where our subjectivity places us within the story is as much as it keeps us as passive viewers. We, in all our *ontos*, look out over the precipice into oblivion and feel grounded.

Chris Stiegler

This project was shown at R. Jampol Projects, NYC.
The essay was written for the accompanying catalog.





Shortcut: 910-918 Raymond Blvd, digital c print, 20 x 30 ", 2015



Store Front: 9 Central Ave, digital c print, 20 x30 in, 2015



New Jersey is a state known best known for its industry. The state is rich in natural resources from the vast forests of the Pine Barrens to the mineral rich geology and once vast wetlands. Most of the magnetite in the state is found in the Highlands, the North Western region of the state. Although from the 1760s-1860s Southern New Jersey was also known for mining and smelting bog ore. Magnetite is a mineral that is naturally magnetized. Historically stones containing these properties were often called Lodestones. This type of mineral comes from the Precambrian Era, the earliest geologic time period on Earth. The mineral is extracted from the surrounding rock by a variety of different methods: melting, crushing, chemicals, etc, then melted down to create iron ore. While the production of Iron was never a huge part of Newark's industrial production, undoubtedly the Steel made in the state helped build the buildings and factories that made Newark. Magnetite is a symbol of the geology of the region and the industrial history of the state. This sample contains Hornblende Crystals and is from the Hibernia Mine in Rockaway County, NJ.

Magnetite: Iron Ore, magnetite stone, wood, glass, 2015



This is a replica of a Bannerstone, a carved stone created by humans during the Archaic period in North America. The Archaic period is generally recognized as 8,000-1,000 BCE. The stones were created by the Lenape's ancestors. The actual use of the stone remains a mystery, but archeologists speculate that they could have been ceremonial or used as weight for spears used in hunting. Newark is part of the Piedmont region of New Jersey, the area that sits between the glacial lakes of the Passaic and Hackensack. The area was primarily wetlands and was a popular home for many people during the Archaic period as well as the colonial period. Many of the archeological sites in New Jersey have been destroyed by development, outright vandalized, or covered by pavement. So rather than showing up in archeological digs, many Bannerstones have turned up in farmland and in development sites.



Bannerstone: Archaic Peoples, stone, wood, glass, 2015





Threads: Industrial Textiles, thread, wood, glass, 2015

The Clark Thread Company was located in Newark from 1866-1949. The company was started by two Scottish manufacturers that wanted to produce thread in the United States, at the time thread manufacturing was dominated by Scottish firms. They joined forces and started a plant in Newark. In the early 1870s an unrelated Scottish firm started a plant in East Newark, John Clark, Jr. & Co. In 1896, when the market for thread was becoming more competitive, a new venture joined the brands of these companies. The Clark Thread Company was built on both sides of the Passaic, with a larger complex on the East side of the river. There were 35 buildings on 133 acres. At its peak there were 3,000 employees. The factories were moved to Georgia in the late 1940s. Clark Thread was one of many textile factories that dotted the Passaic River. Other factories made lace, rugs, woolen goods, silk, and ribbon.





School of Law: 1109 Raymond Blvd, digital c
print, 11x 14 in, 2015

Ultramarine Blue:

Ultramarine was one of the first synthetic colorants manufactured in Newark, the factory was started by a German scientist.

Recent Industrial History/Rise of Newark's Industry



Newark Knows How:

I found this slogan on a button on Ebay, there was a large button factory in downtown Newark. The button was a 1930s cigarette promo, but I loved the slogan. After talking to more people from Newark, it seems that this slogan has been used several times for different civic projects in the 20th century.



During the summer of 1967, Newark had a series of riots over five days in July. Early in the evening on July 12, two white police officers stopped a yellow taxi driven by an African American man named John Smith. The officers beat him and took him to jail for resisting arrest. In the meantime the other cab drivers had been spreading the word about the police brutality and took community members to the county jail to protest the police brutality. During the protest the rumor spread that he had been killed in police custody (he was actually in a holding cell awaiting arraignment, bruised and with a broken rib). Over the course of the next five days the Central Ward was alive with riots. The National Guard was called in. There was massive looting, 26 lives were lost, and hundreds injured. Parts of the city were set ablaze. Governor Richard Hughes appointed a commission to investigate the causes of the civil disorder. This team, comprised of seven white and three African American members, put together a report called Report for Action. The report identified three main causes of unrest: lack of political representation, police brutality, and worsening social conditions. For more information about the history of African Americans in Newark during the twentieth century check out *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* by Kevin Mumford.

The City Riots: Newark Ablaze, 1967, mesh banner, 128" x 132", 2015

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Newark Anti-Violence Coalition: <http://www.navcoalition.org/>

Newark Museum Digital Archives: <http://www.newarkmuseum.org/search-our-collection>

New Jersey Environmental Digital Library: <http://njedl.rutgers.edu/>

Queer Newark: Our voices. Our histories.: <http://queer.newark.rutgers.edu/>

The Frick Collection: http://www.frick.org/research/research_tools

The Metropolitan Museum of Art: <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online>

The New Jersey Historical Society: <http://www.jerseyhistory.org/>

Textile History: <http://www.textilehistory.org/ClarkThread.html>

U.S. Environmental Agency: <http://www.johnheinl.net/LHserver/JP-standard-text.htm>

Women's Artist Archives National Directory: <http://www.johnheinl.net/LHserver/JP-standardtext.htm>

St. Louis

My grandmother grew-up in a town called Alton, which is an hour northwest of St. Louis on the Illinois side of the Mississippi. Growing up, I visited Alton frequently and occasionally St. Louis, but I had never spent any significant time there. I was interested in doing an artist in residence program in St. Louis for this reason. I had not quite figured out my research methodology for the project yet, but I did spend considerable time talking to my grandmother about St. Louis when she was growing up. Tracing Oblivion started out of this residency.

St. Louis is located on the Mississippi River and prior to colonization, the land was inhabited by people who are now called Mississippian people--particularly the Mound Builders. These indigenous people inhabited the area between 600-100 BCE and left large mound cities, the most famous being the Cahokia Mounds. The more recent native american tribes that lived in that region were the Illini, Quapaw, and Chickasaw.

The city as it is known post-columbus, was founded in 1763 by a French explorer named Pierre Laclede. It wasn't until 1803 and the Louisiana Purchase that St. Louis became part of the United States. St. Louis became a key location for settlers moving west and as a stopping point between Chicago and New Orleans on the Mississippi River.

A gem of the Midwest, with great industry and population growth. St. Louis was a very popular and wealthy city that became known as the "Gateway to the West." The city was known as a place for meat processing, leather making, paint manufacturing, brick factories, iron working, and financing trips west. With a population peak in the 1950s of 856,796 people there has been a general population decline with the 2014 population at an estimated 317,419. Much of the county is in decline, but there have been recent efforts at economic revitalization and growth. But as is often the case the growth is for a fraction of the city and majority of the working class neighborhoods are in near ruins. There is also racial unrest and the police force is under national scrutiny. However residents that I spoke to remain positive in outlook and enjoy their beautiful brick city by the great Mississippi River.

St. Louis is the first iteration of Tracing Oblivion. This work was created during an artist in residence program at The Luminary.



Tracing Oblivion, Installation view 1, St. Louis, MO, 2014



My great-grandfather worked for Western Cartridge, an ammunitions manufacturer based in St. Louis, they also had an office in Alton. During World War II he worked out of St. Louis. My maternal grandfather's sister also worked for Western Cartridge, although later down the road. She was the office manager there for most of her life. I found that my family had been supported by the military industrial complex for two generations. The lead in this exhibition is a nod to that history, part of the reason why there was ammunition factories in the area was because of the rich lead deposits. There was also a burgeoning lead paint industry during the nineteenth and early twentieth century as well. And in the later twentieth century, plenty of time spent on trying to deal with the industrial waste made by lead-based industry.

Lead: Paint & Ammunition, lead ingot, dimensions variable, 2014



This photograph was sourced from a digital archive. It is representative of the interior of upper class homes during the height of wealth in the St. Louis area. A victorian style drawing room that would have been used to entertain guests.

View of drawing room, Eugene Berthold House, 4482 Lindell Boulevard, Saint Louis, Independent City, MO, digital c print, 11x 14", printed 2014



In August of 2014 the police shot an unarmed African American man named Michael Brown. His death sparked riots that resonated globally and brought to light police brutality and the killing of African Americans in the United States. Something that the UN Human Rights Council has commented on. These riots would be the first of many over the next coming years and were pivotal to the Black Lives Matter movement.

Tear Gas Cloud, Ferguson, MO, sourced from internet, mesh sign, 30 x 40", 2014



Façade, 3000 Cherokee St, St Louis, MO, digital C print, 20x30", 2014



Tracing Oblivion, Installation view 2, St. Louis, MO, 2014

The iron fencing in the exhibition was borrowed from a store front across the street that was being refurbished. This type of fencing is ubiquitous in the city. At the peak of the city's population and popularity the St. Louis was known for its brick industry and cast iron. Later in the city history as it began to decline the iron fencing became more common inside of windows to prevent theft. The iron fencing in this exhibition is from the latter use.



Coal was another natural resource that was abundant in the St. Louis area. There were large deposits on the Illinois side that provided this fuel for the growth of St. Louis. And burn coal they did, until one smokey Tuesday in November, 1939 when the coal smoke was so thick that the sun was blocked. The city banned the burning of the soft bituminous coal that is abundant in the Illinois mines. The coal industry was appalled by the ban and for many years bootleg soft coal would still find its way to furnaces in St. Louis.



Stalactites, Local Caves, digital C print , 20x30", 2014

St. Louis is also known for the karst formations that run below the city, creating a vast cave system as well as causing sinkholes. During the mid 19th & early 20th St. Louis was a popular place landing spot for German immigrants that brought with them beer brewing techniques. And an industry was born, the cave system provided brewers with dark, cool places to keep their beer. The karst geology also played a large part in the development of the city's sewer system, the karst has many small streams that flowed through it to the river. These natural "sewers" were used until it became clear, for public health reasons that the city had to develop better sewer systems due to overflow and backups. St. Louis had one of the first terra cotta sewer systems in the country as a result.



Trees, Forrest Made of Oak, digital c print ,11x14", 2013 printed 2014

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