

2009 Berenice Abbott Prize
1st Place Winner

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Artist Statement: "The Transience of Things"

I don't have a particular place I consider home having grown up somewhere between Germany (where I was born) and the United States (where I moved at the age of six). Searching for the meaning of "home" I returned to Westchester County in New York where I was raised. The American Suburbs are a private place. Everything happens behind closed doors. The Estate Sale throws these doors wide open, at a moment where the families that used to inhabit these spaces are at their most vulnerable. A rupture – a death, a divorce, a move – usually precedes the sales. The rooms exist in a suspended state of reality – a convergence of past and future rooted firmly in the present. Everything is for sale.

The Estate Sale marks the final moments of a home: it is the last time the house exists in all its parts with rooms and objects intact in the way the owner intended. The absence of the owners at the sales only makes their presence more felt. Each picture frame, each panel of wallpaper, each decorative lampshade has been selected with utmost care. The people that used to live in these homes continue to define the rooms and objects. Their presence – or lack thereof – is written across the spaces: on each fixture, each glittery dress, each sturdy armchair, and stack of china. The details of a life can be pieced together by means of the objects, which have been left behind. We don't realize the impermanence of things and it is ironic that the silk plants and prom dresses not only outlast us – they encompass our memories. In these houses I found the remains of family life and an archaeology of loss in which I recognized pieces of myself.

This project was shot in Westchester County, New York in the last six months with a 1954 Rolleiflex Camera. Most of the houses were built during the original Flight to the Suburbs and it felt appropriate to use a camera that was present in many households at that time and is a staple at many of the sales today.