

Miki Baird

Tow Lot

2007-ongoing

The Tow Lot Series is a photographic study of isolated images that I captured at close range from the inside and the outside of vehicles stored at the Kansas City, Missouri Tow Lot. It is one of several series of large scale tracking expeditions that I have engaged in since 2005 and is a cumulative photo investigation examining bits of evidence left in the wake of pedestrian activity. With assistance from the Municipal Arts Commission and Vehicle Tow Services through the Neighborhood and Community Services Department of Kansas City, I was able to work on site at 6817 Stadium Drive beginning in January 2007 for a period of four months.

Impounded within the tow lot is a diverse collection of vehicles housed there for a variety of reasons. Some are towed in due to parking violations, of which a number will pass through the system quickly, but others will remain longer for lack of funds or no declaration of ownership. Many are wrecked beyond use and will be salvaged for parts at auction; some are impounded because of criminal cases. Grouped together they are indiscriminately parked in herringbone pattern rows generally not segregated according to condition or type. Walking through each aisle you see difference; what you don't see are the people involved with each vehicle nor do you know what their situation is. The diversity is striking and as individual objects the vehicles are each a trove of information; in many ways they are telling about the owners, sometimes revealing to the point of pain. Some cars embody tragic stories and others are so innocuous their sterility hurts. Regardless, parked within this huge lockup are clues found in possessions left behind as well as from the marks of human stain; even indications that are minute and unassuming are reflective of personal narrative.

My interest is not in describing the volume of nor the condition of vehicles contained within the tow lot, rather it is in accessing the site as a collection host. The grounds resemble a repository of discarded and unclaimed information much like a landfill or an archeological site. The lot is full of visual clues and while those leads might be imperfect and subject to deterioration they are also indicative of who we are and whom we share our space with. The entire cache acts much like a group of individual synopses, an anthology descriptive of the presence and place of pedestrian activity. They sit on the lot in their assigned places holding contents that practically reference the notion of 21st Century vanitas as unwittingly placed memento mori.

Tow Lot Vanitas, a solo exhibition at Paragraph, an Urban Culture Project venue, was shown January 2008 in Kansas City, Missouri. It is the first body of work to be exhibited from the Tow Lot Series.

Urban Culture Project, an initiative of the Charlotte Street Foundation, creates new opportunities for artists of all disciplines and contributes to urban revitalization by transforming spaces in downtown Kansas City into new venues for multi-disciplinary contemporary arts programming.

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