

## Nicole Jean Hill

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In my photo work, I explore evidence of human and animal activity and mark making on the land in the outskirts of rural communities in the American West. I was surprised to find that the extremely remote environment at the Montello residency posed physical challenges for me. I had difficulty negotiating my cumbersome camera and lighting gear in the wind and terrain in the surrounding area. So, I used my time there as an opportunity to observe the landscape without my usual art making tools. I rode my bike along the dusty roads free of camera gear and started collecting objects.

I became equally mesmerized by two things: the abundance of wild flowers flourishing in the June Nevada desert and the bleached white matte empty beer and soda cans that I found strewn amongst the sage brush. I began to think of these two



things equally as markers of time. The precise assortment of perennial desert flora blooming indicated a specific and fleeting few weeks in mid-summer just before the later summer heat would singe the landscape. And the cans became markers of the passage of years and months, as they must have been in the desert long enough to have the sun completely bleach the text away, but not long enough to have been crushed or completely swallowed by the surrounding dirt and mud. I would attempt to “date” each artifact based on the whiteness, surface quality and shape.

I have not yet resolved the work I started at Montello, but I am excited about the possibilities of still life images that reflect the experience of the Nevada desert landscape. I ultimately photographed as many wildflowers as possible and returned home with a car full of bleached cans to photograph in the studio - both subjects an essential component of the Nevada desert.