Decay of the Domestic

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Decay of the Domestic

by

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A THESIS

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Because I was an adult when my parents divorced, I was aware of how the tumultuous situation and new knowledge were working to change my childhood memories. Past events became tainted, clarified, or muddled. Different from my memories was the idea of history, specifically a family's history. My inner narrative changed and to this day differs from my parents' narratives. This was a shocking realization of the subjective nature of history. Ultimately, the events of the divorce made me unsure of things of which I had been certain. Through these photographs I am questioning my ideas about family, memory, history, and the malleability of all of those issues. The subject matter is the literal decay of a domestic structure through which I am using photography to explore the metaphorical decay of the family unit. The use of the 'broken home' is perhaps a simplistic metaphor for the complicated relationships within a family structure, but the visual presence of beauty expresses the ambiguity of the issue. The depicted houses all exist in a landscape I would refer to as familiar, the rural Midwest, but at some point while making these images I realized that I was also becoming particular about which houses I chose to make images of. They ended up being houses of a certain age or time period, they had a certain type of
architecture, and their belongings turned out to have similarities. When looking at the images, I find objects of familiarity, such as a particular carpet, a certain wallpaper, or a couch that recall a specific memory in this otherwise unknown terrain. I began my investigation into abandoned houses in hopes of learning and sharing visual information about the previous inhabitants. The idea was to access a stranger through things and places that they left behind. What I had thought were images questioning the mysteries of others were really questions about me and my perceptions.