

Yasmeen Siddiqui

Denver, CO



Observation and Response

Before arriving, the word Montello conjured images of brush and gravel, dry beds of sand, rock peppered with low grasses, cacti, jackrabbits and coyote, amounting to a neat, self-perpetuating and isolated system. A place distinguished by views from a well conceived building standing over a site both in contradistinction and harmony with the landscape. Like great jazz.

Since leaving, Montello behaves as a catalyst in both my understanding of aspects of the creative process and the mechanics of creation. Physically set apart, distant and

distinguished from all previous experience, Montello magnified and set into wild frenzy fundamental aspects of my psyche. At each turn, driving up and down the Rockies, across the Salt Flats and toward and into the Great Basin, I felt the expansion of my map. This is an extreme place, far away from anywhere I had been or where I live, that brought to the fore self-knowledge that I must have been repressing.

Getting there safely proved challenging, for reasons obvious and anticipated by those who know me well, but a complete revelation to myself. But, slowly, it is becoming clear. I



resist planning. Planning anything at all, including studying maps carefully. Even when traveling to this unknown and remote location with my sensible nine year-old son. My tendency to remain in densely populated areas where shelter and answers are a stone's throw away is a crutch I now recognize as problematic. Life at Montello demands awareness and self-reliance. While it is possible to call on those who know its rhythm and cadence, facts about water and darkness, they are difficult to reach because of distances and the absence of communication technology. And this is the brilliance of this project.

Nearby towns, Native American reservations, and a cattle ranch are the trails that at first organized my own looking onto the sagebrush. I clung to and conjured images of predecessors in order to fathom my location. Over time, these thoughts of settlers and native inhabitants were muted by the loud quiet of the winds across the brush and the hyperactive chipmunks buildings nests and having their fates sealed by predator hawks. My attention shifted, but my anxiety persisted. I worried about the ridiculous, thoughts of marauding bandits and other terrifying fancies. Again, humans and their activities permeated my thoughts even though I intentionally focused on what I could see from the studio, while walking the hills, and resting under juniper trees. The importance of presence and the absurd manner in which anxiety can hijack meaningful encounters and a capacity for observation and the resultant process of creation, has made an indelible mark on the way I now conduct my days, the way I sit at my desk, reading and working through impressions and images as they take form in language.

Yasmeen Siddiqui is an independent curator, essayist and lecturer, committed to voicing the unorthodox, stories that traverse and toy with prevailing political and art historical categories. yasmeen.m.siddiqui@gmail.com

