

# ShanePrine

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## **Artist's Statement**

As an artist, my goal is to capture an elegiac quality in subjects both animate and inanimate. A phrase that, I believe, encapsulates my most recent work is “the presence of absence.” A central theme of my work is memory—what informs memory, how does it change over time, why is that memories are often romanticized...or how is it that nostalgia or trauma often color memory accordingly. Other related ideas contained here involve questions of identity and belief. What I continually strive against in my artistic endeavors is ‘to make pretty pictures;’ rather, I’d prefer to create compelling, thoughtful works of art.

The structure that I’ve chosen to depict in a recent, ongoing series is the house in which my grandfather grew up. The farm on which this house sits has been in my family for over 100 years. As a young boy, I spent a great deal of time there with my grandfather as he carried out various tasks required by farm life. It is now owned by my aunt who, as a result of living hundreds of miles away, has neglected to maintain it. I am making an effort to document the farm’s slow but certain decay as well as vandalism that has taken place over time.

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In an upcoming project, I am making an effort to connect with another aspect of my family’s history. I will be documenting and exploring other memories of growing up in the South—specifically those of spending time with my maternal grandfather as he worked in North Carolina’s tobacco industry. As a result of the many changes which have occurred in that industry, the traditional jobs held by many in that field no longer exist. Among those most heavily impacted by the many changes in the industry are the growers and their families.

The culture of tobacco in the American South has been changed forever by the stigmatization surrounding use of tobacco products in our society. The purpose of my research and artistic endeavors as they relate to this topic is by no means a “glamorization” of tobacco use or of tobacco culture, per se. The purpose of my efforts will be to visually illustrate the changes in the lives of those involved in the farming and acquisition of the product. I am working with my mother to contact many of my grandfather’s colleagues and co-workers (many of whom are also relatives) to photograph the places where they grew and harvested tobacco and conducted business. I will document those places where my grandfather spent summers “on the tobacco market.” I have travelled to some of those places in recent years and I am aware that some of them still exist (although many are now abandoned).

The fundamental goal of this project is to create a body of work which demonstrates the humanity of those who have devoted much of their lives to growing a crop that has significantly decreased in demand, thereby lowering their standards of living and their hopes of prosperity. I generally would resist the temptation to compare my work with that of others. However, for the sake of reference, I would suggest that the inspiration for much of my work is someplace in the realm of the Zen-like minimalism of Minor White and the stark, revelatory imperfection of the human condition exposed by the WPA photographers (i.e. Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange). In capturing images of those people and their places as I’ve described them here, my hope is that the images I create will exhibit qualities similar to those that I’ve created from my paternal grandfather’s family home.

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Themes which reoccur in my creative work include longing, loss, psychological remoteness, elegy and alienation. The purpose of the art I create is to communicate my interest in individual psychology, existentialist philosophy, and memory. My work invites viewers to better understand their own life experiences by activating memories—perhaps long-forgotten—of times past by presenting what I believe to be archetypical images from my own history. The desired effect is not necessarily nostalgic since, in my view, nostalgia carries the positive connotation of yearning. In each work I hope to capture a snapshot of loss and longing, a glimpse into something which reminds viewers that life is too brief; ultimately memories and objects are all that remain.

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You can see and read more about my work at <<[www.shaneprine.com](http://www.shaneprine.com)>>.

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In my most recent work, I am taking found (or “discarded”) phrases and incorporating them into larger compositions. The inspiration came from some graphs and assembly instructions that I had laying on the floor of my studio. They had been walked on and were pretty dirty overall. The idea struck as I looked and saw the words and diagrams with dirt and footprints over the top of them. I began to realize that I had (both in my head and written down on scraps of paper) saved words and phrases that I had heard or seen in various situations. Those (sometimes) unique combinations needed to be utilized artistically. So, the new work is about discarded language and overheard phrases that may or may not have any intrinsic use or meaning; however, when read, the phrases typically conjure a visual response in the viewer’s mind. So, the new work, although somewhat stylistically dissimilar to previous drawings as well as my photographic compositions, keeps intact the ideas of absence and memory... in this case, absence of context or immediate recognition of meaning of phrases remembered from past experiences.