

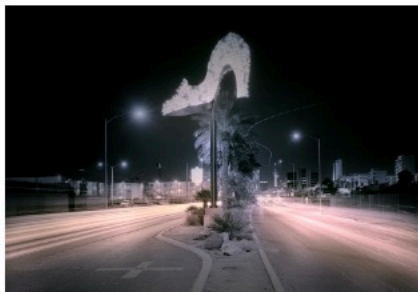
MEDIUMFORMAT

An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and white foam from breaking waves is visible as it crashes against a dark, rocky shore. The foreground shows a sandy beach with some darker patches.

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INTERVIEW:
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PROJECT: Lost In The Glittering Gulch

Michael Massaia

How did you come up with this project?

Some areas simply feel like home immediately. A combination of things create the feeling but mostly it's a type of melancholy (which I find iridescent and unique to this place) that radiates from the people and the environment. Unmet expectations, the persistent hope that tomorrow things will get better, and the need to run from themselves and their current situation, live in the people and the architecture of this five-mile stretch of Las Vegas. I suppose most people have opinions about this place, but to view it (and feel it) in a romantic way opens the door to show it in a new way. This is why I still find photography interesting.



Please tell us more about the title?

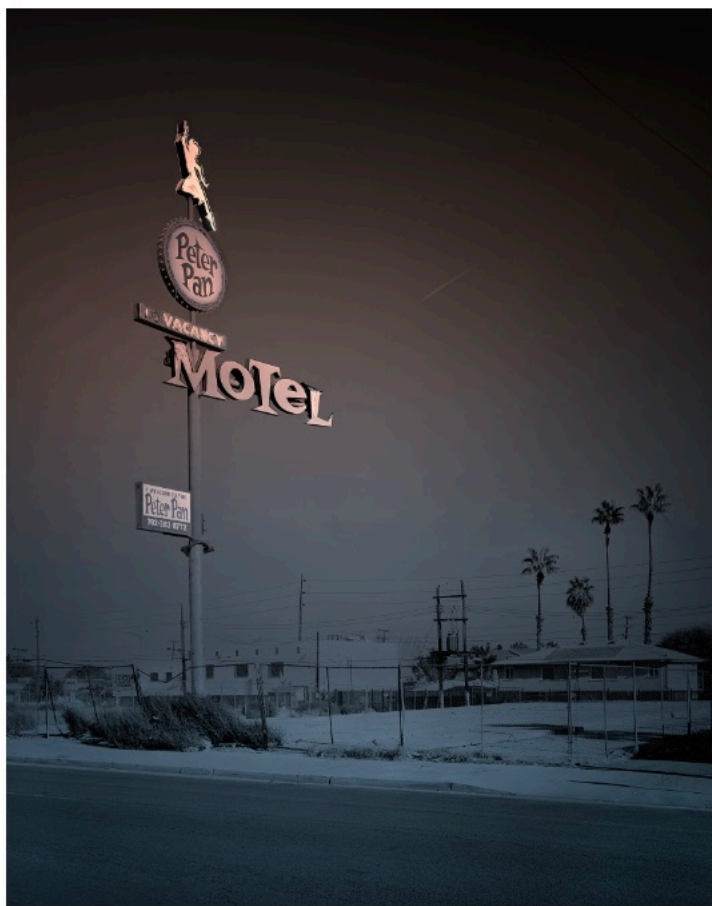
“Glitter Gulch” was the name given to downtown Las Vegas in the 1940s. Glitter because of all the neon signs on Fremont Street. Gulch referred to the valley the city sits in. “Lost In The Glittering Gulch” was my play on that old designation while describing how easily you get lost in the dream being sold to you.

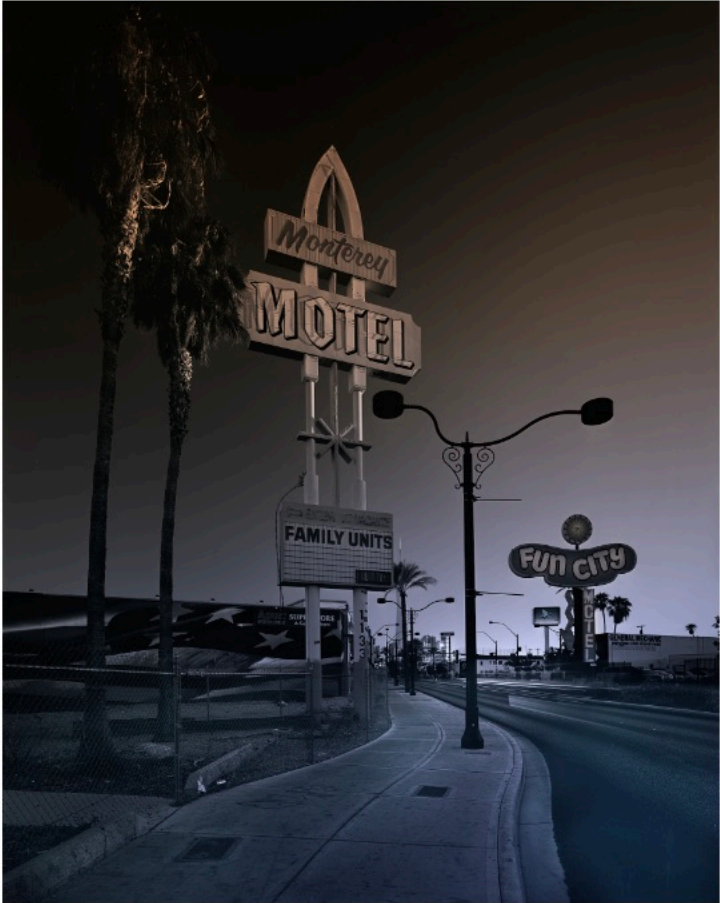




How did you prepare for the project?

I did a lot of walking and getting to know the area as thoroughly as possible. Understanding when the lighting is best, which areas convey the sentiment, doing small composition drawings once I knew the areas and things I wanted to document. Then I figured out the technical issues: the cameras, film, lenses, development, printing, etc.





What is the most challenging part of this project?

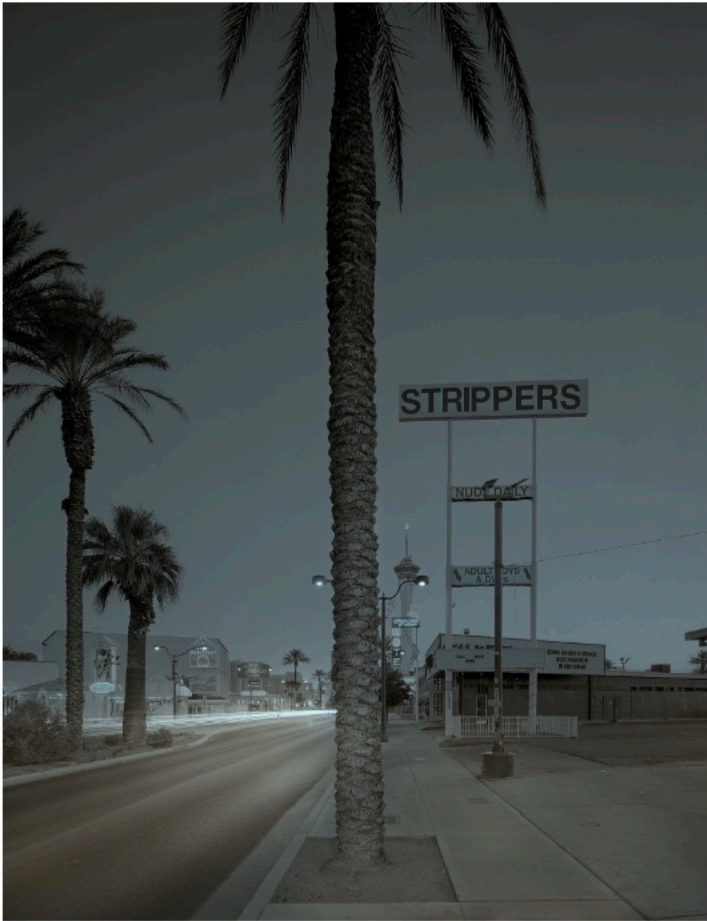
There's not a lot of subject matter left to work with because so much is being redeveloped but pockets of opportunity still exist. Finding the pockets that are unobstructed can be difficult. The other (and always) challenging part of all my projects is printing. I push the darkroom process as far as I can, but I still struggle with many technical problems.

Could you please tell us about framing/ composition choices while photographing such locations?

I try my best to capture the sentiment, stay true to the original idea, and show the soul that exists in inanimate objects. If the composition accomplishes all that, then it's correct.



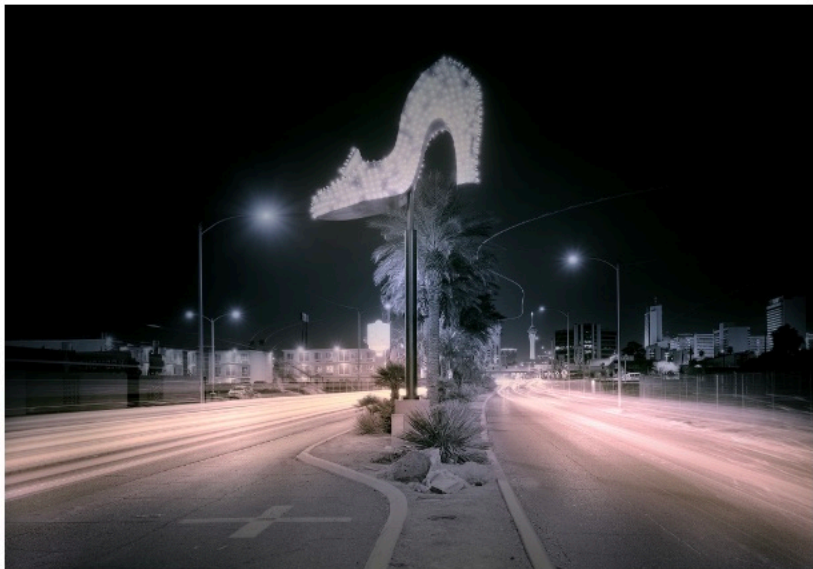


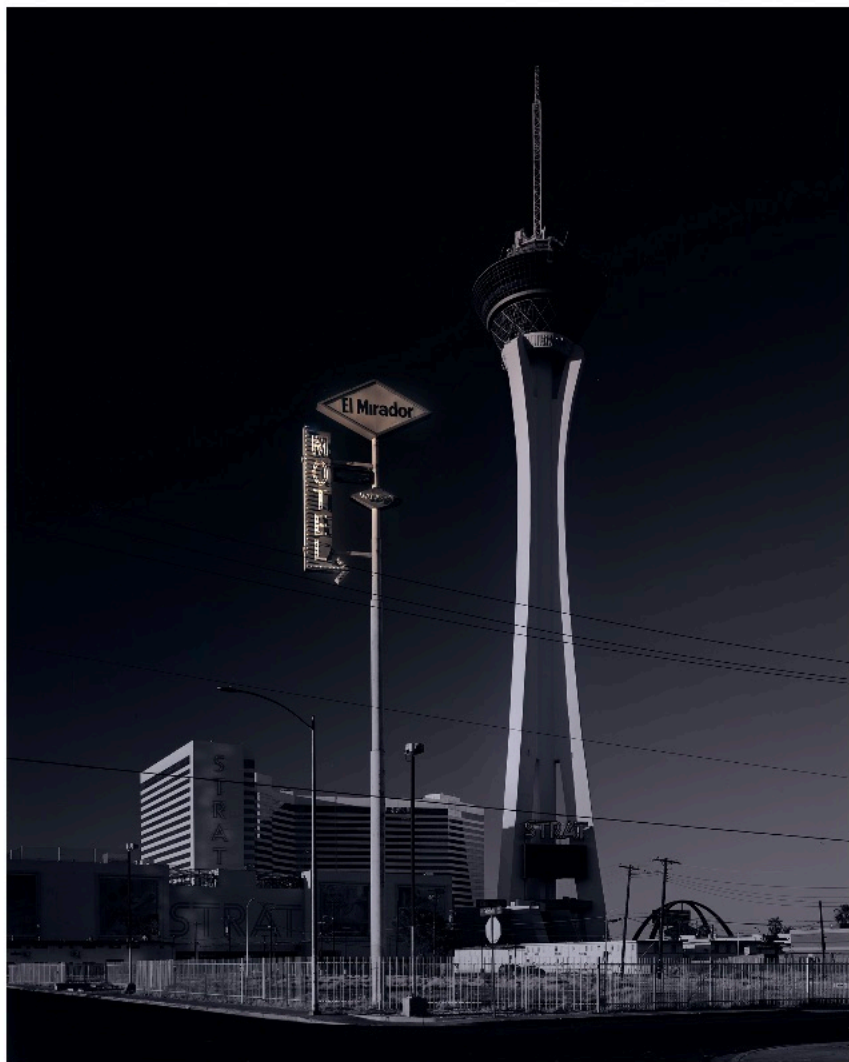




Could you please tell us about technical aspects of the capture?

I used two large format film cameras: 5"x7" and a 4"x5". Both cameras were custom made by Mike Walker. The 5"x7" camera is modified in a way that I removed most of the movements from it. All that remains is front and rear focus, and front rise and shift. The reason I did this is so I can operate the camera quickly at night in very low light. The 4"x5" camera has a more traditional movement set-up with tilts, swings, rise, etc. I mostly used "copy" film made by Adox (CMS 20) for this series. It's an extremely high-resolution film that I shoot at about ISO 12. Although it's very slow, it produces some of the most beautiful nighttime negatives I've ever made. I also used Ilford FP4 (for 5"x7") and Tmax100. I develop the films in Pyro / Pyrocatechin / Catechol staining developers, while the copy film / CMS 20 is developed in Adotech (made by Adox) to keep the contrast from getting out of control which copy films naturally want to do. I used three lenses for all the images: Rodenstock Grandagon-N 155mm f/6.8; Nikon Nikkor-SW 120mm F8; and a Schneider 72mm f/5.6 Super-Angulon XL.









Did you do any image-processing?

I like the original negatives to be an accurate depiction of the scene. I will make a series of inter-negatives from the original in-camera negative once I start printing. These inter-negatives are coloured so they respond to the variable-contrast, silver-gelatin paper they are printed on. Processing occurs when creating the series of inter-negatives. They have to be set up so that they are optimized for the contact printing process. The colours of the final prints are all created in the darkroom using a split-toning process of Sulphide, Selenium, Gold, Iron, Selective Bleaching, and Redevelopment.

Are you continuing to work on this series?

Yes, I will work on this series until there is absolutely nothing left.

Michael Massaia
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