

“Lucid Stead” Project Statement – Phillip K. Smith, III

After the long, dusty, bumpy, anxious trip out into the far edges of Joshua Tree, you open your car door and for the first time experience the quiet of the desert. It's at that point that you realize you are in a place that is highly different than where you just came from.

Lucid Stead is about tapping into the quiet and the pace of change of the desert. When you slow down and align yourself with the desert, the project begins to unfold before you. It reveals that it is about light and shadow, reflected light, projected light, and change.

In much of my work, I like to interact with the movement of the sun so that the artwork is in a constant state of change from sunrise to 9am to noon to 3pm to 6pm and into the evening. With Lucid Stead, the movement of the sun reflects banded reflections of light across the desert landscape, while various cracks and openings reveal themselves within the structure. Even the shifting shadow of the entire structure on the desert floor is as present as the massing of the shack itself, within the raw canvas of the desert.

The desert itself is as used as reflected light...as actual material within this project. It is a medium that is being placed onto the skin of the 70-year old homesteader shack. The reflections, contained within their crisp, geometric bands and rectangles contrasts with the splintering bone-dry wood siding. This contrast is a commonality in my work, where I often merge highly precise, geometric, zero tolerance forms with material or experience that is highly organic or in a state of change...something that you cannot hold on to...that slips between your fingers.

Projected light emerges at dusk and moves into the evening. The four window openings and the doorway all become crisp rectangular fields of color, floating in the desert night. White light, projected from the inside of the shack outward, highlights the cracks between the mirrored siding and the wood siding, wrapping the shack in lines of light. This white light reveals, through silhouette, the structure of the shack itself as the 2x4's and diagonal bracing become present on the skin of the shack.

The color of the door and window openings are set at a pace of change where one might question whether they are actually changing colors. One might see blue, red, and yellow...and continue to see those colors. But looking down and walking ten feet to a new location reveals that the windows are now orange, purple and green. This questioning of and awareness of change, ultimately, is about the alignment of this project with the pace of change occurring within the desert. Through the process of slowing down and opening yourself to the quiet, only then can you really see and hear in ways that you normally could not.

Questions from visitors to the project:

Q: How did you come up with this idea?

A: I've owned this 5-acre property for about 9 years. I would come up several times a year to visit the shack and to spend time out in the raw of the desert. It was only about 8 months ago or so that I finally decided that it was time to do something on the property. And so, when I sat down to draw what I wanted to create, I drew what you see at Lucid Stead almost immediately. The idea had been slowly brewing for 9 years unconsciously. When it was time to conceptualize the project, I knew exactly what it wanted to be.

Q: How is the project powered?

A: Hot Purple Energy in Palm Springs donated a 6-panel solar array. This was a really important aspect of the overall project. I worked hard to ensure that there were no visible connections, no screws, nothing that explained clearly how the project actually existed. This allowed the experience to be very pure. The energy source of the lighting was part of this. I didn't want the hum of a generator to pull you away from the purity of the experience. Solar not only ensured efficient, clean energy, but, most importantly for this project, quiet energy.

Q: What is on the inside of the shack?

A: Lucid Stead is an exterior experience. At the interior of the shack are the custom built electronic boards and Arduino with custom programming that sets the pace of the color change and the particular movement from specific color to specific color.

Q: Was the shack existing?

A: Yes. When I purchased the 5-acre property, it came with the existing shack. It is believed to have been built in the 1940's as a homesteader shack. The project has really been a collaboration with the 70 year-old structure. The splitting wood, the bent nails, the dimensions of the openings are all untouched.

Q: What do you intend to do with the shack?

A: Building a project of this scale, as the artist, you have particular expectations. You hope this or that experience will happen as planned...or that a particular effect will be revealed as intended. With "Lucid Stead," I can say that all of my expectations were met and they were also far surpassed. Entire projects and new concepts have been revealed to me. So, to answer the question...my intent is to study what I have made. It is my goal to spend time with the project and to document it fully through photography, drawing, writing, and other methods. This is much of the reason why I have decided to rent a property just a ½ mile from Lucid Stead, which will be my Joshua Tree studio outpost for the next year.

Q: Will there be more Lucid Steads?

A: While inquiries from various institutions might warrant the purchase, moving or reconstruction of "Lucid Stead," I am not interested in creating duplicates of this project due to its site specific nature in the desert of Joshua Tree. With this said, there are "Lucid Stead"-based concepts that could be carried to new sites that could inform new, site specific installations. Whether that next project is a 20' high x 8' wide mirrored surface that becomes a hovering plane of light or a converted shack on Martha's Vineyard that employs corten and plate glass, that is yet to be defined. Ultimately, I am interested in furthering the concepts of "Lucid Stead" via the specifics of new locations across the globe.