

The Pink Cabin

*Excerpt from **Home: Finding Our Place**, a presentation by Chris Carraher given at the Twentynine Palms Historical Museum as part of Kim Stringfellow's Jackrabbit Homestead project, March 28, 2009*

“I’m going to tell you a story. Six or seven years ago Perry Hoffman and I got an idea about the pink cabin. Many of you know the pink cabin. It’s out on the highway, a few miles east, and it’s had a Triad Realty sign in the window for at least the 17 years I’ve been out here. So, long story short, Perry and I got an idea we wanted to turn it into a kind of homestead museum slash gallery slash evolving installation piece. And we had to wrestle a lot with the issues of how to make it secure, or as it turned out leave it unsecured, because there didn’t seem to be any way of securing it that would not fundamentally change what we found attractive about it, which was its sense of abandonment, its fadedness and freedom, the way it seemed to melt into the landscape. It’s sense of openness, essentially. And we came up with an idea of how, okay, we could do a minimal clean-up and fix the roof, make the concession of some removable screens to deal with the pigeons, and beyond that just leave it essentially open. Anything that was of value we’d remove when we weren’t there. And, let the forces of the desert, including the humans wandering around in it, have their way. But – where we hung up was the windows. They were broken and unsafe, and we could re-glaze them and make them safe but then – they would be different. We realized we loved the broken window frames just the wayward way they were. That somehow the experience of the cabin would be different if we fixed the windows. So we went round and round with this discussion, and Perry wanted to re-glaze them and I didn’t, and one day we went over there with a friend and were discussing this and Perry grabbed the sash of the kitchen window and shoved it

up and a great big shard of glass fell out and sliced across his arm, like this, and so it was off to the emergency room and goodness knows how many stitches and that was the end of the discussion about the windows.

“There are many conclusions that can be drawn from this story. But for me, the story is about the quality of openness. About boundlessness. About the desert and the seduction of negative space. The abandoned small-tract cabin is as much about what is around it as about a human structure. It’s that relationship that matters particularly to me in my art.

“The derelict small-tract cabin serves as a metaphor for and especially mediator with the desert – and by desert, I mean, both, yes, the ecosystem with its heat and its wildlife and its restless forces of life and erosion, but also the iconic, archetypal desert found throughout mystical traditions, that legendary end-of-the-line existential realm of emptiness, nothingness, boundless space. The abandoned cabin, transparent, penetratable, with unstable boundaries and of unreliable substance, mediates with that desert, serves as a way station, a kind of halfway house, between our daily world and concerns and that “other world” that deserts have represented in human culture for thousands of years, the place where one leaves behind ones props and allegiances and, alone, confronts oneself. The cabin is a pivot point for the transition into negative space.

“And that was what was attractive to me in the pink cabin. It was porous, unfixed, a transit point, and any attempt to secure or define the boundaries of the building would have changed its meaning.”