The project, Empty Apartments consists of all the available photographs of rental apartments listed in Craigslist on May 20th, 2016. The images, over 200,000 where then manually sorted to remove anything that was not an interior shot, including ads, layouts and shared areas like gyms and foyers. The images are then shown en masse on a website that can be endlessly scrolled through. In choosing only interiors we wanted to bring a focus to the intimate spaces where people carried out their private lives. Spaces that we are not normally privy to, turned inside out.

These images show transitional spaces - rooms in various stages of inhabitants exiting and entering. They are paused, their final outcome yet to be realized. Some show a life caught in midstream, with nothing arranged for the benefit of the camera. Others are highly polished and staged; several glasses of wine and a bottle set out on a table with beckoning chairs inviting the viewer to envision themselves there. Others are newly empty – the bareness made more bare with the contrast of the remains of a previous tenant; a pile of pillows stacked in a corner, boxes by a door.

The photographs are removed from their original context, and placed in a new framework. Prices, location, descriptions are no longer attached to the images. The original listings were organized by location, mostly cities and major metropolitan areas. In total there were 413 areas listed starting with Abilene, Texas and ending with Zanesville, Ohio. In doing this project we divided the labor between us. Jeff was responsible for the script to download the original images, and the website, the projects final format. I provided the manual labor of going through hundreds of thousands of images (three times) to weed out the images that we felt didn’t fit.

My task allowed for a granular familiarity with the images. I pored over images for a period of several months. At times the process of sifting and culling was meditative, other times tedious – with one image bleeding into the next. Each day there was a surprise; an image that would take my breath away with its unintentional beauty.

The images exist as a vast array of interior spaces that can be endlessly scrolled through. You are at once struck by the overall totality of the images but can lose yourself in the surprise of the individual. When you pull back you start seeing similarities. The consistency of highly varnished wooden floors reflecting the light back from a sunny window thread through the whole project. The image of a cable wire snaked in a corner kept on reappearing. You pull in and find the surprise of a calico cat, captured crossing a bed in a beam of light; the loneliness of an empty lawn chair, in an empty room, by a curtainless window; the solitude of 3 hangars in an otherwise bare closet. I found an atavistic satisfaction in seeing fresh vacuum marks on carpet, of which there were images of in the thousands. There were the inexplicable images where the intention of the photographer was unclear; unfocused corners, stairs descending into darkness, a blurry shot of wood grain. There was a pervading sense of loss and abandonment that seemed to hang over most of the images only to broken by a shot of a kinky pink hot tub.

The places we reside in, the walls, ceiling and floor act like a secondary skin. The house acting as a protective layer where we perform and act out our most primary functions of the private self. Even in the reign of social media most of us still lead private lives. There is an inside out quality to these images, of something exposed to the open air that should not have been. It’s the shock of looking at a photograph of a Gordon Matta Clark’s cutting. Of the disorientation of seeing someone’s living room from the street. There is a vulnerability found here, of faces heavy with sleep exposed to too bright a light.

Every photograph is anonymous. No photographer is ever credited. We were drawn to the idea of an accidental collaborative buildup of images, the culmination of thousands of cameras and eyes. The purpose capitalism - the result an unintentional document of our nomadic, mostly vacant American spaces. Sometimes I would catch a glimpse of the photographer; a fragment of a face, a crook of an elbow caught in a bathroom mirror, a reflection in a window turned mirror at night, a shadow projected onto the floor. Their presence was always surprising, jarring when stumbled upon. They were fugitive images that broke the illusion of emptiness and introduced a paradox. Though the images exuded an existential loneliness – none of them were empty.

The project also revealed a clear demarcation of class, when it came to the quality of the photographs themselves. Those that could afford and/or it was financially worthwhile hired professional photographers. The rooms shown were neat, generically but tastefully decorated without the marks of lives being lived. Exorbitant rents merited the cost of a wide-angle lens. The professional photographs were, lit with care and carefully edited - they all could have been taken by one single photographer. Their skill and expertise created a closed system that allowed for no oxygen. The ones taken by amateurs, the casual perfunctory images held the most joy and surprise – low quality compression mixed with intricate patterns – overexposed windows with underexposed interiors creating photographic magic. I would image the photographer, probably the landlord themselves pausing and caught up for a moment in the beauty of the way light hit a wall. How it broke up as it ran through the slats of the blind, throwing a pattern on a wooden floor. That for a moment they paused in their task caught up in capturing something beyond just documentation.

The project started with a proposal request from an arts org, that coincided with our months long searching for a home to purchase. We were saturated with looking at images of homes online, projecting ourselves hopefully into these virtual spaces but the artists in us saw opportunity. The project continued even as our plans for showing with the arts organization sputtered along with our hopes of purchasing a home. We continued to work on the project, as we desperately looked for actual apartments to rent and move to before our lease ended and we were kicked out. In fact as I write this we are looking again for an apartment.

Misc. notes.

Explain Drift Station.

The cable snaked in a corner.

Connected to my own nomadic life – the hopefulness of a new apartment. My stationary friends have moved 3 times and all own homes now.

I have not lived anywhere longer then 3 years now since I moved out of my parents house. 16 apartments

Buffalo 1

Buffalo 2

Buffalo – alone

Buffalo – Krisitn Rob

Buffalo – Ti

Jersey City

Clinton Hill

Fort Greene

Maine

Harlem

Jackson Heights

Greenpoint

Montclair

Lincoln

Bloomfield

JC