

Spring 2018

## American Idyll: A Place To Call Home

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*Bard College*

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# American Idyll

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of The Arts  
Of Bard College

By  
Bowen Walsh Fernie

Annandale-On-Hudson, New York  
May 2018



## American Idyll: A Place To Call Home

Bowen Walsh Fernie

Advisor: An-My Lê

May 2018

I was raised in Italy from the age of five and when I returned to the United States at eighteen, I was surprised by the way I was affected by the landscape I had never known or explored. I found myself drawn to American culture as it is stereotypically represented in movies and TV - the quaint houses, the schools with cheerleaders and locker rooms, the drive-in movie theaters – and began to examine how those stereotypes are reflected in the real world. From this initial interest I began exploring the American space that I envisioned myself inhabiting throughout my childhood and the culture that I longed to identify with; the place I would've called home. I began focusing on those elements of the built environment that reflect a culture which I define as distinctly American. In Italy history is visual, physical and constantly present. In America, history often seems intangible, set within the parameters of museums, statues and plaques. This project examines America as a multifaceted and malleable culture. In this complex visual landscape, I focus on a common and universal history that goes beyond its typical representation.

American topography, both natural and social, lacks a sense of permanence. This is reflected in its architecture, its cultural norms and its traditions which seem to be in a constant state of flux. The seemingly short architectural lifecycle in America creates a particular visual dynamic between permanent and transient spaces. I am interested in the disposability of the built landscape and the way that this young country is grappling with managing itself through time - everything lives and dies so quickly. Cultural and architectural styles are always developing and redeveloping, with one often growing alongside the decay of another. I am fascinated by the American dream, the construction of the ideal life within that dream and the tension between the artificiality of a constructed, idealized world and the natural, unassuming one.

While these images all belong to a specific location within the country, they add up to form my personal experience and understanding of a space and a history. My goal is to not get caught in the specificity of the culture, but rather to explore the ways in which the ordinary and the extraordinary play a part in a foreigner's stereotypical understanding of America.









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THE NEW YORK INFANTRY  
FIGHTED THE BATTLE OF RED BANK SEPTEMBER 26, 1777.  
THEY WERE THE FIRST TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY IN THE  
BATTLE AND THEIR COURAGE WAS GREATLY REWARDED.  
THEY WERE RECORDED IN THE BATTLE AS  
HEROES.  
THEY WERE THE FIRST TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY  
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