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# Scouted: An Inadvertent Archive from the Search for a Cinematic Vegas

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# Center for Gaming Research

## Occasional Paper Series

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University Libraries

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

### SCOUTED

#### AN INADVERTENT ARCHIVE FROM THE SEARCH FOR A CINEMATIC VEGAS

*Catherine Borg*

**ABSTRACT:** This paper highlights the transformation of materials within the Mancuso Collection from utilitarian location scouting materials in the service of a film to historical record of the Vegas valley in 1994-95. Destined for disposal, these displaced artifacts are also an important record and reminder of the hidden labor and creative output of the many people who contribute to cultural products.

**Keywords:** Las Vegas; location scouting; Casino; appropriation art; archive

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The Mancuso Collection in UNLV's Special Collections contains photographs that were taken and arranged by the location scouts for the movie *Casino*. Their images document places photographed in the mid-1990s and considered as stand-in locations for a fictionalized narrative based on actual events -- many erased or significantly altered since then. From the distance of two decades they, like many photographs, allow us in essence to "see" time. These materials were kept for a decade by Ms. Mancuso<sup>1</sup>, the location scout who photographed and arranged a great deal of the materials and preserved the collection, until she donated them in 2005.<sup>2</sup>

Locations were photographed to evaluate the potential of each to meet the needs of the script but also, unmis-

takably to evoke nostalgia for an earlier era and present a cinematic 1970s Vegas. Like the shards of a fractured mirror, this archive of pictures reflect the complexity of the landscape where they were taken -- quintessential "Las Vegas" recedes in the daylight and vantage point of the 24/7 back-lot of daily life. Destined for disposal, these displaced artifacts from the "culture industrial complex" instead are an inadvertent but important record of the valley in 1994-95. They are also an important record and reminder of the hidden labor and creative output of the many people who contribute to cultural products.

It has been my creative mission as a visual artist to investigate shifting landscapes and cultural narratives, specifically the evident traces and liminal space of American



Riviera pool, summer 1994.

culture in transition. Through photo and video projects, my work often depicts architectural ghosts operating as conceptual *memento mori*.<sup>3</sup> This is certainly what I have found in the Mancuso collection and why I wanted to work with it. I am re-recording edited selections of the materials in the Mancuso collection to make them more visible and to re-contextualize their use and value. I am interested in the images in relation to three areas of concern – as archive; as appropriation art inside out; and as a conduit to consider copyright law.

### As Archive

The collection consists of a great deal, possibly all, of the location scouting research materials for the motion picture *Casino* (a film by Martin Scorsese released in 1995 by Universal Pictures.) Color photos taped together to create panoramic landscapes illustrate locations that were considered for shots and scenes in the film including the places where the actual events took place as described in Nick Pileggi's true crime novel<sup>4</sup> though more often than not these were rejected as locations for the scenes. Roughly two-thousand images, most comprised



Exterior apartment building east of the Las Vegas Strip, 1994



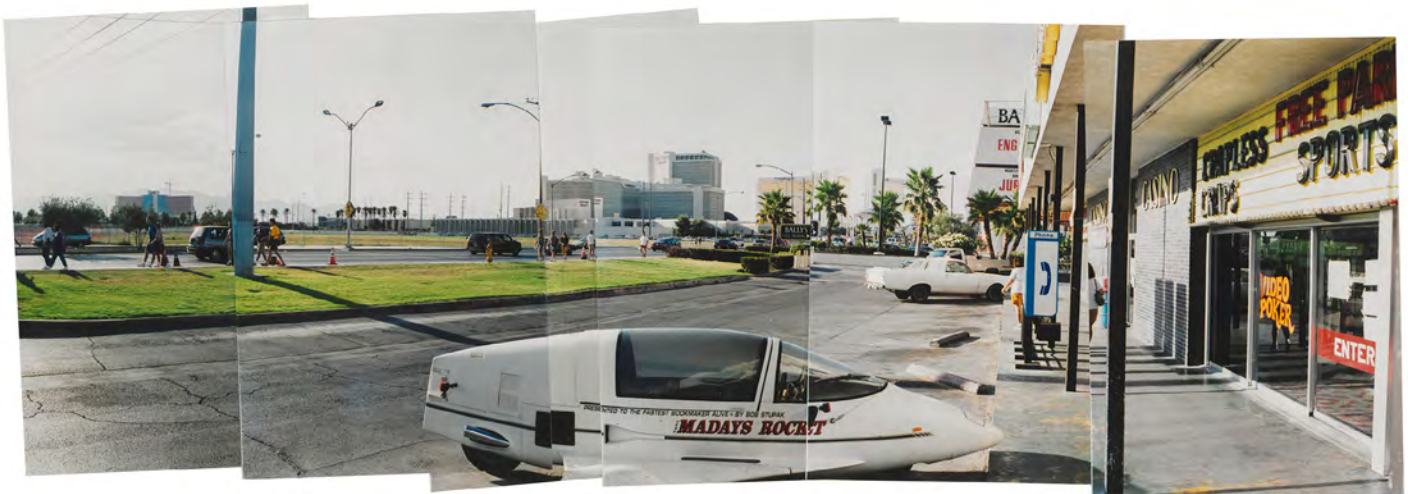
of several 4-inch x 6-inch photos, are organized in manila folders with labels, hand written notes and drawings added. Ms. Maggie Mancuso, who donated the collection to UNLV Special Collections in 2005, and Mr. Dante Ferretti, the Italian production designer for the film who has worked with Martin Scorsese on several films, scouted Las Vegas together in the summer months of 1994. Mr. Scorsese would fly in each weekend to review the locations. The entire crew arrived on location as the summer heat ended sometime in September but location scouting continued for key sites like Ace's house, even as principal photography on the film began.

After the location shooting for the film was completed, Ms. Mancuso asked location manager Michael Burmeister if he wanted the folders of photographs back at the close of production in Las Vegas. He told her they would just be thrown away so she was welcome to keep them if she liked. The files of pictures remained with her, stored in her home. She remained active as a location scout and location manager after *Casino*, though with locations disappearing many of these files did not remain relevant for scouting for long.

The simulation and simulacrum<sup>5</sup> Las Vegas and resort tourism in general trades upon, (reproductions of famous landmarks, exotic locations, opulent lifestyles, etc.) allows only a limited sense of place. Stripped of complexity and nuance, Vegas is known across the country and throughout the world as a glowing spectacle and place for glamour, excess and downfall. I recall countless times hearing the query "people live there?" in response to my own Las Vegas tenure. Many people around the world feel like they know Las Vegas but often their knowledge is limited to a two day blur of a visit

or 30 second advertisements. The Mancuso collection includes far more intimate, environmental and banal views of Las Vegas. Much of what is pictured is the interiors of motel and hotel rooms, personal residences (full of personal effects and sometimes the resident or their pets,) businesses, streetscapes and desert landscapes as well as casino properties by day, rather than more famously by night. These images offer a more dimensional picture of Las Vegas in 1994 and 1995, albeit limited as the intent was to capture an even earlier era. However, the collection is still a valuable archive to consider the significant transitions of the last two decades in Las Vegas...on the Las Vegas Strip, downtown Las Vegas and water levels in Lake Mead – as well as America in general under the influences of globalism and technology. Personally what I find most captivating in these fractured photographic constructions is the suggestion of the existential conditions of living in a remorselessly shifting landscape. In this case it is the landscape of Las Vegas in the desert but it is a mirror image of transitions in landscape and lives across America.

Some specific things documented in the collection include extensive documentation of three homes on the northern edge of the Desert Inn Country Club Estates demolished within a year of these photos<sup>6</sup>; the interiors of rooms in the La Concha, El Morocco and Glass Pool Inn to name a few and exteriors of the same hotels and the Hacienda; the building of the top of the Stratosphere tower is visible over time; an abundance of open space can be seen on the Strip; downtown streetscapes are viewable before Neonopolis and the Downtown Project sponsored redevelopment; and Lake Mead is seen without its "bathtub ring."



Las Vegas Strip, 1994





359 E Desert Inn Road, August 15, 1994 (home of Vladimir Kekhaial)



363 E Desert Inn Road, August 19, 1994 (home of Frankie Perasovich)



365 E Desert Inn Road, August 22, 1994 (home of Bill and Ruth Ballew)





Guest room in the La Concha Motel, summer 1994 (2955 Las Vegas Blvd South)



Guest room in the El Morocco, Hotel, summer 1994 (2955 Las Vegas Blvd South)



Guest room in the Glass Pool Inn, summer 1994 (4613 Las Vegas Blvd South)



Interior of 2058 Ottawa Drive, August 22, 1994

Like the film which chronicles a significant shift in the narrative of Las Vegas from mob to corporate control and pervasive skimming to leveraging, these pictures also record a fundamental shift in most Americans daily life since 1994 – a subtle shift from actual to virtual in this glimpse of pre-digital lives. We see plenty of the old cathode ray tube televisions, wired phones and just a few bulky desktop computers but no evidence of the wireless digital devices so pervasive to daily life today. Not a single cellphone or laptop is pictured let alone any tablet devices or smart appliances as these were not available in the mid-90s.

It would be far more difficult to find locations to make a 70's period movie on location in Las Vegas today, however if it was still possible the mechanics of location scouting would be quite different...most of us have apps on our smart phones that make capturing high quality panoramas quite simple with just a little practice. These files would be captured, stored and shared digitally/virtually and could be viewed remotely from anywhere, and easily copied. The material methods for this location scouting are also evidence of the

great technological shift of the past two decades. The pictures were captured on film, processed at a lab, then taped together to create a panoramic view of a location, and stored in a folder and physically reviewed.... Ms. Mancuso recounted director Martin Scorsese flying out each weekend to Las Vegas to look at the week's scouting (and most likely doing other research for the film.) Indeed they could have been sent by overnight mail but still it would have been important to have the pictures rather than faxed copies.

On the one hand, a digital approach would make it easier to share and copy such a collection of images but also far easier to delete. In all likelihood, the utilitarian nature of the task at hand makes it far more likely that such research is ultimately deleted after its usefulness rather than held as a historical record unless someone has the foresight to plan for the future.

### Appropriation Art Inside Out

In the modern period we can point to Dada collage artists, Cubists referencing “primitive” African arti-



facts and Duchamp's ready-mades as appropriation art.<sup>7</sup> Andy Warhol, Richard Price and Sherrie Levine all appropriated well-known images from journalism, advertising and other famous photographs to engage in wide ranging discussions covering consumerism, identity, authorship and art itself just to name a few topics. The term Appropriation Art is associated with the visual arts but many kinds of artists and scholars creative output is informed by those that precede them. Sometimes the original is unrecognizable in the new work, others an exact copy. But very often in visual art, with the exception of the work of an artist like Sherrie Levine re-photographing a Walker Evans photograph, the original creator is most often unknown to the mass audience even though their images may be quite recognizable to a mainstream audience. A good example is Richard Prince's series of photographs of the "Marlboro Man."<sup>8</sup> Though we were quite familiar with the images we were not familiar with the photographer. Prince's appropriation of those images created new meanings primarily related to deconstructing American archetypes, but within the many layers of meaning of the appropriated work is the fact that most people still do not know who captured the iconic original images.

It is with that in mind that I refer to my appropriation as "inside out." I don't intend to bury the identities of the original authors as the complexity of authorship and ownership of these images is important to my work -- I add my observation, editing and context to transform these materials. Their placement by Ms. Mancuso in the UNLV Special Collections archive was an initial act that transformed these materials from utilitarian location scouting materials in the service of another creative work to historical record. That I bring to that my own artistic sensibilities is undeniable. In my work with the collection, I am editing with the eye and bias of a trained artist. The images I select to work with add to the thesis I aim to construct but also appeal to my aesthetic assessment of pictures worthy of attention.

### Conduit to consider copyright law

Though the location scouting materials for the film *Casino* reside on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of UNLV's Lied Library in the Special Collections archive, the rights to the material are far less straightforward. Gaining an understanding of the complicated rights associated with this collection has been educational and fascinating. The rights to these works can best be described as "a mess." These images were made in the service of a copyrighted work, creat-

ed over many months by freelancers, who likely control some of the rights, as well as by employees whose efforts fall under "works made for hire." Even the author/director of the copyrighted film, Mr. Scorsese, nor the screenwriter Mr. Pileggi, own the copyright of the film.

As an artist making work for exhibition I feel secure that my use is fair, falling within the standards of the Fair Use exception within US copyright law. However due to the heated controversy over the ease of copying and distributing copyrighted works over the internet, big entertainment conglomerates voraciously protect their rights.<sup>9</sup> This may make it difficult to ever publish an intended book with an extended photographic essay of these images along with a collection of written essays by myself and other contributors due to a publisher's fear of being sued by a big media company. And this is the conduit I suggest to consider copyright law... as a creative intellectual act worthy of being shared but possibly hindered due to fear of litigious copyright protection

### In Conclusion

However inadvertent the origins of this archive, it remains as an important and multi-faceted record of Las Vegas, America, and location scouting for the film industry in the mid-1990's. It is my hope that my images instill interest in the collection and that my inside out appropriation and Fair Use of these materials encourage others explorations in archives and attics alike to spark new discussions.



## Notes

- 1 Ms. Maggie Mancuso, also known as Maggie Peterson, is best known for playing Charlene Darling on *The Andy Griffith Show*. “Maggie Peterson,” *Wikipedia*, last modified January 22, 2015. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maggie\\_Peterson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maggie_Peterson)
- 2 Maggie, Mancuso. Personal interviews. Oct. 24, 2013 and Jan. 16, 2015.
- 3 *memento mori* (Latin, literally ‘remember (that you have) to die’)  
Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition, June 2001.
- 4 Pileggi, Nicholas. *Casino: Love and Honor in Las Vegas*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- 5 Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- 6 *Las Vegas 1994 and 1995 maps*. Landiscor Aerial Information.
- 7 *The Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms*. <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/a/appropriation>
- 8 “Untitled (Cowboy), 1989.” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2000.272>
- 9 Doctorow, Cory. *Information Doesn’t Want to Be Free: Laws for the Internet Age*. San Francisco: McSweeney’s, 2014.



### About the Author

Catherine Borg (MFA Rutgers 2004, BA SFSU 1995) is a visual artist and educator in Baltimore, MD where she teaches at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and Stevenson University. Her photo and video based art works have been included in exhibitions and screenings throughout the US, Europe and Canada, including at SFMOMA and Mass MOCA, and realized as public art projects for the Southern Nevada Regional Transportation Commission, the City of Las Vegas and Scottsdale Public Art. Awards include residency fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Jentel Foundation and an Artist Fellowship from the Nevada Arts Council.

For more information about her work, please visit:

[Catherine Borg's website](#)

[Baker Artist portfolio](#)

[Art in America review](#)

[Las Vegas Weekly review](#)

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## Center for Gaming Research Occasional Paper Series

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### About the Occasional Paper Series

In 2010, the Center for Gaming Research launched an Occasional Paper Series that publishes brief studies of gambling and casinos with a policy and public-interest orientation.

These papers are generally between three and six-thousand words, written with the intent of informing the public discussion of gambling and casinos. Topics include gaming history, casino management, and studies in sociology, economics, and political science related to gambling.

Authors include faculty affiliated with the Center for Gaming Research, particularly Eadington Fellows. As part of their residency, fellows complete a paper for the series.

In June 2013, the UNLV Gaming Press published *Frontiers in Chance: Gaming Research Across the Disciplines*, a collection of many of the papers in the series. For more information about this book, please see <http://gamingpress.unlv.edu>.

A full set of the papers are available at: <http://gaming.unlv.edu/papers.html>





## About the Center for Gaming Research

Founded in 1987, the Center for Gaming Research hosts scholars investigating a variety of subject areas. Located within Special Collections at UNLV's state-of-the-art Lied Library, its main resource is the Gamin Collection.

Many unique primary resources can be found only within the Collection. We preserve and make accessible company documents, state publications, and other important resources.

The Center's Gaming Fellow program, active since 2007, brings scholars from around the world to Las Vegas to perform research in Special Collections. Fellows use the Center's resources to further their study of gaming and become ambassadors for the Center and UNLV.

The Center is committed to providing support for scholarly inquiry into all aspects of gaming. We serve as an unparalleled resource for students, faculty, and independent scholars.

Students, faculty and community members interested in academically-oriented gaming research are welcome to use the collection and the resources of the Center.

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