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Barry  
Salzman

# The Other Side of Christmas

A Solo Photographic Exhibition

7 November - 28 December 2019

Deepest Darkest Contemporary Gallery

20 Dixon Street, De Waterkant, Cape Town

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## Essay by Ashraf Jamal

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke provides a modicum of cheer to a depressed soul: "If your daily life seems poor, do not blame it; blame yourself, tell yourself that you are not poet enough to call forth its riches; for to the creator there is no poverty and no indifferent place." These inspirational words can fittingly be applied to Barry Salzman's project, *The Other Side of Christmas*.

Shot in 2014 while on a road trip across the Southern US, *The Other Side of Christmas* is a sobering reminder that there is no indifferent place. No matter how dispassionate or detached our everyday encounters might appear, it is within these fleeting moments that our existence assumes its deepest traction. We know ourselves best not through special or extraordinary circumstances, but in-and-through the indifferent bilge and bric-a-brac which is the binding sump of life.

A pit or hollow in which liquid collects, a sump is where drainage fails and the unbidden detritus of our lives amasses its implacable force. No matter how earnestly we try to smooth the surfaces of our crumpled lives and despatch what we imagine to be needless and excessive, we accrue far more than we purge. Superfluity defines our cluttered lives. In Salzman's photographs it is not vacuity which assumes centre stage – the scene as vacant lot – but the tell-tale objects, randomly strewn, which break the tidy boundaries we set up. Order begets chaos. System is the hither side of a thither nothingness. As the French Philosopher, Gilles Deleuze, reminds, the system works *because it does not work*.

Weeds tear apart an empty sidewalk. Rainwater, flat as piss on a platter, skims a deserted alleyway just shy of an untended pot plant, while across the street an ox-blood red sign marking America's governing fear reads – Abdalla's. Two overfed grub-like boys stand at attention beside a blue port-a-pool, dwarfed by a bloated SUV sliced in half by the image's right flank. The low rectangular facade of a clapboard building, null, void, insistently announces that it is open for business. An empty parking lot, sporting signs designated for invalids, overlooks an equally empty field, the flattened scene broken by a towering palm tree which splits the frame.

In three photographs the exhibition's seasonal theme, Christmas, is haplessly commemorated through randomly placed garden décor and an unlit spangled star on a lone lamppost. Physical human presence is minimal and distantly recorded. It is the mise-en-scène of everyday life, the structures both man-made and natural which are uppermost in the photographer's sight-line. And yet, despite the unerring sense of desolation which Salzman's photographs evoke, a contrary impact is also generated – Rilke's realisation that "there is ... no indifferent place."

Salzman is not interested in reprising the cliché of existential nausea one experiences in the face of nullity. Rather, his viewpoint and felt sense of the world asks us to cherish what we mistakenly imagine to be superfluous. In his photographs it is the elemental world which contains the urban sketch we create – a night-lit mall, makeshift home, car, chair, or

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bright yellow trolley on a green lawn – which we now find clarified and heightened by nature's mute and sentient presence – a gloaming sky, groaning palm, forlorn weed, or the calligraphic flurry of a winter tree. Through this interplay of the man-made and natural we are reminded that ours is not only a world which we awkwardly inhabit, but a world which inhabits, enfolds, and exceeds us.

Humility is the true temperature and temperament of these photographs. They are the product of a man who both inhabits and refuses his dislocation. Having spent thirty years in America, Salzman remains someone who cannot wholly embrace a sense of belonging. The phrase, 'naturalised American' rings hollow to his ears, because, for him, the natural is not a rooted condition. Neither, however, is the photographer rootless. Rather, he finds himself compromised by any conscripting designation. If he allows himself the luxury of defining himself as a privileged, urban, 'New York centric' being, this description cannot, in truth, bind him. This is because selfhood – the manufactured sense of a self - cannot explain away the sump that seeps into a life, the realisation that we leak, fray, distend, and ceaselessly founder.

Salzman's photographs, then, are the unresolved sum of an unresolved life. It is not Being that defines him, but Becoming. Which is why, after the cultural analyst Michael Foley, Salzman's way of seeing is one in which 'The crucial thing is to start paying attention now'. It is this presence of heart and mind, unmoved by dread or anxiety, which gives his photographs their currency. For these are not photographs which endorse an existential cliché the better to coolly sum up human folly, but records fragile and tender which ask that we still ourselves and allow for wakefulness.

*Ashraf Jamal is a Research Associate in the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre, University of Johannesburg and a leading commentator on contemporary art in South Africa. He is the author of In the World: Essays on Contemporary South African Art, published by Skira in 2017.*

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## Project Statement

I often wonder what is in a label. What do the words we attach to ourselves tell us about our hopes and aspirations, our identity, community and place of belonging?

For a decade after leaving South Africa in 1984, I wanted nothing more than to become an 'American'. I celebrated when I became a citizen. But for the two decades that followed, every time I proclaimed to be an 'American' people doubted me. I had an accent. I didn't fit with my fellow Americans' sense of what it meant to be 'American'. My friends often joked with strangers that I was from Brooklyn or the Bronx and had gone to a fancy school where I learned to fake my accent. Amazingly, that seemed easier for people to believe than the fact that I was a naturalized American who was born in Zimbabwe.

My understanding of America was almost entirely based on a life lived in New York City. In truth, that is no understanding at all. I self-identified as a New Yorker, but never as an American. So when the time came for me to consider the next phase of my life as an artist (in America or elsewhere; and as it happens, I moved part-time to Cape Town), I first set out to understand what the label 'America' meant. I wanted to pierce the veil of its official image of equality and opportunity, comfort and confidence - "the land of the free and the home of the brave."<sup>1</sup>

Leading into the holiday season in 2014, starting around the time of the American mid-term elections, the precursor to the divisive 2016 Presidential elections, I began to explore the notion of being 'American' in a body of work that became *The Other Side of Christmas*. The project follows the rich tradition of the road trip in the history of contemporary photography, and the role of the open road as facilitator for observing and understanding the USA.

<sup>1</sup> Written by Francis Scott King in 1814, and since 1931 sung as part of the US national anthem.

The camera's depiction of the American open road is almost as old as photography itself, but the seminal work that has come to define the genre was made by Swiss photographer, Robert Frank, in 1955-56. In the decade post World War II, the public discourse in America was dominated by issues of immigration and immigrants - those who belonged and those who did not.

Disturbingly that continues to be the prevailing discourse today, making the view of the outsider looking in as relevant as it has ever been. It is the outsider who upholds the idealized promise of the 'American Dream'. As I traversed the country, it was apparent that for many Americans, perhaps even the majority, the life they live has little bearing on the promise of that often romanticized dream held by so many who seek to be 'American'. This was particularly poignant through the holiday season, hence the title of the exhibition.

Robert Frank wrote: "What I have in mind then, is observation and record of what one naturalized American finds to see in the United States...I speak of the things that are there, anywhere and everywhere - easily found, but not easily selected and interpreted." His words are equally applicable to my journey 60 years later as they were to his.

Countless photographers have been influenced by the work of Frank, including some of photography's legends like Garry Winogrand, William Eggleston, Lee Friedlander, Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore, Alec Soth, Todd Hido and South Africa's David Goldblatt. They are all referenced directly or indirectly in my own work.

*Barry Salzman 2019*

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Abdalla's Department Store  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Supermarket Carts  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

DEEP  
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By The Bayou  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix



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The Swimming Pool  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix



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Cousins  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Open 24 Hours  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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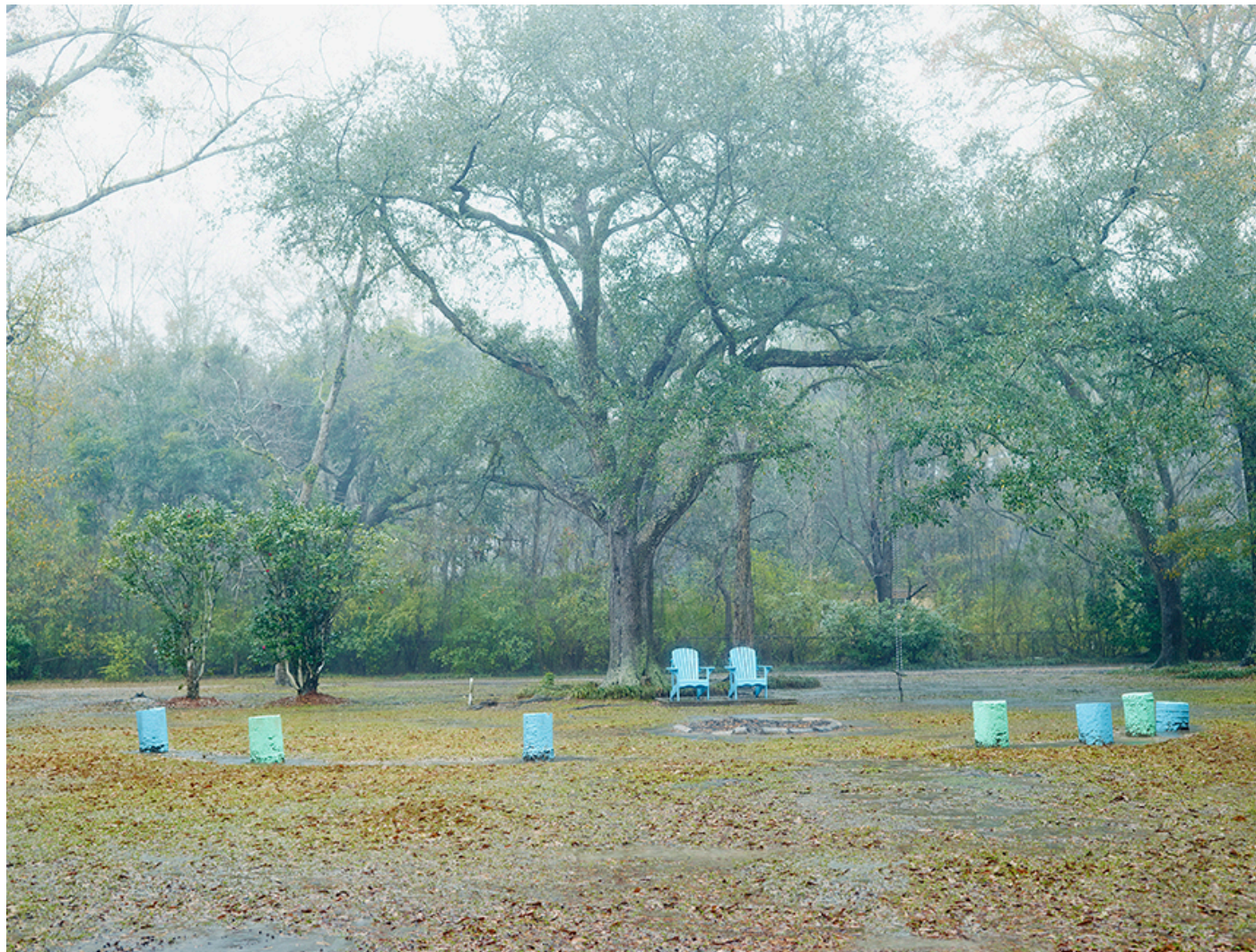
Basketball Net and Wall  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Reserved Parking  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Adirondack Chairs in the Rain  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
127 x 98.4 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Yes We're Open  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

DEEP  
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Mobile Home and Blue Car  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

DEEP  
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No Trespassing  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix



DEEP  
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One Way  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

DEEP  
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Merry Christmas  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Third Street and Avenue A  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 60.8 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

DEEP  
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The Other Side of Christmas  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 55.3 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

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Yellow Shopping Trolley  
2014  
Archival Giclée Print on  
Hahnemühle Photo Rag  
77 x 55.3 cm  
Edition of 8 + 2AP  
Pricing in Appendix

## Biography



Barry Salzman is an award-winning contemporary artist who currently works in photography, video and mixed media. He was named *2018 Photographer of the Year* by the International Photography Awards (IPA) in the Deeper Perspective category for his project *The Day I Became Another Genocide Victim*, in recognition of his efforts to humanise victims of the Rwandan genocide.

Salzman was born in Zimbabwe and grew up in South Africa during the Apartheid years, before emigrating to the United States of America, where he has worked for the last 35 years. He has had a lifelong passion for photography, and after an initial business career in New York, he transitioned to working as a full-time artist. He currently resides between New York City and Cape Town, when not travelling for a project or assignment.

Salzman's interest in photography began as a teenager in South Africa. He was moved to document racially segregated areas, particularly the black informal settlements displaced to the outskirts of white suburbs, in an effort to understand the politically entrenched racial inequality that surrounded him. Today, his work continues to explore challenging social, political and economic issues, much of it focused on community, heritage and identity.

Salzman's *The Other Side of Christmas* depicts everyday scenes across the American South between the 2014 USA mid-term elections, the precursor to the divisive 2016 Presidential elections, and Christmas. It is his personal exploration of the 'American Dream' and what it means to be 'American'.

For the last six years, Salzman has worked on ongoing projects that attempt to challenge the universal fatigue around the genocide narrative. Mostly, he applies visual tools of abstraction to landscape images shot at precise locations where acts of genocide were perpetrated as a means of reminding us that 'that place' can be 'any place'.

He has a Bachelor of Business Science degree from the University of Cape Town, an MBA from Harvard Business School and an MFA in Photography, Video and Related Media from The School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Title	Editions	Medium	Size	Edition: 2* / 3 / 4
Abdalla's Department Store	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Supermarket Carts	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
By The Bayou	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
The Swimming Pool	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Cousins	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Open 24 Hours	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Basketball Net and Wall	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Reserved Parking	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR
Adirondack Chairs in the Rain	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclee Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 130 x 101.4 cm Unframed (Print): 127 x 98.4 cm	Framed: 21 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 17 500 ZAR

# Barry Salzman

## The Other Side of Christmas (2014)

### Pricing Appendix

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Title	Editions	Medium	Size	Edition: 2* / 3 / 4
Yes We're Open	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
Pink Mobile Home and Blue Car	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
No Trespassing	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
One Way	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
Merry Christmas	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
Third Street and Avenue A	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 63.8 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 60.8 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
The Other Side of Christmas	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 58.3 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 55.3 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR
Yellow Shopping Trolley	Edition of 8 + 2AP	Archival Giclée Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag	Framed: 80 x 58.3 cm Unframed (Print): 77 x 55.3 cm	Framed: 14 500 ZAR Unframed (Print): 12 500 ZAR

\* Exhibition framed works (Edition 2) include anti-reflective UV glass.  
Unless otherwise requested, all other framed works supplied with UV resistant glass.  
Availability of additional editions upon enquiry.  
Shipping available worldwide.

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