

It seems to me that Home is a lot like Love. No amount of poetry, music, art, life, death, or disappointment will ever suffice to complete the catalog of its permuted meanings—which won't stop anyone from trying. It literally means something absolutely different to each living creature, and without ideas like Home, Love, and even God, there'd be no paintings, no pop music, and no novels.

Home, again like Love, is an emotion as well as a social construct, a place to leave, return to, miss, defend, dream of, or destroy. It's a place of specificity, but does it even have to be a place at all? It can be a person (parent, lover, pet) or an illusion, or a karmic goal-post that keeps moving. It's often aspirational, symbolizing achievement, security, and retreat.

But even with the endless catalog of definition, prayer, fixation, metaphor, image, symbol, myth, purchase, and confession, human nature will endlessly prompt us to add to the archive. For every poet and painter—and for that matter every living person—believes themselves capable of shedding new light and adding new insight to our soul-situation. And they are right.

The residents of the settlements flanking California's Salton Sea—an artificial lake intended as a desert oasis resort that quickly became a toxic, calcified symbol of catastrophe—think they live in an Earthly Paradise. They are proud to call it Home, and are busy making improvements, landscaping, and building baseball parks. It's a salt-flat with dilapidated, sagging structures lining empty streets, paint peeling away in the sun, devoid of apparent activity. Its short, blacktop roads all lead to a lakeshore, the sandy beaches of which are littered with sunken vehicles and the skeletons of four-eyed fish. And as for front lawns, well, you can't grow plastic grass...

Martin's work is a kind of interpretative documentation; she stays true to the reality of her selected places. In addition to the Salton Sea sequel, she's currently at work on a series about Cape Cod's Narrowlands—a more vegetated but no less remote “vacation” destination less about the desert and more about vines, nature's reclaiming of the cultivated, the process of decay, and the beauty in the breakdown.

--Shana Nys Dambrot, Los Angeles