

# James Casebere

## Fugitive

**Edited by Okwui Enwezor**

With contributions by  
James Casebere, Okwui Enwezor,  
Caleb Smith, and Brian Wallis

# Contents

## TEXTS

4 – 5

---

### Major Supporter's Preface

*Dr. Eva-Maria Fahrner-Tutsek*

6 – 8

---

### Director's Foreword

*Okwui Enwezor*

10 – 21

---

### Fugitive States

James Casebere's Political  
Economy of Spatial Illusion

*Okwui Enwezor*

22 – 30

---

### In Casebere's Cave

*Brian Wallis*

32 – 38

---

### In a Different Light

*Caleb Smith*

## WORK

41 – 56

---

### Procession

57 – 74

---

### After Architecture

75 – 94

---

### Entropy

95 – 136

---

### Early Work

137 – 160

---

### Archaeology (Studies)

161 – 188

---

### Fugitive Spaces

189 – 201

---

### Landscape with Houses

## APPENDIX

202 – 205

---

### List of Works

206 – 213

---

### Biography

214 – 221

---

### Selected Bibliography

222 – 223

---

### Artist's Acknowledgments



# Major Supporter's Preface

*Dr. Eva-Maria Fahrner-Tutsek*

CHAIRWOMAN,  
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MUNICH

When does a ubiquitous mass media like photography count as art? This question is posed time and again, despite the fact that photography has long been established in the collections and exhibitions of renowned museums and art institutions. In an exhibition like *James Casebere: Fugitive* in Munich's Haus der Kunst, however, the question simply answers itself.

James Casebere is a pioneer of constructed photography who has created a forceful and unique form of art. This US-American follows a little-known approach, illustrating models of complex architectural and art-historical themes in his photographs. In lasting ways, their defamiliarization of reality evokes archaic perceptions and the most varied emotions in the beholder.

With emphatic commitment, Okwui Enwezor has brought this retrospective—which encompasses James Casebere's artistic career of more than forty years—to the Haus der Kunst and conceptualized the exhibition with his team with

great skill. It is thanks to him that this type of photography is going on view in Munich, and hence receives a major platform in Europe. *James Casebere: Fugitive* is one of a series of first-class exhibitions that have propelled the Haus der Kunst to the highest levels in international rankings.

The Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung consistently seeks out the special and the exceptional for its sponsorship activities in the framework of the ambitious program "Art and Science." This is why we are delighted to support the exhibition *James Casebere: Fugitive*. The magical, cool photographs of James Casebere are not necessarily accessible to the viewer at first glance. They perplex, challenge.

My appreciation goes to Okwui Enwezor and his team at the Haus der Kunst for presenting this retrospective in Munich. I wish the exhibition every success and many visitors—who are sure to enjoy grappling with the works of this enthralling artist.

# Director's Foreword

Okwui Enwezor

*James Casebere: Fugitive* is a long overdue recognition of the rich body of work produced by this singularly pioneering and innovative American artist in a career spanning more than forty years. The exhibition presents photographic works that are based on the creation of spatial narratives using studio-fabricated architectural models that are then photographed to yield images that hover somewhere between the fugitive and the sublime, between the uncanny and the concrete, the pictorial and the spatial. Casebere has stated that his work, particularly during the beginning of his career, was “philosophically opposed to the notion of allegory as an artistic device.” He commented that the underlying motivation for the unique approach he adopted for the composition and production of his photographs was to transform the resulting images into autonomous artistic objects: “I was trying to construct meaning with single images, in the end photographically, but without primary reference to photographic tradition, and with the notion of constructing meaning directly for the camera, much the way a filmmaker would do.”

The references to architecture and cinema imbue his work with a film noir quality, especially in the exquisitely printed early black-and-white pictures that are full of tenebrous inky values. Casebere approaches his emotionally laden, psychologically ambiguous image-making by extensively researching his chosen subject matter, be it of scenes drawn from the classic films of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford, or architectural movements such as New England shingle architecture, prison design, and suburban real estate developments. American literature has also had a lasting influence in the development of narratives and settings for his photographs. These encompass influences from the nineteenth-century American gothic tradition in the work of Edgar Allan Poe to the twentieth-century social novels of William Faulkner and Toni Morrison’s magic realism.

With over seventy works in different formats and photographic processes, the exhibition comprises images drawn from all periods of Casebere’s career, from 1975 to the present. It includes large, multi-panel color photographic works in processes as diverse as cibachrome, chromogenic, and ink jet prints, as well as black-and-white gelatin silver prints, dye destruction prints, waterless lithographs, and Polaroid prints. The highly refined and carefully worked detail of the prints contributes to the absorbing richness and visual experience the viewer has in the presence of the photographs.

With this presentation, *James Casebere: Fugitive* continues the ongoing critical dialogue that Haus der Kunst has devoted to the work of a generation of artists such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, and Stan Douglas, among others, whose primary artistic form is rooted in the photographic medium. This dialogue in the past also extended to the role of images in contemporary media, with special emphasis on photography in all its forms.

Making an exhibition of this scale and magnitude requires the support and contribution of so many people and organizations. To that end, the exhibition would not have been possible without the crucial and generous funding extended by the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung to underwrite the presentation in its entirety. We are grateful to Dr. Eva-Maria Fahrner-Tutsek and Maleachi Bühringer for their passionate and enthusiastic engagement with photography. Their major support ensured that we could present this exhibition in a comprehensive manner.

Many others have played important roles in realizing this project, not least of which are colleagues from many institutions and the lenders of the works to the exhibition. We thank them for their generosity. Members of the James Casebere Studio, especially Pamela Vander Zwan, studio manager, and the skilled studio assistants Michael Vahrenwald, Chris Rodriguez, Taylor Shields, Camille Meshorer, Sam Matamoros, Kate Davis, Thomas Callahan, and Brooks Larson, provided crucial support in helping realize at various stages the works presented in this publication.

Our gratitude goes to the galleries who have supported and represented James Casebere’s work over the years. We wish to thank Sean Kelly, Cecile Panzneri, and Melissa Morales at the Sean Kelly Gallery in New York; Nicholas Logsdail, Alex Logsdail, Jeannie Freilich, and Annette Hofmann at the Lisson Gallery in London, Milan, and New York; Daniel Templon, Mathieu Templon, Anne-Claudie Coric, and Tessa de Caters at Galerie Daniel Templon in Paris and Brussels; and Helga de Alvear in Madrid. Special thanks go to Clint Downing and Rachel Payne at Downing Frames, New York; photo retoucher Eric Jeffreys and Charlie Griffin at Griffin Editions, New York; and Philippe Laumont, Esteban Mauchi (master printer), Willie Vera (mounter), and Diana Vera at Laumont Photographics, New York.

The catalogue published on the occasion of this major survey undoubtedly adds to the literature, criticism, and

analysis of Casebere's work. For the present volume, Brian Wallis and Caleb Smith have each authored significant essays that shed light on the philosophical and cultural references behind Casebere's thinking and in so doing bring a new level of interpretative clarity to how we see and understand his work. We thank them for their contributions. We also thank Katharina Haderer, Cilly Klotz, and Iris Forster at Prestel Verlag; Florian Frohnholzer (graphic design); and the copy editors Louise Neri and Rita Forbes for making such a beautiful and accessible book.

As an institution, Haus der Kunst takes great pride in the commitment of our staff to all artists whose works we exhibit in the museum. The care each member of the team brings to mounting exhibitions in our galleries creates the conditions that make the viewing of art a vivid, vital, and stimulating experience. I want to extend my thanks to Anna Schneider, assistant curator, who assisted me in the organization of the exhibition and provided key support throughout the process. The result of the exhibition is as much her doing as it is mine. I am grateful for the support of my colleagues Marco Graf von Matuschka and Ulrich Wilmes, members of the senior management team, and my assistants Sonja Teine and Iris Ludwig for their work and support. Many thanks to Tina Köhler, Exhibitions Coordination; Cassandre Schmid, registrar, and Sofia Sprick, department assistant; Anton Köttl, technical director; Glenn Rossiter, technical assistant; and members of External Affairs: Tina Anjou (Marketing), Martina Fischer (Visitor Relations and Mediation), Elena Heitsch (Press), and Anna Schüller (Digital Communications), Chris Goennawein (Graphic Design), and Andrea Saul (Public Program). I am thankful for the exceptional work of the members of the exhibition installation team: Markus Brandenburg, Elena Carvajal, Tanja Eiler, Vincent Facio, Hansi Frank, Adam Gandy, Ben Goossens, Martin Hast, Marzieh Kermani, Christian Leitna, Roland Roppelt, Carlo Scheuermann, Marjen Schmidt, Tina Schultz, Magnus Thorén, and Susanne von der Groeben all deserve recognition for their contributions.

Finally, I want to register my immense gratitude to Jim for agreeing to make this exhibition and for trusting me with his work. Over the years, since the early 1990s, I have gained enormous appreciation and deep admiration of his work. I have also had the singular pleasure of knowing and working with him for nearly two decades. During these many years

we have developed a close dialogue and extended exchange around images, photography, art, culture, and ideas, from which I have learned so much. I am therefore delighted to have the privilege of working with an artist of Jim's stature and for the opportunity to continue this dialogue, one that foregrounds his artistic achievement at a pivotal moment in his career. Jim is undeniably one of the most significant figures in contemporary art working today. His innovative approach to photography has left a pioneering and an enduring mark in the field. His unstinting generosity, critical acuity, and expansive knowledge have made the collaboration between us, and with members of Haus der Kunst staff, a most rewarding experience.





# Fugitive States

Okwui Enwezor

James Casebere's Political  
Economy of Spatial Illusion

Over the last forty years James Casebere has produced a diverse body of work involving photography, sculpture, installation, and film. During this period he gained renown as a pioneer of a type of constructed photographic tableaux which derive exclusively from meticulously planned architectural models that he conceives, fabricates, and photographs in his studio. Even if some aspects of the work draw from existing spaces and sites, his fully realized models and the photographs generated from them are never explicitly mimetic. In fact, Casebere's architectural models are as much replications of the real as they are detours from it. As such they can be best understood as psychological profiles and character studies of spaces, as fugitive states and affective representations, rather than reproductions of a given place, locale, or site.

Constructed *ex nihilo*, out of completely imagined scenes, or from reconstructed setups generated from existing documents and images, the early pictures were, fundamentally, studio experiments and interventions into architecture. However, over time, with the work's burgeoning conceptual complexity and formally expansive re-creations, the architectural models became deeper reflections on the social effects of space, and can be seen as investigations into the nature and conditions of the apparatus.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of these shifts in his model-making—in which cinema also played an influential role—the experiments, interventions, and investigations accumulated a rich resource of architectural features and spatial lexicons, as well as a range of discursive and pictorial dispositions, which today cover a broad territory of subjects and systems.

Casebere arrived at this mode of working early, as a young art student in the mid- to late 1970s at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, followed by the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). It was a period when photography was in transition: artists were interrogating the aesthetic principles underlying photographic realism and the related issues of the dominant documentary form.<sup>2</sup> In 1977 the critic Douglas Crimp organized the influential exhibition *Pictures* at Artists Space in New York, in which he introduced the work of five artists (Robert Longo, Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, and Philip Smith) for whom the interrogation of pictures was central to the conception of the photographic or moving image. In an accompanying essay for the exhibition catalogue he writes:

To an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in cinema. Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seemed that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems they have usurped it. It therefore becomes imperative to understand the picture itself, not in order to uncover lost reality, but to determine how a picture becomes a signifying structure of its own accord.<sup>3</sup>

Crimp's core argument about the economy of pictures, or what the art historian Terry Smith characterized as iconomy,<sup>4</sup> in which the operation of the image was structured according to the forms of discourses it generated, subsequently extended beyond the original five artists in the exhibition to include a loosely affiliated group of artists working in New York.<sup>5</sup> Casebere was one of these artists. Discussing the influences and motivations behind his own art-making at this time when artists in the United States were using the camera to record and document ephemeral actions and site-specific sculptures in urban and rugged natural environments, Casebere states:

I was not thinking about photography, but about other visual artists of the time that I'd been interested in since at least high school. These were mainly artists who worked in the landscape, in the urban fabric, and who documented their activities or interventions, like Gordon Matta-Clark in the city; Robert Smithson or Michael Heizer in the American West; or other performance artists who documented their performances and whose work I became familiar with through its documentation after the fact.<sup>6</sup>

Formally, the bare essentials of the work that Casebere began producing in response to the art that affected and influenced his thinking consisted of nothing more than pieces of cardboard, paper, Styrofoam, tape, plaster, and pigment, along with other materials procured from art stores and hardware shops. These quotidian materials represented the fundamental resources that, over a lengthy process of transformation, formed a species of spatial structures whose deliberately planned psychological complexity built up into a procession of architectural codes. Only after these codes had been strin-

gently delimited, and their signifying characteristics precisely organized, would Casebere proceed to the next level of the work, by making architectural models that could convey the specific intentions of his pictorial narrative. Out of this lengthy process emerged a photograph.

Although a great part of this oeuvre is photographic, Casebere works simultaneously in the mode of a sculptor, cinematographer, and film director. For this reason his work asks us to consider the relationship between an image and a representation. In the same vein, it calls for associations that can be made between object-making and picture-making. In the course of sustained looking at Casebere's photographs, what manifests is a sense of the image in a state of suspension, located in the tension between real and illusionistic space, such that the photographs constantly oscillate between the fabricated and the representational, mediated and immediate. Grasping the importance of these related modes of making a photograph—from and through an object—is essential to understanding the motivations behind the work. Here Casebere is both emphatic and explicit:

I was not interested in specific sites or in documenting actions that took place in a real space. I was not interested in documentary at all, *per se*. In fact, I was also philosophically opposed to the notion of allegory as an artistic device. At the time, I was thinking about constructing meaning in many ways other than allegory, in a single image. I was, abstractly speaking, interested in the interaction of ideas within an imaginary space. I consciously wanted to make the photograph the primary manifestation, as an object or as an artwork, rather than create a secondary mode of presentation. Reproduction was the primary mode of communication nonetheless; the means through which people experience the work itself. The reproduction was the work itself. That was one thing I wanted to emphasize.<sup>7</sup>

A pictorial object developed along these lines, as is the case with the architectural spaces and structures that are reproduced as photographs, asks us to approach architecture not as a readymade thing in the world that is devoid of ideological manipulation and psychological control, but as a thing that requires considerable powers of pictorial and social illumination to capture its ever-shifting complexity, as well as the

feelings of estrangement and anxiety it arouses. From the constructed and arranged to the fictive and manipulated, the abstract logic of the photographic medium allowed Casebere, from the outset, to adopt a stance of radical de-realization of conventional patterns of image production; in other words, to make more real what had been obscured, and to show precisely what needed to be revealed.

To unravel and reveal these deeply imbricated ideas in the work, Casebere generates his objects and models in aggregates. These are then transposed into scenographic ensembles, settings, sites, and ideoscapes<sup>8</sup> that reflect spaces of both habitation and desolation. Each turn of picturing, whether as fragment, detail, or complete scene, is a photograph of veiled spaces presented at the point of unveiling. And in the unveiling, the absorptive power of the realized image becomes seductively palpable.

Early on, the architectural ensembles were composed of invented spaces (living room, bedroom, porch, recreation space, garage, driveway, kitchen, office, stairwell) and imagined objects (refrigerator, electric fan, stove, television, fireplace, furniture) that were scripted and drawn from everyday life. In other words, these aggregates simultaneously evoke the whole and the fragment. Each fragment performs a representational role in the procession of forms that ultimately delineate specific models and studies, conventions and uses of space, both in terms of the habitat and the habitual.

Here, conceptions of American middle-class dwellings took precedence. Despite the ambivalent treatment they received, the studies of home and hearth in Casebere's explorations of American suburban life might be more precisely characterized as anthropological and ethnographic, in the sense that the initial impulse to build and document them derived directly from a certain anxiety that American domestic architecture and its ideological foundation induced in him as a young person growing up in a suburban Midwest town, next to the apocalyptic landscape of post-urban-riot Detroit. The 1968 Detroit riot sealed the fate of the city and fed its decline with mass white flight from the city to the suburbs, depleting the city of economic resources and orchestrating a plunge in real estate values of the black inhabitants who were left behind.

However, Casebere did not directly address this matter of white flight and urban decay. He took it on only suggestively, as the critical point of his work rigorously abjured the docu-

mentary. Instead, he focused attention on the facade of normality erected in the suburbs after the riots. But the more one peers into those scenes of normality, the more they reveal a sense of anxiety, as is shown with the real fire engulfing the paper model in *Furnace with Flame* (1976). However, the obviousness of the fire is merely a reproduction of an effect that exists squarely in the image. In other words, this photograph is what W. J. T. Mitchell would call a “metapicture,” “pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is.”<sup>9</sup> At the same time, *Furnace with Flame* could be considered analogously, as a reference to the fire-scarred city. Here, both home and city represent troubled sites, places where the social imaginary had become ruptured. Yet to draw this conclusion requires an understanding of the deep-seated contradictions that exist within an image. For example, by having the flame in the image emanate from the cardboard box instead of the furnace, did Casebere mean to suggest the non-functionality of the oven, and thus an alternative way of warming the space? Or is its dislocation from the furnace to the cardboard box a means of conveying the idea of fire engulfing the space? Such ambiguity points to the fact that the ideas behind Casebere’s image-making are never mere literalizations of effects, since he always sets the improbable within a kernel of an overarching pictorial investigation.

For Casebere, the key point of the work is that the image refers to nothing but its own reproductive essentiality:

But keep in mind, when I say reproduction I am referring to the reproduction of the image rather than the reproduction of an event, an action, or of an actual space. There was also a theatrical aspect to the work which, for me, was all about film, television, and my experience as a member of a different generation from the artists I mentioned before, as an artist who grew up under the influence of the moving image and the television screen. This shaped a whole archive of available images and image devices for our generation. So the work was partly a reflection of my own experience as a child of the TV generation. I was trying to construct meaning with single images, in the end photographically, but without primary reference to photographic tradition, and with the notion of constructing meaning directly for the camera, much the way a filmmaker would do.<sup>10</sup>

Fabricated out of ordinary materials, the early models were deliberately rudimentary, as if to elaborate their frailty and artificiality, as well as to highlight the collage aesthetic that underpins them. With the seams visible, indicating where the corners had been joined, the models also had real objects (a metal fan, a four-pronged metal fork, a pillow) embedded in them. In fact, it was Casebere’s intention to aim for “the obviousness of the constructions”<sup>11</sup> to display their self-conscious artificiality. Casebere wanted the seams clearly visualized in order to emphasize that the image was a construct, a fiction.

By introducing real objects at actual scale into the models, and combining them in real space, the photographs manifested an oneiric quality and the appearance of deliberate rupture, a breach in the protocol of the object. Hal Foster has noted that this causes a derangement of the image.<sup>12</sup> In *Fan as Eudemonist Relaxing after an Exhausting Day at the Beach* (1975), an electric fan is anthropomorphized and staged resting on a creased white pillow against a backdrop of wrinkled paper inside a cardboard box. A metal fork, in bizarre literalness, is stabbed through the exterior of a cardboard model refrigerator in *Fork in the Refrigerator* (1975). This photograph of a fork attacking a refrigerator, though seemingly playful, is a jarring image of violence. It rescripts and transforms a domestic idyll into a picture of angst and horror. The ambiguous but eerie *Three Freezers* (1976), with the lid of each appliance ajar, exerts a sinister hold over the imagination as to what their interiors may contain.

In these works the objects appear as surreal characters in the image’s unstated narrative. Yet something about this interpolation of the real and the invented, the constructed and the readymade, suggests that far from being enamored of the fictions of suburban normality of American life, Casebere was intent on casting a skeptical light on the tranquility of that putative domesticity. These concerns coalesced in the dynamic ten-part *Life Story* (1978). Toylike, the images and the objects that constitute the ensemble in each of them are arranged from interior to exterior; there are shifts in position and perspective from flatness to depth, from diagrammatic to schematic, with the ensembles summarizing Casebere’s interest in the alienating features of modern social life. While *Three Freezers* playfully mimicked Minimalist seriality, a device that employed repetition and difference,

*Life Story* deployed sequentiality, and the convention of the film storyboard.

One major consideration in this architecture-cum-domestic passion play was the way certain values of American culture were expressed in the national imagination and the kind of myths and narratives that accrued to its spaces. Here, Casebere took the kind of Midwestern American suburban home he grew up in as his model. Despite the specificity of the model, there was nevertheless something generalized and generic about it. It was a non-place, in the sense that rather than being autobiographical, it was a portrait of suburbia in all its innocuousness and mundanity. The domestic middle-class space was, in fact, a way to suggest and signify the emotional geography of a white, middle-class, Midwestern upbringing. In this sense, Casebere's work is about whiteness and its forms of power and control over structures of life and work.

In doing so, Casebere insists, through the deliberate crudeness of the models, on the pervasive sense of disquiet and latent violence of an American domestic experience that was riddled with contradictions: the hegemony of patriarchy, uneven gender relations, and racial strife. In these images the domestic becomes a dispositive of power. At the core of that power also lie the contradictions of America's entire social landscape, which itself was divided according to hierarchies of class, race, and gender.

In 1980, after the oneiric narratives of domestic spaces in works such as *Furnace with Flame* (1976), *Bacillus Pestis (to be looked at while listening to "Scenes from Childhood," section 3 "Catch me" by Robert Schumann)* (1976), *Bed Upturning Its Belly at Dawn* (1976), *Finding a Shiny New Copy of My Father's circa 1933 Boy Scout Scarf in a New Jersey Dormitory Lobby* (1976–77), *Boy's Bedroom* (1977), and *Warm Bed, Hot Coals* (1977), and after the conclusion of *Life Story* at the end of 1978, Casebere expanded his repertoire to other themes in American cultural history. He began investing in a *nature morte* series, into intimate studies of components of middle-class life, for example in *Driveway 1* (1981), *Garage* (1983), *Utility Room*, (1983), *Kitchen Table* (1982), and *Groceries* (1982). Apart from the still life, he was simultaneously beginning to explore and depict institutional and bureaucratic typologies. Pictures such as *Courtroom* (1980), *Library 2* (1980), *Pulpit* (1985), and *State Façade ¾ view* (1991); the ghostly form of the illuminated single structure

in *Row House* (1994); the shadowy, deserted streetscape *Subdivision with Spotlight* (1982); and the dramatically lit, multi-dwelling urban architecture of *Tenement* (1992) present us with a carefully wrought psychogeography of architectural forms. This moment introduced into his process the analysis of modernity, which gained increased focus from 1990 on, with the magisterial *Industry* (1990) and *Chemical Plant* (1991). These images, as we shall see later, represented the moment where the concern shifted from architecture to architectural structure as apparatus in a way that illuminated its ideological roots.

Photographed in gray-scale, in a chiaroscuro-lit black-and-white field, with alternating dark and light shadows as in film noir, these models were expressive of greater solidity and were more robust. They appear more like sets than models. In fact, one photograph, *Stairwell* (1983), a bird's-eye view of a plunging dark void at the center of the image that is sharply contrasted against a backdrop of a perfectly aligned and illuminated geometric staircase, was a reference to a scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film *Vertigo*.

The cinematic references became even more pronounced in images from this period, especially in the series of pictures that explored America's post-Civil War westward territorial expansion in the 1860s under the auspices of "Manifest Destiny," an expansionist doctrine that consecrated the conquering and colonization of Native American territory as national policy. Casebere was particularly interested in the architectural features of the expansion from east to west, especially the way it consolidated the Shingle architecture movement in the New England landscape. A second feature of the colonial imaginary was the colonization of nature within an extractive policy around natural resources that produced widespread violence, displacement, and mass incarceration of the indigenous population in *reservations*.<sup>13</sup>

All these became subjects of Casebere's coruscating lens. He explored the mythologies of the Wild West by referencing the romantic lens of Hollywood representation. Photographs such as *Street with Pots* (1983–84), *Western Street* (1985–86), *Covered Wagons* (1985), and *Arches* (1985), a tour de force of illusionistic distortion, are redolent of the fictionalized cinematic images of the West and the American cowboy myth, as purveyed by Hollywood films and postwar television.

## Archive

At this juncture one can approach Casebere's work as a series of problem sets which at every turn is transfigured through the process of conception and realization. Though all the attributes of depicted objects, scenes, settings, spaces, etc. are legible in the images, his photographs, like many works of art that were informed by postmodern theory in the 1970s, go beyond the technical and materialist modes of artistic production. The images operate under the internal conditions that he establishes for them. However, they are also not strictly self-referential in the way in which Mitchell defined metapictures, but operate in a more generalized way, in the sense that they are not about what is represented, but rather modes of representation and the way one perceives and understands the mechanisms that ground the meaning of the image. Given that Casebere's images are wholly invented through intricate studio process, another way of understanding his picture-making is in terms of the medium itself, especially the capacities of photography to create an analog representation of a plausible image, even one with no real equivalent, just an approximation of what might exist in the real world.

Thus, at first encounter, Casebere's photographs disorient recognition. This has to do partly with the fact that most of his photographs are generated from studio-constructed architectural models and plans. So, on two levels the photographs we see carry with them a set of problems. On the one hand, there is a sense of diminished syntactical reference that the spaces in the photographs have in relation to the pattern and language of architecture. Because of this loss of referential mooring, there emerges the question of scale and structure in the way that the settings and spaces are depicted, photographed, and then perceived. It is these types of disorientation, both in the material scale of the models and in the unresolved issues of depth of field in the images, that compel the mind to see again that which has been contextually denaturalized or spatially reprogrammed in these singular images.

In a perceptive analysis of Casebere's practice, Hal Foster characterized the operations of these images in terms of the "imaginary":

On the one hand, Casebere has created photographic tableaux evocative of different periods and cultures—some concerning American life, others more distant in time and

place—to the point where today his oeuvre stands as an archive—an imaginary—of such representations. On the other hand, Casebere also reflects on what images can tell us about the operations of the mind, both conscious and unconscious—in particular how imagined spaces can serve as settings for fantasmatic narratives of identity (sexual, ethnic, socioeconomic, political, national, and so on).<sup>14</sup>

It is in this sense of the imaginary, as evocations of the archive and of structures of perception, that Casebere's photographs can be said to expose fissures in the real, and thus make the eye relive and rethink images in ways that do not always correspond to what is actually represented or depicted. Rather, the way the images are organized within an expanded sphere of pictorial and representational models, and according to sociological, cultural, and historical references, disrupts the logical flow of how we see the mundane settings and scenarios to which they are attached. This open field of references carries designations such as architecture, landscape, shelter, and nature, but only to the extent that these terms are more generic than normative.

In this way, Casebere's photographs can be apprehended as coded signs with specific spatial programs that are organized in such a way that they oscillate between the concrete and the illusionistic; the actual and the imagined; the real and the fictive. Foster describes how the particular conceptual levers that Casebere employs "derange" the image. Such a photography of derangement, a kind of disaggregation of pictorial patterns, compels yet another reorganization of cognition, namely the relationship between the phenomenological and the sociological. This world of perception and awareness tends to conjure dystopian visions of architectural space that simultaneously evoke a sense of latency and entropy.

## Inundation

The sense of the entropic can be seen in those images in which a series of historically freighted architectural spaces have been derealized and deprogrammed through a process of controlled inundation. Flooded interiors as a subject

in Casebere's oeuvre first appeared in the late 1990s. The initial thinking for this series of photographs began during a trip that Casebere took to Berlin in 1998. There was a heady sense of optimism across the city and throughout Germany of impending reunification that gave Berlin "the excitement of the city of the future." However, across Berlin the past and future constantly collided. Decrepitude loomed very large: in the abandoned subway system that connected the east and west of the city; in the flooded sewage system; in the old air-raid bunkers that dotted the urban landscape. The book *Bunker, Tunnel und Gewölbe unter Berlin*, which Casebere found in the observation tower at Potsdamer Platz, contained an extensive documentation of Berlin's subterranean spaces that further opened up his thinking on how to approach the disjunctive image of the past and future entangled in Berlin. The visible scars of the past imprinted on the material surfaces of the city reflected this tension—as he expressed it, "the historic unconscious of Germany."<sup>15</sup>

Casebere was particularly fascinated by the photographic documentation of the flooded catacombs and bunker beneath the Reichstag, taken in the decimated city immediately after World War II. These flooded spaces opened up for him an approach to addressing historically contingent architecture that he had not undertaken before. He used water "as a device to signify things like the passage of time, the loss of memory, a sense of mourning,"<sup>16</sup> but in the sense of recollection and eradication. *Flooded Hallway* (1998) and *Flooded Hallway from Right* (1999) reimagine the air-raid shelter in the basement of the Reichstag and, by extension, Hitler's former chancellery, as spaces suspended between history and oblivion.

Over a period of almost a decade, Casebere invested a similar sense of pictorial ambivalence in extensive studies of tunnels, prisons, and quasi-palaces such as the aggrandizing interiors of Thomas Jefferson's Virginia home, Monticello. In *Monticello #1*, *Monticello #2*, and *Monticello #3* (2001), the photographs posed complicated questions of this grand theatrical space (the nation's "first gallery," as he commented) and its Enlightenment allusions. The flooding of the interior is, therefore, a pointed critique of the failures of Enlightenment and egalitarian principles embodied by the third president of the United States. At the same time, the socially and politically embodied self-

image of the nation as being just and fair in its conduct toward its citizens and inhabitants is opened to critical account.

The limpid water spreading across the airy, neoclassical chamber opens up gaps in the space. It also excavates the contradiction between the image of Jefferson as the author of America's Declaration of Independence and as a slaveholder, as the overseer of the slaveholding society and plantation economy of Virginia in a newly self-liberated United States. Seen from the point of view of such complex entanglements, Casebere's images of Monticello can be read as photographs that deal with imaginary notions of shelter and confinement, liberty and enslavement. Here Monticello represents a perfect allegorical figure in architectural terms.

Over the course of excavating America's history, Casebere became more invested in analyzing architecturally the legacy of slavery, its historical consciousness and contemporary presence stretching across the Atlantic Ocean, from West Africa to the United States and the Caribbean. The flooded rooms, tunnels, and subterranean arches turn one's gaze toward the rising water as it sweeps down from the plains of historical memory to the dry docks of disremembering. The leftover spaces photographed in *Four Flooded Arches* (1999) and *Nevisian Underground #1*, *#2*, and *#3* (2001) were based on, respectively, images of Portuguese slave factories in West Africa and the Caribbean slave-trading ports in Nevis in the West Indies.

For the exhibition at Haus der Kunst, Casebere revisits yet another site with a burdened architectural legacy. History, memory, and the present are brought into alignment in the three new site-specific photographs—*Rally*, *Grandstand*, and *Banners* (all 2016)—conceived for the grand stairwell leading up to the exhibition galleries. For this series of photographs, the monumental colonnaded architecture of the museum served as a starting point. However, Casebere was less interested in the specific architectural features and iconography of the building than in the ceremonial use of the space as a site for Nazi pageantry. Therefore he focused on theatricality and spectacle, the mood of populist celebration, and the functional economy of public architecture as an arena for mounting ideologically orchestrated mass events. To explore the mood of the marches and parades during 1930s Nazi Germany, he consulted such films as *Good*



*Morning Mr. Hitler* (1939), a recently discovered amateur color film of a cultural festival in Munich attended by Hitler just six weeks before the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Other than this, photographs and historical film footage of the groundbreaking ceremony in 1933, and the public opening of Haus der Kunst in 1937, served as sources. Other films, such as Leni Riefenstahl's classic *Triumph of the Will* (1935) and documentary footage of Nazi Party rallies, were used as references for the construction of the actual scenes depicted in the photographs: *Grandstand* is an abstract distillation of the stage in the Speer-designed Zeppelin Field in Nuremberg, the Nazi equivalent of a Roman arena. In Casebere's image, the austere, sculptural materiality of the carved stone lectern is emphasized against the backdrop of an ominously cloudy gray sky. Empty except for the three glinting standard metal microphones, the photograph is a composition of antiphonies: dread and anticipation, power and threat, silence and mass hysteria. In this image, as in *Banners*, Casebere employs abstraction as a device to produce a decidedly anti-spectacular photograph of one of the ultimate spectacles of mass mobilization in living memory.

*Rally*, the largest of the three photographs at an imposing nine meters in width, is a monumental image that absents the body of the surging crowd in the folds of the banners and flags, but nevertheless conveys the palpable energy of its movement across the wavering band of the horizontal surface. Taking the form of a classical frieze and mounted at the top of the soaring stairwell, a sweeping field of multicolored banners and pennants confronts the viewer in what appears a restaging of "the historical unconscious of Germany." To see this from across the gallery holding *Theater (after the Acropolis #2)* (2006), a reconstruction and depiction of the theater of Dionysus in Athens, proves especially poignant.

These latest photographs mark Casebere's renewed interest in the way that spaces theatricalize and dramatize experience. They represent a continuation of his longstanding interest in analyzing and representing ideologically freighted and historically compromised architecture. In this vein, Casebere is not only interested in questions of representation seen through the filter of architecture and its afterlives, but also in problems of representativeness embedded in various norms of spatial politics and ideology.

## Apparatus

The more one looks at these images, photographed in shifting perspectival views, the more they gain the appearance of becoming derealized or deprogrammed from normative pictorial theories of perspective, scale, figure, and ground. To a large extent, the same thing happens to the architectural and spatial systems that the photographs serve as plausible indexical referents: they too, become destructured and deplanned. Thus, Casebere's oeuvre is fundamentally concerned with the social representations—as well as the political and cultural effects—of architecture, rather than architecture per se. A tougher reading can propel the thrust of the argument to conclude that his real interest here is in the pathologies of architecture across its political, institutional, private, and public conceptions. In other words, what one beholds in Casebere's images is architecture as *apparatus*: rather than buildings and spaces, we perceive a series of spatial strategies.

In this sense, Casebere's models reflect the essential features and prerogatives of an apparatus of discipline and control. Such a disciplinary apparatus was exemplified by Jeremy Bentham's late-eighteenth-century panopticon prison, a model for the architecture of surveillance so influential that it was replicated across the Continent, and widely emulated in the United States. No doubt Casebere's interest in the regulatory nature of the apparatus owes a debt to Bentham, as well as to Michel Foucault's pivotal work, *Discipline and Punish*, concerning the prison system of the modern disciplinary state. As Foucault wrote:

The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it. A "political anatomy," which was also a "mechanics of power," was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines.<sup>17</sup>

Beginning in 1990, the idea of architecture as apparatus, which regulates and controls, took a decided hold on Casebere's work. For instance, in his six-part study *Untitled, Three-Dimensional Digital Models of Prison Plans* (1995), the industrial structures of incarceration emblemized by prison architecture, as well as spaces of bureaucratic control, served

as pinwheels for the overarching study of the legacy of modernism on the built environment, and the effects of modernity on social formations. This showed, particularly, how rational systems, planning processes, and distributive circuits tend to create standardized, homogeneous spatial structures and models. Casebere elaborated his initial interest by examining the way in which individuated units spring from conventional bureaucratic ideals, as in *Panopticon Prison #3* (1993), *Prison in Cherry Hill* (1993), *Nine Alcoves* (1996), and the disquieting and forbidding *Sing Sing* (1992). Some of these images drew from Bentham's panopticon. As Foucault describes:

Bentham's panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principle on which it was based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, a schoolboy.<sup>18</sup>

### Correction

With their dramatic, absorptive scale, a common feature of Casebere's photographs is architecture's phenomenological effect. His sustained and extensive study of the prison system, hospital wards, asylum cells, rooms for solitary confinement, and rendition dungeons display and expose those junctures where space becomes less a place of shelter and protection than one of threat and anxiety. The legibility of these concerns, especially in the ways in which he dramatizes them, reveals the prevailing themes of the constructions, pushing the images toward inscrutability. Casebere's minutely worked structures intersect modern studies in spectrality, desolation, and desperation.

However, Casebere's objects and the pictures that derive from them are not so much about molding and transforming the givens of architectural space and picturing them in a flat,

modulated and spatially nuanced modeling and profiling as about employing architecture and its mediated references to reimagine and rescript specific ideological meanings of space and dwelling. As such, his work could be described as self-analytic. Describing these references in his work, Toni and Ford Morrison made a crucial distinction between confinement and shelter in terms of how the codes of space are played out in the photographs.<sup>19</sup> They counterpose and link the forms of shelter and dwelling to the question of freedom versus unfreedom. While shelter can be nurturing and protective, confinement can be restrictive and isolating, limiting and anonymizing. Here, architecture in Casebere's self-analytic frame serves as a metaphor for the study of exercises of power and control over bodies and space. In such a frame, confinement and shelter—be it in the series on prisons, hospitals, and asylum, or on domestic space and living environment—are constantly collided, the more to expose how their foundations are similarly rooted in behavioral manipulations of power and control.

The Morrisons write, "Nowhere is this estrangement more compelling than Casebere's treatment of representations of state power. . . . The formal instruments of this power exist primarily at the innermost regions of its architecture. . ." <sup>20</sup> The relationship between race and class, particularly the ambivalence of institutional systems of control toward disciplining bodies, created an analytical incision into the imaging of carceral systems. A place of discipline and control, training and correction, the etymology of the penitentiary emerged out of ecclesiastical laws of the Middle Ages. Correction thus had to do with penance, paying one's debt to society, and with repentance, the rehabilitation of the soul.

As such, the prison is as much a space of confinement as it is a place of penitence, obedience, and reform. In his recapitulation on the economy of discipline and correction, Giorgio Agamben writes, "The boundless growth of apparatuses in our time corresponds to the equally extreme proliferation in processes of subjectification."<sup>21</sup> Law as a permanent force, and the function of its various apparatuses, universalized to a norm the constant act of coercive social subjection, thus transforming the individual's relationship to the law into a dialectic of virtue and transgression.

Prison architecture was, therefore, designed to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power"<sup>22</sup> and the law.

In its restrictive spartanness, the cell was designed to compel a response of obedience, reflection, and rectitude such that to be placed in confinement, the prisoner enters into the spotlight of a redemptive plan. With each of these conditions of incarceration in mind, Casebere created a series of sparse white cells and dormitory-like rooms. Each of the spaces contains either a single plank bed, as in *Prison Cell with Skylight* (1993); a bed, as in *Barrel Vaulted Room* (1994); or rows of uniform cots, as in *Hospital* (1997). However, he brought great focus to bear on the spaces themselves, bathing them in hushed, glimmering whiteness. In *Cell with Rubble* (1996), a bare unfurnished white space glows in chilled emptiness, illuminated by a single shaft of light that streams into the room from a rectangular slit in the roof. *Asylum* (1994) is similarly illuminated, perhaps softened by a contemplative, austere grandeur, not unlike a space by architect John Pawson. Everything about the cell—scale, volume, the vaulted but barred arched windows—brings attention to the room as a metaphoric space, at once monastic and sadistic. Casebere ingeniously incorporates and exploits all the dimensions of marshaling the human being into a condition of submission, using spotlighting and illumination within the apparatus as part of the ephemeral architecture of correction and redemption.

### Parataxis

By the end of the 1970s and into the early 1980s, Casebere's models shifted from the initially imagined scenarios to include, progressively, images drawn from preexisting archives of architectural and spatial typologies. However, instead of duplicating these extant spaces, he worked to defamiliarize and transform them according to the agenda of his own conceptual and pictorial operations. These were then photographed with a large-format camera.

Where existing references are not sufficient, Casebere builds new ideals of architecture and space from scratch into approximations of plausible spatial genres fit for his analytical purposes. This was the case in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, which resulted in the collapse of the housing market in the United States and led to widespread foreclosures of over-indebted real estate. Casebere's interest in the

mortgage crisis led him to revisit an earlier image, *Subdivision with Spotlight* (1983). The result was the series *Landscape with Houses*. Beginning in 2009, he created several models, including a series of imaginary suburban developments of the type created during the building boom of the previous decade, some of which are derelict today.

Casebere drew on different sources, from newspaper accounts to sales brochures with “model” homes for housing development to online real estate listings, and even from Dan Graham's photographic study of postwar America suburbia *Homes for America*, for the architectural models that eventually became photographs. None of the photographed sites depicts any particular community. Instead, he employed composites to create scenes to suit the narrative of his overall analysis. The images generated from his pictorial investigation eschew all direct documentary mode. Instead, he focuses on the analytical reframing of cultural and sociological signifiers that might be recast in order to explore the ideological and phenomenological effects of architecture within the context of the built environment, and in relation to institutional, economic, and political systems. In constructing his models, he delineates different building typologies and spatial systems: house, sports field, playground, housing development, and landscape. Here architecture operates as a wheel—what Anthony Vidler calls “the spatial uncanny”<sup>23</sup>—that turns to unveil hidden meaning or obscured economic detail. It also enables a more scrupulous critical perspective on the forces (societal or institutional) and habits (family or media) that mark and shape spaces. Along with economic forces, for Casebere the effects of such violent storms as Hurricane Sandy in the New York area, and natural disasters along the coasts and beaches of the American Northeast, also became subjects of intense reflection.

This overview of Casebere's career across four intellectually absorbing and productive decades leaves no doubt as to his achievement and stature as a major artist of his generation. Along the way, it becomes clear that his development has coincided with transformational conceptual and technological shifts in photography. In this sense, this exhibition is timely, particularly since it comes at a moment when the cultural and artistic status of photography appears uncertain. With the advent of digital technology and social media, we have witnessed the emergence of a host of new toolboxes. Like the period during which artists of Case-

Casebere's generation were interrogating photographic practice, the current transformation in imaging techniques and technologies has been reorganizing the archives and practices of photography, irrevocably affecting its production, circulation, and consumption—all the more so in light of the overwhelming use and influence of photographic images produced and disseminated by ordinary people across social media platforms.

On the one hand, this shift has contributed to the deinstitutionalization of photography; on the other it has eroded the boundary between amateur and professional. This reaches beyond the traditional concepts of popularization and democratization of photography of the postwar period, when the wide availability of cameras began to erode the facilities of the photographic studio. Today, with an expanded toolbox that can simultaneously generate and transmit images, those who could be considered “serious amateurs,” with access to massive distribution capabilities, have gained a firm foothold in the universe of lens-based image production. App-driven software has enlarged the social networks of creators and consumers, who have formed symbiotic relationships. With this transformation, it can no longer be said that traditional media drive our encounters with images.

To be effective, then, as an analytical and artistic tool, it seems that photography must operate in a sphere where the critical transactions of its images and products can gain greater specificity. I would argue that Casebere's oeuvre offers an important counterpractice of photography that is both specific and articulate in its critical intentions.<sup>24</sup> The facture of the photographs is predicated on the artifice and material conditions of the photographed objects and the illusionistic capacities of the resulting images. Over the years Casebere's photographs, along with the digital postproduction techniques that accompany them, have evolved to such an extent that they erode the seams between artifice and illusion, thereby further confounding the relationship between the real and the supplement.

However, in the digital age where photographic images have become more or less composites of recombinant image ecologies and pictorial memes that are aided by assorted reproductive devices, to see a photographic image is to immediately question not only its veracity, but its very existence. This structural and technological shift, rather than enlivening

the possibility of the photographic medium, plunges it into a kind of black hole, a scopic abyss. And if digital devices have so deconstructed and denatured the very idea of photographic form, Casebere's studio-made, ur-architectural spaces, which shift between realist and artificial, provide an incisive reference that anchors photography's legibility and recognizability within the dictionary of pictorial forms that have informed photographic production for nearly two centuries.

- 1** I use this term to describe the way Casebere's architectural models expose an understanding of architecture as a system within the institutions of the state, politics, law, and economy. For a terminological discussion of the concept of the apparatus, see Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).
- 2** Such changes in the approach to photography have lately been associated with a group of mostly New York-based artists, known as the "Pictures Generation," who in the mid-1970s began rethinking how to produce challenging images with the camera outside the conventional documentary language of photography by interposing reality with invented scenarios and pictorial circumstances. Casebere emerged alongside and exhibited with this group of artists, such as Cindy Sherman, Louise Lawler, Jeff Wall, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, Jack Goldstein, Troy Brauntuch, James Welling, Laurie Simmons, Richard Prince, Sarah Charlesworth, and Barbara Kruger, during this period.
- 3** Douglas Crimp, *Pictures* (New York: Artists Space, 1977), p. 3.
- 4** Smith coined this neologism to describe the field (economy) of images (icons). See Terry Smith, *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
- 5** Such was the influence of Crimp's exhibition and his critical analysis of the work of artists during this era, that in 2009, Douglas Eklund organized *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984*, a survey exhibition of the Pictures artists at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. See the accompanying catalogue: Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art / New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 6** Okwui Enwezor and James Casebere, "Photography and the Illusion of History," in *James Casebere: Works, 1975-2010*, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Bologna: Damiani, 2011), p. 17.
- 7** *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.
- 8** I have borrowed the term "ideoscape" in reference to how cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai interprets the flow of linked images and ideas within the global cultural sphere that is constitutive of contemporary responses to modernity, representation, liberty, ideology, etc. Appadurai identifies five topographies or lenses (ethnoscape, ideoscape, mediascape, financescape, and technoscape) through which contemporary global cultural flows can be understood, with ideoscape representing the ideological field or landscape of the jagged, fluid, uneven movement of ideas that currently characterize global capitalism. See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).
- 9** W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 35.
- 10** Enwezor and Casebere, "Photography and the Illusion of History," p. 18.
- 11** *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 12** Hal Foster, "Camera Imaginaria," in Enwezor, *James Casebere: Works*.
- 13** In an email exchange with Casebere, he clarified some of the underlying ideas he was puzzling over during the making of the series of pictures about the westward expansion. He wrote: "Shingle architecture developed in the 1870s in New England, at the same time as the colonization of Native American territory, western expansion, genocide, etc. Western expansion, brutality, and genocide on the 'frontier' enabled this ideal vision of domestic bliss on the East Coast. This juxtaposition was similar to my thinking when I started looking at early Victor Horta buildings and his development of Art Nouveau in the early part of the twentieth century. This style reflected a fascination with the tropical garden, the greenhouse, and the natural world, at the same time that King Leopold II was decimating the human population of the Congo in his desperate quest for cheap rubber, enormous wealth, and international status among the other European colonial powers."
- 14** Foster, "Camera Imaginaria," p. 9.
- 15** Enwezor and Casebere, "Photography and the Illusion of History," p. 28.
- 16** *Ibid.*
- 17** Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 138.
- 18** *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 19** Toni Morrison and Ford Morrison, foreword to *James Casebere: Works*, ed. Okwui Enwezor, p. 7.
- 20** *Ibid.*
- 21** Agamben, *What is an Apparatus?*, p. 15.
- 22** Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 201.
- 23** See Anthony Vidler, "Staging Lived Space: James Casebere's Photographic Unconscious," in James Casebere, *Spatial Uncanny* (Milan: Charta, 2001), pp. 9-19.
- 24** Though this list is by no means exhaustive, other members of Casebere's generation such as Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall, Andreas Gursky, James Welling, Christopher Williams, and Thomas Ruff, and younger ones such as Thomas Demand, work in a similar fashion.



Okwui Enwezor

**James Casebere**

Fugitive

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Prestel

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James Caseberes fotografische Arbeiten zeigen architektonische Motive wie beispielsweise monotone Wohnsiedlungen, überflutete Gänge luxuriöser Villen, kahle Innenansichten von Gefängnissen, maurische und muslimische Architektur, das unterirdische Kanalsystem von Bologna oder das jüdische Ghetto in Venedig. Doch was vordergründig real erscheint, ist künstlich geschaffen: Caseberes Werke sind Aufnahmen detaillierter, selbst gefertigter Architekturmodelle, in denen imaginierte, fingierte Szenen arrangiert werden. Auf diese Weise schafft er Bilder, die zwischen dem Flüchtigen und dem Sublimen, zwischen Realismus und Fiktion zu schweben scheinen. Erstmals präsentiert Casebere zudem Notizbücher, Collagen sowie Polaroid-Studien, in denen der Entstehungsprozess – von den verschiedenen Produktionsstufen bis zum fertigen Einzelbild – sichtbar wird.

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