

SEANKELLY

Powell, Neil. "Emotional Rescue," *Wall Street International*, February 3, 2017.

Wall Street International Emotional Rescue



'Yellow Passage', 2017. Copyright James Casebere/SKNY. Framed archival pigment print mounted onto dibond paper, 44.5 x 66.5 inches

Firstly, apologies if I got you here under the seeming false pretence that this is some fan-based show about the Rolling Stones. It's not. It is however about an equally unlikely interpolation of title, image and context within an exhibition of new works by the much acclaimed artist, James Casebere, at Sean Kelly Gallery, NYC, until the 11th of March.

Casebere's highly orchestrated archival prints look like what might happen if the sensibilities of James Turrell, David Hockney and Giorgio de Chirico were placed into a hydraulic press and squeezed really hard. Whilst Casebere's works and PR explicitly refer to the Mexican colour palette and 'starchitects' such as Barragán, Speer and Goéritz, the context of his work at SKNY, for me, can be viewed through a rather different lens. As announced, the photographs certainly portray or document architectural spaces, (show me a space that's not architectural I hear you say?), but unusually, spaces that appear simultaneously beautiful and inhospitable. I have searched hard to find that the word I might best use to describe Casebere's improbable photographic interiors and I guess 'hypothetical' is the nearest I got.

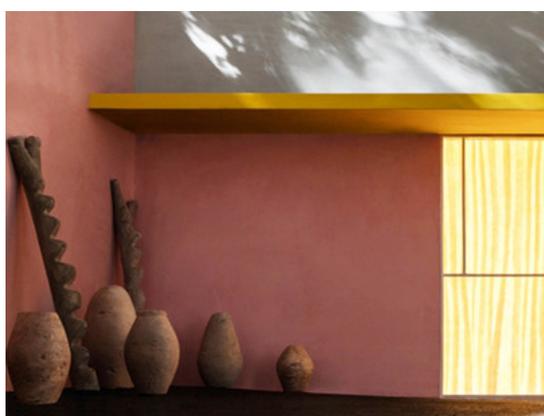
To expand on the reference I touched on earlier, Casebere's exquisitely composed and produced images, such as 'Yellow Passage' (2017), share the same essential sense of mediated, surreal artifice that we encounter in de Chirico's 'Mystery and Melancholy of a Street' (1914). The image composition and chiaroscuro nod towards architecture as the force majeure in portraying the construct of emptiness and transition but both are stagey and deliberate in their contrivance. Similarly, Casebere's 'Yellow overhang with patio' (2016), shares not a little of its sense of artifice/edifice and flat tonality with Hockney's understated acrylic masterpieces of the late 1960's. Turrell and Casebere's 'Vestibule' (2016) need no explanation I feel. So much for context then.

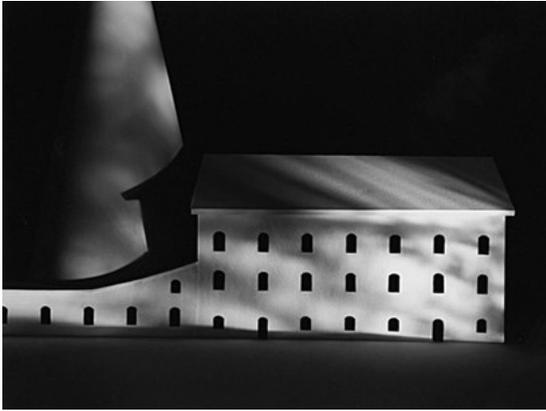
As viewers of pictures of course, we the audience are always in the position of voyeur, but somehow in the case of Casebere, the absence of humanity from these impossibly contrived places disassociates us even further from any sense of place, reality or empathy. On knowing how to 'read' the imagery and signs in Casebere's work, I found myself vacillating not between the superabundance of explicit architectural and interior design references, but bounced between the polar philosophical magnets of Baudrillard's 'Simulacres et Simulation' (1981) and Umberto Eco's more populist 'Travels in Hyperreality' (1986). My reasons for this may, of course,

be entirely idiosyncratic, but there is something topically disconcerting about Casebere's re-presentation of space/no-place that heightens one's feeling of artifice and illusion. Eco talks of the disappointment of reality when compared to a Disney set, and Baudrillard speaks of the 'procession of simulacra' and infinite mutability of our world through the proliferation of signs and symbols. Casebere's work gives the lie to the illusion of perfect space, produced yet untarnished by human hands.

In an increasingly odd world, where it seems that assertions contend with facts for credibility, and where the 'real' is increasingly difficult to divine, Casebere's work draws on a set of apparent and subtle references that make for interesting reading. Drawing parallels between Casebere's work and the rupture(s) in the current geopolitical landscape may seem tenuous, but I would argue that these transatlantic preoccupations presently inform our collective predispositions to viewing and thinking and bring us to question the very semblance and face value of art. Unless it's just me, Casebere's current and previous works do seem to have an uncanny quality in their ability to act as a litmus of the moment more than is accidental.

The tempo and measure of the imagery in this show is hypnotic and entirely in keeping with Kelly's new space, and, as I hope my text intimates, there is much food for thought here that wants for more words than offered in this brief review. An exhibition that rewards in direct proportion to the time spent and one I can heartily recommend.





Captions

1. 'Dorm Room', 2003, digital chromogenic print mounted to Plexiglas, 71 1/2 x 90 1/2 inches (182 x 230 cm)
2. 'Beverly Hills Housewife', 1966. Copyright David Hockney. Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 144 inches
3. 'Turning Hallway', 2003, digital chromogenic print mounted to Plexiglas, 71 1/2 x 91 inches (182 x 231 cm)
4. 'Overhang with Patio', 2016. Copyright James Casebere/SKNY. Framed archival pigment print mounted onto dibond paper, 44.5 x 66.5 inches
5. 'Industry', 2010. Copyright James Casebere/SKNY. Gelatin silver print, 30 x 40 inches
6. 'Vestibule', 2016. Copyright James Casebere/SKNY. Framed archival pigment print mounted onto dibond paper, 62 x 44 inches
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