

Wei, Lilly. "James Casebere," *ARTnews*, September 2009.

## ARTnews

### James Casebere

#### Sean Kelly

The title of this show, "The Levant," refers to the area bordering the eastern end of the Mediterranean, which includes Syria, Lebanon, Greece, Turkey, and Egypt. That region was the source for eight of the photographs on view here, while two images had their origins in southern Spain. Casebere examined both secular and sacred architecture for these then built models of his interpretations of Ottoman, Moorish, and domestic spaces before photographing them. It is a process of faithfully depicting illusion that Casebere helped to pioneer in the 1980s.

His constructions have become more elaborate and elegant, with more details, as is evident in the two *Mosque (after Sinan)* images from 2006 and 2007, which pay homage to the great 16th-century Ottoman architect Sinan with their large, low-hung wheels of lights and tiers of arches.

*Tripoli* (2007), a night scene of apartment houses with streetlights and satellite dishes, and *Samarra* (2007), a rubble-strewn interior that recalls the Golden Mosque (one of Shiite Islam's most sacred sites, bombed and virtually destroyed in the last year), give the artist's recent work a much more contemporary sheen than usual. Yet other works remain stripped down to essential forms that suggest archetypal, rather than real, places. These are muted in color but often dramatically lit and devoid of people.

While Casebere's photographs can be poignant meditations on time and its ravages and reclamations, they can also be isolating and emblematic, veering dangerously close to orientalizing clichés.

—Lilly Wei



James Casebere, *Tripoli*, 2007, digital chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglas, 72" x 90".  
Sean Kelly.