

# SEAN KELLY

Parsons, Elly. "Scaling up: photographer James Casebere's miniature worlds." *Wallpaper*, June 23, 2016.

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## Scaling up: photographer James Casebere's miniature worlds



Belgium's Bozar gallery plays host to an exhibition of work by American artist James Casebere, as part of its 'Summer of Photography' expo. Pictured: Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County NY) # 3, 2010. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris and Brussels

American conceptual photographer James Casebere is fascinated by architecture. Throughout an illustrious and diverse career, he has captured the flooded corridors of grand mansions to the bare spaces of prison cells, to ancient water tunnels in Bologna and the Jewish Ghetto in Venice. These images, however, share a common quirk: none of the buildings photographed are real, at least not in the traditional sense. Instead, they are impeccably detailed, self-made models.

A new exhibition at Bozar in Belgium will display one of these sculptures, Screw Device (1991), along with related photographs. 'The exhibition space here is very special,' Casebere says of the antechambers of the Victor Horta-designed Centre for Fine Arts, where the show takes place. 'It comprises a round space at the centre, and the photographs appear in adjacent, radial galleries like the spokes of a wheel.'

This tendrillar layout literally places the sculptures at the core of Casebere's practice, which has become more and more complex over the years. 'The models can take anywhere from one night to several months to build,' he explains. 'The landscapes are constructed from cardboard, chicken-wire, plaster cheesecloth, and covered with artificial flora. The miniature houses have a foam core, but are later drawn in 3D modelling software, laser cut and air-brushed in different colours.'

Perhaps it is this lengthy, process-driven approach that gives the images there characteristic sterility – else it is the lack of humans. An empty sports field is made emptier still by the lack of children playing; a picture-postcard, whitewashed house is left to turn a neglected shade of brown. Blank, monochrome interiors invoke the unblemished walls of a mental asylum. Later photographs (Cloudy/Sunny Skies, Landscape with Houses) share this disquieting air, made more pronounced by the ironically chirpy colour palette.

These lonely, absurdist worlds aren't without humour. Earlier works like *Bed Upturning its Belly at Dawn* (1976) have a comedic simplicity that Casebere is keen to return to. 'At the moment I am trying to learn from my earlier, more spontaneous ways of making and bring back a sense of humour to the photographs,' he reveals. 'One gets to a certain point, when their main influence is the history of their own work to date.'

The Bozar exhibition covers over 40 years of this history. The exhibition is hot on the heels of another extensive retrospective at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, suggesting that Casebere is having a much-deserved European moment in the spotlight.



The American conceptual photographer is fascinated by architecture. Pictured: Landscape with Houses (Dutchess County NY) #9, 2010. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris and Brussels



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At Bozar, Casebere's scale models will be displayed alongside the photographs, blurring the boundaries between where the process ends and the art begins. Pictured: Cloudy/Sunny Skies, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly, New York



Monticello #1, 2001. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Templon, Brussels and Paris



The blank greyscale interiors that feature heavily in his earlier works conjure images of the unblemished walls of a mental asylum. Pictured: Turning Hallway, 2003. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Templon, Brussels and Paris



Bed Upturning its Belly at Dawn, 1976. Courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery, London, Milan and New York



Vaulted Corridor #2, 2001–2002. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris and Brussels



Having trained with, and subsequently taught alongside, contemporary photography stalwart John Baldessari, Casebere is a modern master of the 'staged' tableau