

James Casebere

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James Casebere's photographs evoke our deepest fears and longings. He builds tabletop models that mimic the appearance of archetypal institutions (home, school, library, prison), or archetypal architectural tropes (tunnel, corridor, archway). In Casebere's photographs, these miniatures often appear to be actual structures. Their serial narratives bear a particularly European, existential angst in spite of the artist's affinity for American subjects such as the Western frontier and Jefferson's Monticello. And while his influences seem far flung, from French New Wave cinema to conceptual American art and the early 20th-century Bauhaus and Constructivists, his work feels organically unified. Perhaps this is because his images captivate our collective imagination, the one ruled by instinct.

The first time I saw James Casebere's latest larger-scale works, as I strolled past the showstopping presentations at the massive New York Armory Show, I immediately recognized his moody light and fabricated architecture; but in the form of a wall-sized panel, the work seemed unfamiliar. I inspected the images, blown-up views into Southern plantation interiors, at close range. As I backed away, I was struck by how the visibility of cracks and seams lent an ambiguity to the work's formal construction. The leap of faith necessary to understand Casebere's art was now center stage, compelling the viewer to ask himself: Do I believe what I see? Or don't I?

Like life, art is relative, and we all struggle with issues of faith and truth, with no easy answers. But in his new body of work James Casebere creates a tension that can only be resolved one way: on faith. I call for more public funding for faith-based art.



