

JAMES CASEBERE

On the Water's Edge

10.12.2020 – 06.02.2021

In his previous exhibition “Emotional Architecture” (2017), James Casebere (Lansing, Michigan, 1953) created architectural images that were largely internal, protected sanctuaries in the spirit of Luis Barragán. Barragán had created an image of a contemporary lifestyle for suburban Mexico City during a time of expansion and growth. He was a developer, as well as an architect.

“After making a whole body of work about Barragán, and his emphasis on sanctuary, solitude and spirituality, (at a time when I felt that was needed with the rise of Trump during the American presidential election) I began to think more about the future than the past. *On the Water's Edge* presents a new type of architecture for the future. It may not be entirely practical, but it expresses something emotional in a time of impending global environmental crisis.

So, I began making new spaces and designing new buildings rather than working with existing architecture. The structures became beach houses, changing rooms, and lifeguard stations at the same time -a hybrid form of public and private space. While these structures, depicted in wide open spaces can appear unfinished, it's because I imagined them to be a place for displaced persons to find safety and refuge on the water's edge, in a time of environmental disaster.

Now that we are also collectively trying to navigate the global health pandemic, the images pile on with another association in that the small singular structures in space evoke the experience of and need for physical distancing in the current battle with Covid 19.

So, I suppose that like Paul Rudolph, in the 1950's, and even like the Arts and Crafts movement in the first two decades of the 20th century, I am trying to create an updated image of an ideal lifestyle through architecture in harmony with nature. This is something I have often gone back to—the idea of a private home on a suburban plot of land... one's own private garden of eden...

I think of most of the structures as “pavilions”. With these works, I was thinking about modular units that can be duplicated and stacked again and again and reconfigured in various positions to create a labyrinth-like architectural form.

The brightly colored images with blue skies feel optimistic. They also retain some of the intensity of color from Barragán, and my experiences in Mexico. There may be a certain sense of irony in some of the other images, and humor.

There is the holdover of serenity from Barragán and some of my other work: and the sublime, perhaps given the juxtaposition of beauty and terror. I think they are also about tenacity, adaptation, ingenuity, and maybe therefore optimism. Acceptance and courage. I don't want it to be depressing, but I think we all see the effects of global warming now, and can't afford to throw our hands up in despair, and resignation.

I have been taking elements from contemporary architecture that I can manipulate to suggest the future and to evoke hopes and fears about our world - the future and its terrors, as well as its possibilities. It's about human fragility, as well as fortitude as we face the unknown... an indomitable human spirit rising from the water like the first animal to emerge and live on land”.

James Casebere