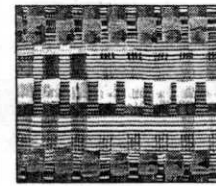


Art & Architecture



Abstract paintings by **Juan Usié** conjure emotional states in "Noche Abierta," opening Tuesday at L.A. Louver. Left: "Interferido," (1999).

Lessons From One Man's Model Society

James Casebere uses photographs of his architectural models as social commentary.

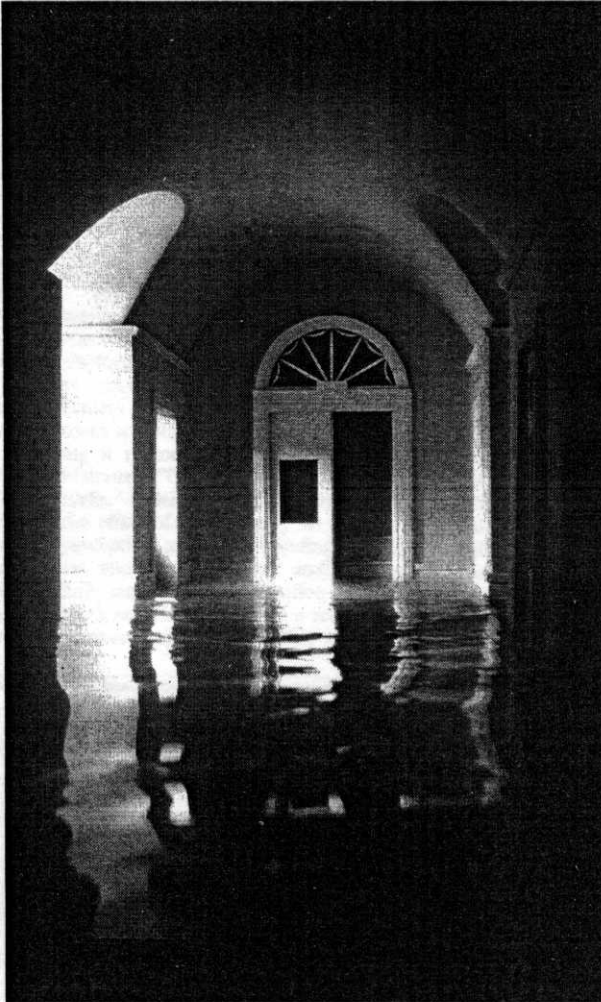
By HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP

NEW YORK—The hallway is flooded at Phillips Academy, one of America's oldest and most exclusive private schools, in Andover, Mass. The silvery surface of the water contrasts with the pale pink color of the walls and the delicate neoclassical moldings over the classroom doors. Four-by-5-foot photographs capture this eerie scene, one that is entirely invented by artist James Casebere. Along with his photographs of constructed models of arched tunnels, both flooded and dry, they are on view at Grant Selwyn Fine Art from Tuesday to July 8.

Casebere, 46, is one of a group of artists who, in the late '70s, began questioning the documentary capacity of photography. Instead of taking pictures of extant scenes, he built elaborate models and photographed them, presenting the prints rather than the constructions as his art. Other artists were coming up with similar strategies at the time—Laurie Simmons, James Welling, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince—all departing from the tradition of straight photography and its commitment to reality.

As the first generation of post-modern artists, they treated photography as one tool among many to create the images they wanted. During the past 25 years, their subversive strategies have proved successful as the artists' photographs have found their way into museums and art history.

The cordial Casebere, with cropped dark beard and sharp blue eyes, works in a roomy apartment in an East Village

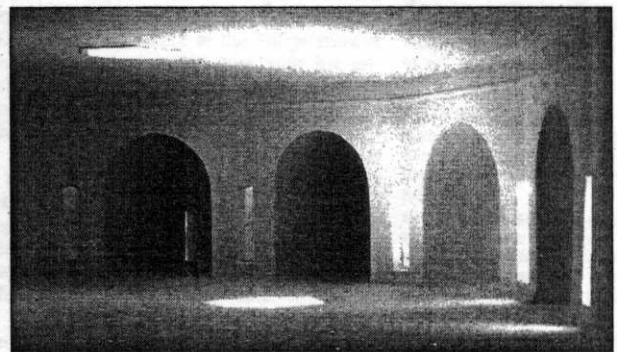
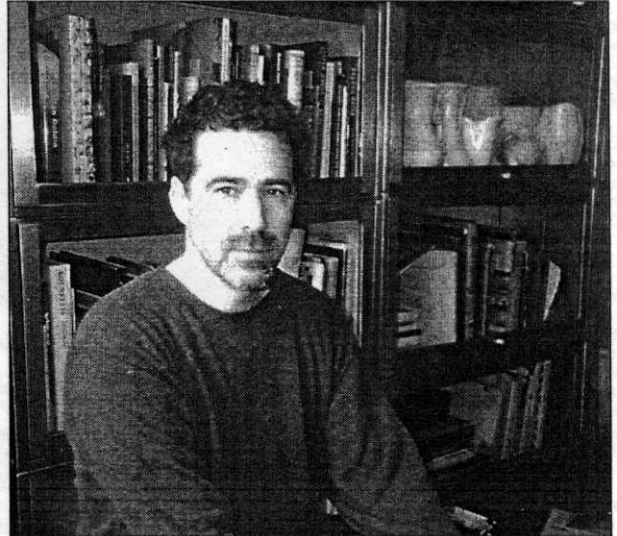


building he bought in the 1980s. The living room is crowded with carefully detailed Styrofoam and cardboard models of buildings, including the inside of Phillips Academy. A view camera on a tripod, draped with a black drop-cloth to block out light, is trained on the model of the hallway scene, with poured resin water. Looking into the viewfinder, one sees the miniature flood glowing under aluminum-shaded lights.

Inviting a visitor into his book-lined office, Casebere offers fresh-

baked croissants bought that morning at the bakery near his house in Brooklyn, where he lives with artist Lorna Simpson and their baby daughter, Zora. He flops onto a sofa and hesitatingly explains the genesis of the new work, which is also on view through July 31 at Phillips Academy's Addison Gallery of American Art.

"I went up to Andover last fall and then built two models based on different spaces I liked: the pink hall with the vaulted ceiling



Photos courtesy of JAMES CASEBERE

Silvery waters contrast with pink walls in a model of Phillips Academy, left, photographed by Casebere, top. "Converging Hallways," above, comes from an earlier series based on institutional interiors.

and the crown molding, and the blue hall with the sunburst pattern over the doors. Around the same time, I was doing pictures of flooded arches, which look as though they are underground. But in those pictures, the water looks like it belongs under the arches. The water doesn't look as though it belongs in the classrooms. To me, the imagery is Gothic."

The pictures are luminous with shades of iridescent pastel from the artificial light thrown on the resin water and the plaster-coated

walls. They seem a rapturous departure for Casebere, who has spent most of the last decade making sober pictures of painstakingly handcrafted—and unflooded—prison cells and asylums. Still, they are part of his ongoing interest in using architecture as metaphor for social, historical and cultural inquiry.

Referring to the 220-year-old Phillips Academy, the artist says, "I'm interested in the origins of different institutions. This is as

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"JAMES CASEBERE," Grant Selwyn Fine Art, 341 N. Canon Drive, Beverly Hills. Dates: Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., through July 8. Phone: (310) 777-2400.

