

SEANKELLY

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Art Agency, Partners

in other words

The powerful and powerless



James Casebere, Grandstand (2016) © James Casebere, courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York

James Casebere, *Grandstand* (2016)

If photographs could talk, this one would declaim, loudly and with great confidence. An ominously lit image of an official grandstand anchored by more than dozen flagpoles and topped with glowering clouds, it depicts the moment before its mysterious occupant climbs onto the stage.

Despite being mute, the photo—on view at Sean Kelly gallery in a show titled "Emotional Architecture"—speaks volumes about another kind of art: propaganda. Among the powerful narratives it channels are George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, Philip K. Dick's alternative-reality fiction *The Man in the High Castle* (as well as the current award-winning Amazon TV series based on the book) and the "fake news" discussed daily by our current POTUS.

The creator of this picture, American artist James Casebere, has photographed handmade dioramas since 1975. His carefully considered tableaux—derived from both fictional and real spaces—often respond to current events, but they always address the enduring challenges posed by documentary photography. Casebere's so-called "constructed photographs" are primarily concerned with using the medium as a means of apprehending (or misapprehending) the world. As the artist once told *Time Magazine*: "I am interested in how photography creates and reconstructs reality."

Despite the incredible verisimilitude built into *Grandstand*, this image, like all of Casebere's photographs, essentially constitutes an elaborate fiction made convincingly unreal. A dramatically lit miniature handmade from modest materials like cardboard, colored paper and Styrofoam, the image invites the viewer to experience a facsimile of reality made uncanny.

Based on a hieratic view of the Nazi party's tribune constructed at Nuremberg in 1935, Casebere recreates the upper section of the massive *Zeppelinfeld* as designed by Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler's favorite architect. The opposite of Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (1935), *Grandstand* is a masterpiece of anti-propaganda.