

James Welling

January 17 – February 28, 2009

The Galerie Nelson-Freeman is pleased to present a new exhibition of the American photographer James Welling. Since the end of the 1970s the artist has continually explored and questioned the medium of photography both in terms of the different subjects that he treats and the different methods he uses. The works of James Welling have been shown on various occasions in Europe and the United States. In 2000 the Wexner Center for the Arts (USA) devoted a retrospective to the entire body of his work, and this exhibition was repeated by the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. In 2002 a second retrospective focusing on abstraction and color in James Welling's photography was held at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels. More recently, his photographs were shown in Los Angeles in the Centre Pompidou exhibition « *Los Angeles 1955-1985* ». In 2008 he participated in the Whitney Biennale, and in April 2009 his works from the 1970s will be included in the « *The Pictures Generation* » exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

After an initial series of photos of architecture, presenting buildings designed by H.H. Richardson in the 1980s, James Welling chose to present a new architectural series, begun in 2006, for his seventh exhibition at the gallery. This series was originally commissioned by the New York Magazine for the publication of an article about the American architect Philip Johnson (1906-2005), considered to be one of the major figures of modern and Postmodern architecture. His glass house was built between 1947 and 1949 in New Canaan, Connecticut, a tribute to the famous *Farnsworth House*, designed by Mies Van Der Rohe. Surprising in its simplicity, with this house Philip Johnson made one of the fantasies of modern architecture come true : transparency. Other architectures of the site appear throughout James Welling's photographs, in particular the library or the guest house.

The iconic theme of the glass house gives the artist the opportunity to explore the photographic medium through the element that constitutes the leitmotif of his work : light. Using different tinted filters placed in front of the objective, James Welling explores three types of themes : the house, different views of the interior, and the pavillon on the lake, thus alternating and manipulating colors in an unusual way.

Under the glass roof, James Welling presents his very first film, « *Lake Pavilion* », made in 2009 with a low-definition digital camera. As for the series of photographs, the artist uses color filters placed in front of the objective of his camera, thus giving the image strong saturation and luminosity. In a loop of about six minutes, we follow and hear the artist's steps as he paces around in the pavillon of the lake, alternating close-ups of the pavillon and the snow-covered landscape around it.

On the first floor, we discover three unique small formats of the Glass House series, on which James Welling worked with acrylic paint. This is a method that he had never explored before, and it gives his photos a certain dynamic pictorial energy.

James Welling is an artist for whom the photographic medium hides many more mysteries which he seeks to uncover through experimentation : the methods he uses show the care he devotes to the creation of the photographic image. This image is not the reflection of a single reality but rather the mode of perception of a multitude of variations, and this same idea appears in the principle of seriality. The referent is sometimes identifiable in appearance, but the main subject of James Welling's work is light – the different ways in which it is seized and the different forms in which it is shown.