

GALERIE MARIAN GOODMAN

JAMES WELLING

Chronology

25 January – 2 March 2017

Opening Tuesday 24 January from 6 to 8 p.m.

"I loved the notion of ventriloquism. The idea that the vocabulary of photography could exist independent of the subject, that I could throw my voice into a photograph, or that the photograph was creating its own voice, all that was very important." James Welling in conversation with Hal Foster

Marian Goodman Gallery is pleased to present its first exhibition devoted to photography by James Welling. In parallel, the Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K) in Ghent will hold a major retrospective of the artist's work, entitled *Metamorphosis*, which will subsequently travel to the Kunstforum in Vienna.

The exhibition *Chronology* showcases new works and a selection of both recent and important photographs from the 1970s. During his early years, James Welling experimented with painting, dance, video, sculpture, and performance, before eventually focusing on photography in the mid-1970s. Self-taught, he began exploring the medium's possibilities by experimenting with various techniques (Polaroid film, gelatin silver prints, inkjet prints, photograms, and chemigrams, among others). Interested above all in the unpredictable character of photography, Welling deliberately explored a variety of themes, engaging with materiality, abstraction, color, and spatiality. The exhibition illustrates the full range of the artist's work, highlighting formal and conceptual continuity.

A pioneering artist, Welling constantly invents new *modi operandi*, many of which take place entirely in the darkroom. Inspired by the work of Moholy-Nagy, *Hands* (1975/2016) gave rise to photograms of the artist's hands which he developed as negatives. *"I divide photography into lens-based pictures and photograms. The lens-based model is based on the Renaissance idea of picture, whereas the photogram is a shadow of an object on a photographic surface. Neither is entirely abstract because both connect to a referent."* Welling has continued to develop this technique, as demonstrated in *New Flowers* (2016). However unlike his series *Flowers* (2004–07), he has digitally constructed these photograms from multiple negatives. Another technique bypassing the use of a camera, the chemigram makes it possible to create images with light, chemical solutions, and happenstance as the only raw materials. Welling employs this method in the series *Chemical* (2015–16) which blurs the boundary between photography and painting.

Color is key to the works featured in the exhibition. Welling's early chromatic experiments date back to the 1970s when he would intensify the color of his Polaroids, such as *Red Dawn* (1976), by heating the prints over a gas stove. It was not until he taught at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), between 1995 and 2016, that he refined his chromatic research; the series *Degradés* (2005) most strikingly exemplifies the results. *"As I became sensitized to unnatural colors, I realized that they were not unnatural – I just hadn't noticed them. Becoming attuned to color has led me to think that we actually see more color than we normally perceive. I guess in some way I'm trying to liberate color."* Variations in color occasionally participate in the construction of images. This is the case in *Glass House (Lavender Mist)* (2014), where Welling used a lavender-tinted lens filter that interacted with the see-through construction of the house. In the series *Choreograph*, however, colors obtained through the use of Photoshop are an essential part of the work, created by the superposition of three black-and-white photographs in the RGB colors channels of the program. In his *Meridian* photographs taken in a printing factory in Rhode Island, Welling acknowledges the connection between mechanical reproduction and photography by subtly altering the colors in the digital file.

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Although in 1976 Welling decided to devote himself full-time to photography, he has not completely excluded other artistic disciplines from his practice, architecture being among his chief sources of inspiration. The fragmented black-and-white images of buildings photographed at night in the *Los Angeles Architecture* series, or his Polaroids illustrate his fascination with space and volume. The series *Glass House* (2006-2014) is entirely focused on a house designed by the architect Philip Johnson in 1949 in New Canaan, CT, and is treated as a giant sculpture, photographed in different seasons. Similarly, in *Choreograph*, the art of dance—which Welling also studied and used to practice in college—returns to center stage. The artist superimposes images of professional dancers taken during rehearsals with shots of architecture by Paul Rudolph, Rudolf Steiner and Marcel Breuer as well as the landscapes of Connecticut or Switzerland. These barely discernible landscapes serve both as the backdrop and a stage set for the dancing figures. Lastly, as painting has always been of great importance to Welling ; *Seascape*, a new film showcased in the exhibition, expresses this affinity : here he uses sequences of a 16mm film shot in the early 1930s by his grandfather as a study for a seascape painting. The artist digitally colorized the 16mm film using samples from that painting and his brother composed a musical score of accordions and drums.

James Welling was born in Hartford, CT, in 1951. He lives and works in New York City. After studying at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA, Welling obtained a BFA and an MFA from the California Institute of the Arts in Los Angeles (Cal Arts), where he attended John Baldessari's course on "Post Studio Art." Welling was counted as a member of the "Picture Generation," alongside such artists as Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, and Richard Prince, hailed for their innovative approach to photography in the 1970s–80s. Between 1995 and 2016, he was a Professor in the Department of Art at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA); and since 2012 he has guest lectured at Princeton University. Two major exhibitions, respectively in 2012 and 2013, offered an overview of his work as a whole: *Monograph*, organized by the Cincinnati Art Museum and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and *The Mind on Fire*, held at the MK Gallery in Milton Keynes, England, at the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, and at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, Canada. In 2014, Welling received the Infinity Award presented by the International Center of Photography, New York and, in 2016, the Excellence in Photography Award from the Julius Shulman Institute in Woodbury, CA.

Welling's works enrich the collections of such international museums as the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; the Vancouver Art Gallery in Canada; the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT; and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in Germany.

On the occasion of the exhibition opening, January 24, James Welling will give a lecture at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts in Paris, at 10:30 a.m.

The exhibition *Chronology* continues in the exhibition space of the Librairie Marian Goodman, 66 rue du Temple. The bookshop, also opening on January 24th, offers a selection of art books, exhibition catalogues, printed matters and artists' editions. It has the same opening hours as the gallery, from Tuesday to Saturday, 11a.m. to 7p.m.

Upcoming exhibition:
William Kentridge, *O Sentimental Machine*
15 March – 15 April 2017
Opening March 15 from 6 to 8 p.m.

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