



James Casebere's photo-tableaux, *Utility Room* (left) and *Sutpen's Cave*, installed in St. George Terminal, Staten Island.

# Uncanny Images

In photographs of models of his own making, James Casebere plays with our sense of the real, questioning the photograph as document, seeing it rather as simulacrum, and evoking scenes that are at once familiar and phantasmal.

BY HAL FOSTER

James Casebere is a genre artist, a photographer of bizarre tableaux: out of paper, mat board and plaster he makes little models which he lights "naturally," photographs, then usually destroys. Whether the everyday made strange (as in *Kitchen Table* where a shadow cast by a cardboard man looms among pots and pans) or the exotic made tame (as in *Sutpen's Cave* where a cave is staged with a grand colonnade), all these shadowy white images seem slightly deranged. Though homey, even home-

ly, the photographs are not quite right: they have the scalar oddity of dreams that will not be contained; and like *natures mortes* come alive, they blur the line between true and false, real and imaginary. Neither models nor copies of worldly things (no original or referent exists), they are more properly phantasms—as if here the symbolic had somehow usurped the real, or a dream or memory were projected before our eyes.

An encounter with these images, then, is strange, all the more since

now it may occur in a public space—the St. George Terminal of the Staten Island Ferry.<sup>1</sup> High in this everyday place of routine repetitions, Casebere has set five large photo-tableaux in deep black light boxes, their size and format much like the ads and signs elsewhere in this space. *Kitchen Table* appears above a post office. *Sutpen's Cave* is set above a jeweler's store beside *Utility Room*, complete with open drawers and generic box, bottle, racket and ball. *Waterfall*, a suburb-scape of rocks, water and vine, hangs

