

AMERICAN CONNECTION

While the city sleeps, **Michael Massaia** walks the streets and takes photographs with his large-format camera. He talks to Susan Burnstine about uncommon experiences and how insomnia has helped shape his work.

Often artists are haunted or challenged by the very thing that drives them to create. New Jersey photographer Michael Massaia has suffered serious bouts of insomnia for years and has turned lemons into lemonade by creating a number of haunting bodies of work while wandering about New York City and New Jersey in the early morning hours.

During the past 15 years Massaia has created several personal series including *Deep In A Dream*, *Afterlife* and *No Past, No Present, No Future*, all of which have been inspired by the world he experienced while walking alone in the dark. 'The isolation can be almost electric, perhaps unsettling, but ultimately it feels like it's where I'm supposed to be,' he says. 'Living in such a populated area, there's something very exciting about depicting the area in an uncommon way. After 2am everything changes. Good things happen, bad things happen, but I always felt I was on an adventure.'

Isolation, solitude, disconnection and voyeurism permeate every image Massaia creates, making one ask if creating this work assists him through processing ongoing questions



Half Moon, 2009.

and issues or if it merely helps fill time during his unrest. 'I think both play a role in why I create a specific body of work, but longing also plays a major role. A good deal of my work is simply what I wish was true. I

don't think anything is resolved by what I create, but that's a nice thought to have,' he says. Iconic locations such as Central Park, Grand Central Station and the New Jersey Shore are frequently featured in Massaia's work,

yet they're never depicted in a conventional manner. 'They're all connected by the feeling of experiencing a very common place in an uncommon way,' he says. 'Central Park only makes sense to me when it's vacant. There's nothing compelling to me about that park at 2pm on a beautiful Sunday afternoon.'

Massaia documented the amusement piers that line the New Jersey coastline in his series *Afterlife* in an attempt to create images that echo how he experienced these places while growing up. 'I never went on the rides, but they captivated me. Photographing them on those rickety piers early in the morning was my way of saying goodbye to something, but at the same time finally having my moment with it as well.'

Massaia carries a cumbersome large-format camera while roaming the streets in the dark, which has created a fair share of problems and issues. He's been chased, screamed at and has even engaged in countless fights, but admits he's lost some of his nerve in the past year and is trying to figure out how to regain his former confidence.



Northwest View, 2014.



South View #2, 2012.



Clock Installation, 2016.

Currently his favorite cameras are a modified Sinar X, 8x10in /5x7in and a custom 5x7in. He largely uses Ilford FP4 and Kodak Tmax 100 film and develops all his films in a variety of staining developers.

His stunning prints have to be viewed in person to appreciate the craftsmanship. For years he focused on platinum prints, but

now he mostly makes silver gelatin prints that are as large as 44x60in. He first makes a series of coloured inter-negatives from the original in-camera negative by using different output devices, including an image setter and pigment printer. 'Most of my prints are exposed multiple times with different coloured lighting, which allows me to create split

contrast prints. I process all of my prints in large open trays and will selectively tone them using gold, selenium and sepia.'



Private Gardens, 2013.

ANDOVER

Addison Gallery of American Art

Until 3 March, 2019

Contemplating the View:

American Landscape Photographs

Features Carleton Watkins, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Robert Adams, Lois Conner and Marcia Resnick

addison.andover.edu

CHICAGO

Catherine Edelman Gallery

2 November to 22 December

Michael Koerner

edelmangallery.com

CLEVELAND

Chrysler Museum of Art

Until 27 January, 2019

From Ansel Adams to Infinity

chrysler.org

LOS ANGELES

Annenberg Space for Photography

Until 13 January, 2019

Joel Sartore:

Photo Ark – One Man's Quest to

Document the World's Animals

annenbergphotospace.org

NEW YORK CITY

China Institute

Until 2 December

Art of the Mountain: Through the

Chinese Photographer's Lens

chinainstitute.org

PORTLAND

Blue Sky Gallery

Until 30 December

In Transit: Photography by

George Awde, Daniel Castro Garcia,

Gohar Dashti and Tanya Habjouqa

blueskygallery.org

RIVERSIDE

California Museum of Photography

Until 27 January, 2019

Bringing the War Home: World War I

Through the Stereoscope

artsblock.ucr.edu

SAN FRANCISCO

de Young Museum

Until 31 March, 2019

Steve Kahn: The Hollywood Suites

deyoung.famsf.org