S.M.A.K. is pleased to present ‘Metamorphosis’ a retrospective exhibition by the American artist James Welling (*1951, Hartford, Connecticut). Presenting more than 20 series of works from the early 1970s to today, it shows how his oeuvre bridges gaps between image and matter, representation and abstraction, sentiment and infrastructure, present and past. Welling’s practice of exploring the conventions, styles and histories of photography extends to encompass film, sculpture and painting.

James Welling’s works refer astutely to the history of American painting, at the same time connecting it with the critical, post-modern debates held among the Pictures Generation in the early 1980s, where concepts of authorship, originality and representation were prominent. The exhibition features fundamental series such as Diary/Landscapes (1977–86), where Welling juxtaposes images of journals kept by his ancestors with Connecticut winter landscapes, as well as Aluminum Foil (1980–81), which stretches the limits of visual and verbal representation further onto a seemingly abstract level. Photographic series such as Railroad Photographs (1987–94) and Light Sources (1992–2001) show how profoundly Welling questions the conventions of documentary photography.
Examples from *Glass House* (2006–09), a meditation on Philip Johnson’s 1949 residence, are on display with works from Welling’s *Degradés* (1986–2006), pure colour photograms created entirely in the darkroom, as well as images from more recent series such as *Wyeth* (2010–15) and *Choreograph* (2014–16), which mirror his own biography in those of fellow artists as well as in the history of photography. A new film work titled *Seascape* (2017) premieres at S.M.A.K. and stands at the centre of this exhibition. It appropriates film material shot by Welling’s grandfather in the 1930s, which Welling has recoloured and scored with a soundtrack created by his brother.

In addition to the conceptual basis of his practice, emotional states such as melancholy and nostalgia are a distinct presence in the work of James Welling. His photographic practice is comparable to that of a “ventriloquist” as he himself once described it, meaning that he embraces many artistic languages through the filter of photography. And lastly, ‘Metamorphosis’ addresses the relational approach of Welling’s oeuvre, the way in which new series tend to originate in existing work through the artist’s continuous exploration of his own visual production.


**Catalogue:**

A catalogue published by Prestel will accompany the exhibition. Designed by Joseph Logan (NY), the volume contains a conversation between Hal Foster and James Welling, as well as introductory essays by Heike Eipeldauer and Martin Germann.

**Tour dates:**

S.M.A.K., Ghent, 28 January - 16 April 2017  
(Curator: Martin Germann)

Kunstforum Wien, 5 May - 16 July 2017  
(Curator: Heike Eipeldauer)

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