

Cat. 11 *Threshold Series*, 1996-1998, by Allan deSouza.
C-print, each print 3 x 4" image on 16 x 16" paper. Photo:
Courtesy of the artist.

Allan deSouza

Seeing is (not necessarily) Believing

Steven Nelson

An empty airport waiting area, the Irish countryside, Las Vegas casinos, and tabletop models of cities and landscapes constitute just some of Allan deSouza's arenas of production. Painsstaking in composition and exacting in detail, DeSouza's photographs are at times lyrical, at times seductive, at times hilarious, and at all times haunting. Far from autonomous, deSouza's works are situated within social and ideological processes, interrupting the ways that such processes define and redefine power relationships.

DeSouza's pictures throw up subjectivity as an area of contestation, raise questions about racial difference and visual representation, and excavate the ways in which nationalist mythologies simultaneously accentuate difference and repress it. In exploring such issues, deSouza unhinges visual images from their status as containers of *a priori* truth; he deconstructs ingrained notions of vision as neutral. His practice highlights the social contingency of representation, visibility, and the very making of meaning.

DeSouza's recent work incorporates mythologies of American nationalism, ongoing histories of imperialism, and the structure of vision to play with the boundaries erected between the artificial and the real. *Everything west of here is Indian country* (2003), for example, mines the White City built for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (Fig. 29). Opened on May 1, 1893, by President Grover Cleveland, the White City, designed to upstage Paris's 1889 Universal Exposition, signaled the ascendance of the United States as a world power—one that would increasingly participate in imperial endeavors and wield its weight as an industrialized economy. The White City did not articulate an empire in the process of becoming; it insisted that the process had already been achieved. For deSouza, the White City's neoclassical architecture at once framed the United States as an empire—a new *Roman* empire—and suppressed the racial and economic tensions that plagued the United States at the time.¹ DeSouza's comparison between the United States and Rome finds a potent analogy in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who insist, "It is striking how strongly this American experiment [with a new principle of sovereignty] resembles the political theory inspired by ancient constitutional experience, and specifically the political theory inspired by imperial Rome!"² While the architecture of the White City repressed the role of race in the making of America, descriptions of the exposition's opening ceremonies highlighted the ascendance of white Americans over Native Americans: the *New York Times* reported, "Along the front of the Administration Building, just below the spring of the dome, stood fifty Indians in full war

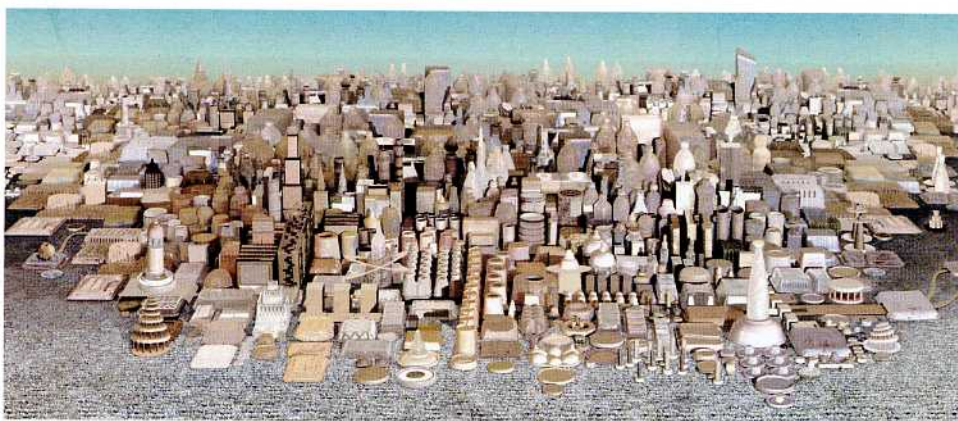


Fig. 29 *Everything west of here is Indian country*, 2003, by Allan deSouza. C-print, 50.8 x 127 cm. Photo: Courtesy of the artist.

Cat. 12 (a-f) *The Searchers*, 2003, by Allan deSouza, C-prints, dimensions vary. Photo: Commissioned by the Museum for African Art, NY, Courtesy of the artist.





Cat. 12 c-d

