About the cover art  From 2008 to 2010 artists Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse documented the life of the fifty-four-story residential building known as Ponte City that dominates the skyline of Johannesburg. Taking a photograph out of every window, of every internal door, and of every television set in the structure, they created three light boxes, each almost four meters tall, that present the resulting images in exact order, floor by floor, and apartment by apartment.

The light boxes provide a view into a place that the artists call the “crucible of Johannesburg’s urban mythology.” Built in 1976 to house affluent whites, Ponte City was separated by apartheid from the Soweto uprisings of that year. With the coming of democracy, the building was gradually abandoned and reoccupied by illegal immigrants and the urban poor. Tales of brazen crime, suicides, snakes, ghosts, and four stories of trash in its inner courtyard lent the building a legendary status.

In 2007, developers bought Ponte City and began a renovation project, recasting the building as a luxury dwelling with apartments decorated on themes of “Old Money,” “Glam Rock,” and “Future Slick.” When sales failed to pan out, the project went bankrupt in 2008 and a new life cycle of rehabilitation began amidst the detritus of gutted apartments.

Ponte City won the Discovery Award of the Rencontres d’Arles Photography Festival in 2011. Subotzky has exhibited in South Africa, Italy, the Netherlands, and in New York at the Museum of Modern Art. Waterhouse is the creative director of Colors magazine and has exhibited in South Africa and Europe. For more information on the project and the artists, see www.subotzkystudio.com.

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Cover:
Widows, Ponte City, 2008–2010 (Detail)
Lightbox
388 x 128.4 cm
Michael Sabotzky and Patrick Waterhouse
Courtesy Goodman Gallery