



## ***Sea of Ice: Echoes of the European Romantic Era***

February 2 – August 24, 2025

Ala Story Gallery

This focused exhibition features the SBMA's James Casebere's grand color photograph, *Sea of Ice* (2014), as its starting point. Casebere based his 21st century composition on German artist Caspar David Friedrich's (1774-1840) famous 1823-24 painting of the same name, renowned for its dramatic hyper-realistic vision of an Arctic naval disaster. In his studio, Casebere built a sculptural tableau that resembled but did not copy Friedrich's painting; he then photographed and dismantled the model, making a permanent photograph of a temporary sculpture that itself was based on a painting from exactly two centuries ago.

Meditations on human aspirations gone awry, both *Sea of Ice* images by Casebere and Friedrich embody the early 19<sup>th</sup> century era of European Romanticism. At this time, Romantic artists, writers and composers questioned 18<sup>th</sup> century scientific and philosophical theories that purported to explain the complexities of the universe and of human experience through human reason alone.

To the Romantics such explanations removed an individual person's unique experience of their world; and were thought insufficient to get at the truth of what it felt and meant to be alive in a radically changing era. As a result, followers of Romanticism explored the worth and richness of an individual's inner life and imagination, both of which were threatened in the wake of the Napoleonic wars' disasters, and by the dehumanizing effects of the early decades of the Industrial Revolution.

*Sea of Ice: Echoes of the European Romantic Era* includes paintings, photographs, prints and drawings from the Museum's collection, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all of which deal in some way with the art, ideas and history of the European Romantic era. Friedrich's and Casebere's works certainly resonate with this sensibility, and, in our own era of climate change, with themes of melting Arctic and Antarctic ice as evidence of other ever-more severe and frequent calamities caused by global warming.

Other works include a hauntingly prophetic drawing by an unknown 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century artist of a ruined church in Dresden (where Friedrich lived for forty years), a quintessentially moody 1860s landscape painting of a Swedish castle at sunset by Karl Stephen Bennet, two intimate Romantic-era portraits in cameo format, and a suite of photolithographs by Darren Almond (born 1971) based on the German Romantic artist Carl Blechen's (1798-1849) travels on the Amalfi Coast.

The installation will provide texts for each object (many of which will be on view for the first time at the Museum) explaining the image's relationship to the ideas behind the European Romantic era, and its persistent relevance to and influence on today's world.



James Casebere (American, b. 1953), *Sea of Ice*, 2014. Pigment print. SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Erik Skipsey Fund, 2019.15.