

# Los Angeles Times

## Art Review: Mark Ruwedel at Gallery Luisotti

by Christopher Knight  
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The optical lushness of gold-toned silver printing collides with the visual decrepitude of ruined and half-built houses in the desert in photographs by Mark Ruwedel. The Cal State Long Beach professor has been photographing the American West for a few decades, and he displays a nuanced knowledge of its endlessly circling contradictions.

The 21 pictures at Gallery Luisotti were made over the last three years. They are given a certain urgency -- not to mention poignancy -- by the collapse of the high-flying residential real estate market

that likely drove the construction of many of the pictured buildings. The cruel fantasy of an "ownership society" pushed by politicians, banks and brokerages in the early half of this decade reverberates against the simple beauty of Ruwedel's best works.

"Desert Springs #3" shows a big, remote, partially built two-story house isolated against a rocky hill. Now abandoned amid bleak grandeur, looking like the architectural equivalent of a long-gone mastodon, it exudes a "what were they thinking" sense of puzzlement -- and loss. The rugged landscape speaks of social isolation, whether sought after or imposed.

"Hinkley #17" is a euphemistic desert ranch house, not unlike the former presidential stage-set in Crawford, Texas, its doors and windows missing and the landscaping dried up. "Dusk #22" seems to have a glimmer of life inside, although the light in the windows seems an illusion created by a setting sun.

Ruwedel works in a "New Topographics" tradition. His record of domestic ambivalence and social decay finds affinities with artists as diverse as John Divola, Judy Fiskin and Edward Burtynsky. The format is typically minimalist, with buildings frontal, light even and subjects set in a middle ground. Ruwedel puts considerable empty landscape between a viewer and a house -- a respectful distance, but one that also effectively isolates "home" as an emotional place midway between an infinity of sky and the intimacy of hard earth beneath the camera's tripod.