



## ARTIST STATEMENT

GREG WILKEN

*Castaic* is a 16mm film and book. As a model, it's more inline with current projects I'm working on. This form, a handmade edition of books with a film tucked inside, re-appears often. Castaic is a suburb of Los Angeles, California. On March 12, 1928 one of the worst civil engineering disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century occurred when the St. Francis Dam failed, killing 500 people, sweeping many out to sea. It's inexplicably a largely forgotten event. William Mulholland, who designed the dam, was largely blamed for the disaster after its failure, thus ending his amazing career as the father of the city's water system. Mulholland died not long after. As I walked by the Mulholland Memorial fountain at the corner of Riverside Drive and Los Feliz Boulevard in Los Angeles, the project was conceived. For anyone who has seen it on a summer night, its slowly changing colors seem both garish and oddly beautiful, like Hollywood. As I looked into the fountain's construction, I was led to Mr. Mulholland's ignominious end. The film, *Castaic*, was made at the fountain with an ultra high-speed camera that captures 4,000 frames per second. It records a pair of hands cupping water from the fountain. As the water falls back into the pool, the droplets pass fragments of colored light, reflecting into the lens. The book, *Castaic*, documents the research process on location at the dam site today, which is only ruins; and as I dug through the archives at the Department of Water and Power for information. This book also delves into the mechanics of the camera, drawing an analogy between shattered film pieces and the shattered concrete of the dam.

The second book project, *An Atlas of Some Fixed Stars*, is an extension of a list of dates recording the appearances of Halley's comet. I was reminded that, as a child, I had gone with my father to view the comet in February 1986. Not being able to stay awake, I missed the spectacle entirely. As it were, the 1986 return of the comet was a great disappointment; the comet did not pass close enough to the Earth to produce the brilliant apparition that was expected. The artwork is a book of photographs, depicting the sky over Los Angeles for every night Halley's comet returned between 1 AD and prior to the invention of photography. The images were created using star charts that were transferred to black seamless paper, which was then punctured to shine like a star when a light was placed behind it, and a long exposure photograph was taken.

The last series, book drawings, are relatively straightforward. Using books from my personal library, whose previous owners had signed or otherwise made a mark in the first pages, photo realistic drawings of their title page or front page were made. The book titles chosen make a not-so-subtle allusion to the relationship between art, the index, and ownership.

-Greg Wilken, September 2008

*From an email correspondence with Gladys Hernando and Jessica Minckley*