

Hans Wilschut, *Sealed Property*, 2012, photograph. © Hans Wilschut and courtesy Galerie Ron Mandos



SEALED PROPERTY

A photograph by Hans Wilschut suggests the contradictions of Lagos, writes **JOSEPH GERGEL**

It is an image of the contradiction of the future urban metropolis in the developing world. Hans Wilschut's *Sealed Property* reveals the extremities of the ever-expanding development of the city of Lagos, Nigeria. The photograph is in many ways a portrait, albeit an unconventional one in that it is an urban landscape, portraying the vast city enlivened by different architectures and building scales. The subject is a massive structure that looms large between small shanties and modern skyscrapers. It is a building abandoned, starkly black in comparison to the rest of the city centre, sealed and apparently long unused. Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria, the second-fastest growing city in Africa and the seventh-fastest growing city in the world. As the city transforms with the rapid pace of urban migration and an explosion of development that is dissolving barriers and leading to new types of civic planning, there are inevitable gaps, gaps that reveal a city in transition.

Wilschut's photographic projects focus on the urban centre, and are executed in developing cities around the globe that are on the brink of explosion. In many ways, Wilschut portrays the archetypal concrete jungle, devoid of human presence and exuding an aura of sterility that foreshadows a dystopian future. Yet, on closer inspection – demanded by his use of a large-format camera and mural-scale prints – the viewer finds suggestions of human habitation. In *Sealed Property*, the central subject is juxtaposed with a small church looming in the grand façade's shadow. There are residential buildings that have thus far escaped the process of urban gentrification. As much as the human subject is left out of Wilschut's photographs, its essence remains. It is in the middle space between expanding development and individual experience that his images speak to the spirit of the city.

Wilschut's *Sealed Property* is currently exhibited in the annual LagosPhoto Festival. In its third year, LagosPhoto is the first and only international arts festival of photography in Nigeria. Events include exhibitions, workshops and outdoor displays of large-scale prints throughout the city – aimed at reclaiming public spaces and engaging the general public in multifaceted stories of Africa. LagosPhoto presents a contemporary and historical visual essay of the continent to both a local and global audience.

This year's edition, under the theme 'Seven Days in the Life of Lagos', explores the energy and vibrancy that make the city of Lagos a unique cultural environment. LagosPhoto nominated twenty-nine local and international photographers to execute long-term projects in Lagos that documented aspects of life in the city, with topics including religion, architecture, culture, nightlife, economy, music, lifestyle, sports, government and infrastructure, among others. By providing a plural point of view that includes the many facets of daily life in the diverse communities of Lagos, LagosPhoto 2012 sets out to document the city of Lagos in a comprehensive and nuanced way that reveals the big picture by focusing on the minute details of social life. During a month-long exhibition, LagosPhoto expands to eight different exhibitions throughout the city of Lagos.

Hans Wilschut's *Sealed Property* is emblematic of LagosPhoto's mission to document and inspire change. As the festival embraces the development of contemporary photography by Nigerian artists, it also engages an international programme that brings leading photographers to Nigeria to document the dynamic cultural landscape.

Joseph Gergel is the Co-Curator of LagosPhoto 2012.