

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY IN THE UNITED STATES OF THE WORK OF THOMAS DEMAND

Artist Is Best Known for Photographs of Life-Size Paper Models That Challenge Perceptions of Reality

Thomas Demand

Special Exhibitions Gallery, third floor
March 4–May 30, 2005

NEW YORK, March 1, 2005— From March 4 to May 30, 2005, The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Thomas Demand***, the first comprehensive survey of the artist’s work in the United States. Demand (German, b. 1964) combines craftsmanship and conceptualism to create inventive photographs of his meticulously fabricated life-size paper models depicting both historical and contemporary scenes. The exhibition features 25 large-scale photographs made between 1993 and 2005, and the U.S. premiere of his most recent film *Trick* (2004). Organized by Roxana Marcoci, Assistant Curator, Department of Photography, the exhibition is presented in the Special Exhibitions Gallery on the third floor.

Regarding photography as a “constructed reality,” Demand starts with a preexisting image usually, but not always, culled from the media. These can be scenes from German history as well as from current events, such as the 2000 American presidential election. He then translates the images into life-size paper models, using colored paper and cardboard to re-create entire rooms, parking lots, facades, and hallways and to simulate such diverse materials as wood, plastic, metal, and cloth. Despite the illusions he creates, the artist deliberately leaves minute imperfections visible, and the lack of detail and the uniform lighting reveal the models as constructions. The resulting photograph challenges the viewer’s perception of reality. Once photographed, the models are destroyed.

Initially trained as a sculptor, Demand began photographing his ephemeral constructions for documentation, but by 1993, the paper constructions were designed expressly for photography. He photographs the models with a large-format camera equipped with a telescopic lens for enhanced resolution and heightened realism. The large-scale photographs are displayed behind Plexiglas and without a frame.

Ms. Marcoci states: “In an age in which reality is dominated by mediated images, the definition of what constitutes the real has unremittingly been put into question. The degree to which the reality of the picture makes us think of the ways in which the real is actually constructed is central to Demand’s approach to photography.”

Devoid of human presence, the places Demand depicts are usually historically significant, although he provides few clues that would allow for easy identification. The artist's personal history offers one way of interpreting his work: in a country filled with Third Reich-era buildings, the postwar period in which Demand grew up held the promise of reconstruction. This theme informs many of his works, among them *Staircase* (1995). In this photograph, the artist re-creates the Bauhaus-style stairway of his secondary art school, built in the 1950s, alluding to the commonly held belief in postwar Germany that architecture could guarantee a democratic generation of moral integrity.

Some of his other images refer to the process of image making, such as *Studio* (1997). This work depicts the set of the German version of the American quiz show *What's My Line?* from the 1950s. The foreground features the contestant's table and chairs, while the brightly colored, striped background resembles television color bars.

Demand also depicts contemporary events, as in *Poll* (2001). Here, the artist reconstitutes scenes from the 2000 American presidential election and the media's reporting of the results of the voting in Florida's Palm Beach County. Selected from a group of electronic pictures issued by Reuters, *Poll* shows rows of desks topped by numberless telephones, uniform memo pads, and blank paper ballots carefully sorted into piles. The laborious process of manually recounting thousands of votes is echoed by Demand's meticulous reconstruction of the scene in paper. In *Kitchen* (2004), Demand portrays a messy kitchen derived from a news photograph of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's hideaway in his hometown of Tikrit, where he took refuge during the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Shot from a high-angle perspective, the crammed cooking area features an aluminum oven, pink plastic pitcher, egg carton, bowl of soup, and pots. Once again, a mundane sight turns out to be the coded representation of a political incident.

Demand's few scenes of nature also question the traditional mode in which photography captures reality. Among them, *Clearing* (2003) re-creates a section of the Giardini, a public garden in Venice. Made of 270,000 individually cut "leaves" of green paper, the photograph, Demand's largest to date, is cinematic in its panoramic scale and dramatic use of light. Playing on the nostalgia of the Romantic landscape tradition, Demand suggests that not even the natural environment should be taken as a given. To achieve the effect of sunlight breaking through the leaves, Demand employed a 10,000-watt lamp that is normally used in the film industry.

The cinematic quality of Demand's photographs reveals the artist's interest in filmmaking, and he has produced five 35mm films to date. His most recent film, *Trick* (2004), featured in this exhibition in its U.S. premiere, refers back to the beginnings of cinema. Based on one of the first films of the Lumière brothers, *Assiettes tournantes* (Turning Plates), of 1896, Demand's *Trick* reenacts a sequence in which a performer executes a stunt by spinning a set of bowls and plates on a tabletop.

SPONSORSHIP

The exhibition is made possible by Angelo, Gordon & Co. Generous support is provided by Mimi and Peter Haas, Ninah and Michael Lynne, and The International Council of The Museum of

Modern Art. Additional funding is provided by The Contemporary Arts Council and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art. The accompanying publication is made possible by Anna Marie and Robert F. Shapiro.

PUBLICATION

A comprehensive publication presents Demand's major works from 1993 to 2004. Ms. Marcoci provides an insightful analysis of the sources, methods, and themes of the artist's striking and provocative imagery. Jeffrey Eugenides, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Middlesex*, contributes an amusing homage that is also an illuminating appreciation of Demand's art. Available at the MoMA Stores. Hardcover \$39.95; members \$36. Please see the Publication press release for more information.

A book signing with Thomas Demand, Roxana Marcoci, and Jeffrey Eugenides will take place on Tuesday, March 1, from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. at the MoMA Design and Book Store, 11 West 53rd Street.

PROGRAMS

On April 14, a panel discussion will take place at the Museum featuring Ulrich Baer, Associate Professor of German and Comparative Literature, New York University; Wolfgang Becker, Film Director, X Filme Creative Pool, Berlin; Beatriz Colomina, Professor of History and Theory, Princeton University School of Architecture; and the artist. Moderated by Roxana Marcoci. Tickets are \$10, \$8 for members, \$5 for students with current ID, and can be purchased at the lobby information desk and the Film and Media desk.

The Goethe-Institut New York will present a conversation between the artist and Roxana Marcoci on April 16 at 3 p.m. The Goethe-Institut New York is located at 1014 Fifth Avenue. Tickets are \$10, \$8 for students with current ID and seniors. Tickets can be reserved by calling 212/439-8700 and can be picked up at the Goethe-Institut the day of the event. Tickets can also be purchased on the day of the event.

Please see the Public Programs press release for more information.

ACOUSTIGUIDE

An Acoustiguide audio tour accompanies this exhibition. This tour is available with all other MoMA Audio tours and can be accessed on one Acoustiguide player for one price—\$5, \$4.50 for Museum members. For copies of the audio tour script and CD, contact Kate Patterson, Sales & Marketing Manager, Acoustiguide, at 212/329-1229 or kpatterson@acoustiguide.com.

No. 10

Press Contact: pressoffice@moma.org