

Thomas Demand

Exhibition Information

21 June – 10 August 2003

Thomas Demand's photographs of reconstructed rooms and places invite us to explore a strange but compelling version of reality. Although what he produces is real, and, as he says, **'a photograph always describes something that existed beforehand'**, Demand's subjects are not what they first appear to be. For the places and spaces he presents to us are made entirely of paper and card. Demand builds meticulous copies of various situations, buildings, rooms, all completely devoid of people. He lights the near life-size models precisely, creating specific atmospheres within each, and photographs them. Once the image is made, the model is discarded.

Demand's subjects are reduced to pure, clean surface with little or no trace of use or age. Cool and undisturbed, they seem familiar yet also as if from another world.

'What really interests me is the world of the media. I see it as a vast landscape, a virtual domain with its cities of scandal, its towns of superstars, its marsh of murders. We are all familiar with these images, especially since some of them create contemporary myths.'

The starting point for Demand's works are everyday images from diverse sources, all widely available; documentary photos in newspapers or on the internet, locations from television, historical material from books, glimpses of the sky and everyday landscapes. His work draws on the extent to which our everyday surroundings are saturated with images, from the earth-shattering to the banal, the sublime to the ridiculous. It relies on the way in which images from distant places and other people's lives become enmeshed with our own memories and personal experience. Essentially they explore a space between the real and the imagined.

Freed from their social, cultural or narrative origins, Demand's images have a strong fictional quality. Reduced to plain paper surface, their sterility and

emptiness create the perfect surfaces onto which we can project our own memories and associations. Like film stills, they hold a moment fast, somehow suggesting a bigger event or triggering stories in our imaginations.

Though his work takes the form of often large-scale colour photographs and 35mm film, it can be likened to both painting, in its scale and colour and composition, and sculpture, in its creation of (albeit temporary) three-dimensional objects. Art critic Adrian Searle has described Demand's as a 'sculptural and filmic and almost literary' vision. Given the narrative quality that has been present for some time in his still images, it is apt that Demand has in recent years begun to set them in motion by producing 35mm films, two of which are included in this exhibition. In either format, it is fiction and its fusion with life that Demand's work explores.

In the small gallery, **Flare** is a large sequence of images made in 2002. It clearly demonstrates the way in which light and colour play a crucial role in Demand's photographs, the effect created in each varying slightly, suggesting different times of the day, or, as the sequence progresses, different seasons. These highly atmospheric images include some where the artifice is apparent and others in which it is completely convincing, almost impossible to detect the true nature. The sense of progression, of time passing throughout the sequence is enhanced by the sound spilling into the gallery from the first of two films included in the exhibition.

Hof / Yard (2002) is a short film loop that places us in a dimly lit yard at night, though it is as ever entirely fabricated from paper. The camera moves around the yard as if trying to find someone or something, accompanied by the sound of a still camera, whose flash occasionally illuminates the fence and shrubs.

'I think that nowadays there are more images in the world than world to be pictured.'

In the large gallery is a selection of Demand's photographic works from 1996 - **Panel**, the most apparently abstract, though it recreates a notice-board - to 2002. Each has its own story, which remains, however, suggested rather than explicit. Demand makes extensive research into the origins for his images. **Poll** (2001), for example, alludes to the debacle of the Florida ballot dispute during the election of U.S. President George W. Bush, while the smaller images of **Stapel / Pile** (also 2001) relate to various stages in the infamous, tortuous count. In a fitting pun, these works are the closest to the original - paper models of piles of paper.

'I choose paper because of its accessibility: it's an open material. We all have the same memories of paper.'

Just as the images from which he works are gleaned from widely available sources, the material he uses is one with which we are all familiar.

Recorder (2002), the second film, in the exhibition uses another means to set Demand's images in motion. It is animated through the construction of a sequence of still images which are run in rapid succession. It relies on the very nature of film (as opposed to video), whereby the projection of 24 frames per second generates the illusion of movement.

In the simplest of terms, a photograph records an image through a combination of light and paper. Demand's work emphasises both components, encouraging us to think about the construction of images, how they prolong fleeting moment, give them meaning and ongoing resonance, while always enjoying the unavoidable impact of colour and light on our thoughts and emotions.

'Demand looks for the shape of the soul inside the image.'

(Francesco Bonami)

One of the foremost artists of his generation in Germany, this is Thomas Demand's first major solo show in the UK. Born in Munich in 1964. He studied in Düsseldorf and London, before moving Berlin, where he continues to live. He first showed in the UK at Victoria Miro Gallery, London in 1995 and has had solo shows at Kunsthalle Zürich, Sprengel Museum, Hannover and Fondation Cartier, Paris among others. He has participated in innumerable group shows internationally, including the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, 1999; the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1996 and 2000; the Taipei Biennial in 2002; and, this summer, the 50th Venice Biennale.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue including texts by art critic Neville Wakefield and author of *The Virgin Suicides*, Jeffrey Eugenides. It is available from DCA shop for the special price of £19.95 during the exhibition.

Curated by Susanne Gaensheimer, Lenbachhaus, Munich.

Supported by

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