

Museum
Leuven

09.10.20
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THOMAS DEMAND

& Arno Brandhuber, Martin Boyce,
Rirkrit Tiravanija, Caruso St John

HOUSE OF CARD



De Standaard



DANS CE DOSSIER

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INTRODUCTION

Cet automne, M présente 'HOUSE OF CARD' : une exposition rétrospective de l'œuvre de l'artiste allemand Thomas Demand (1964) avec des contributions de Arno Brandlhuber, Martin Boyce, Caruso St John et Rirkrit Tiravanija. Demand est sculpteur de formation, mais il s'est surtout fait connaître par ses photos de modèles grandeur nature en papier et carton colorés. En détruisant les constructions en papier une fois la photographie prise, leur seule raison d'être devient l'image photographique finale.

Le travail de Demand est basé sur des images historiques ou contemporaines qu'il trouve dans les médias, dans des livres ou en ligne. En réalisant des photographies soigneusement construites à partir de modèles qu'il a lui-même créés, il établit consciemment une distance entre ses compositions et les images qu'elles dépeignent.

Pour la première fois, l'exposition 'HOUSE OF CARD' place l'architecture explicitement en relation avec la pratique de Demand. 'HOUSE OF CARD' donne un aperçu des diverses approches de Demand au niveau de la construction au cours des quinze dernières années. Ses œuvres autour du modèle, autour du décor ou de la scénographie, mais aussi des bâtiments sont inextricablement liés à l'architecture. En même temps, HOUSE OF CARD montre la relation entre les projets de Demand et ceux d'autres artistes ou architectes tels que Martin Boyce, Arno Brandlhuber, Caruso St John et Rirkrit Tiravanija.

Le titre 'HOUSE OF CARD' fait allusion à la précarité de la pratique de la Demand en tant que constructeur. Alors que l'architecture est souvent liée à des questions de durabilité, Demand repousse les limites de l'éphémère en utilisant du papier et du carton, et en détruisant systématiquement ses modèles après que la caméra les ait capturés.

Artistes, architectes et créateurs de mode

Au cœur de l'exposition se trouve la série des *Model Studies* de Demand, où le concept du modèle joue un rôle essentiel. Dans *Model Studies*, Demand s'éloigne de sa pratique habituelle. Pour la première fois, il ne photographie pas ses propres modèles mais ceux d'autres artistes, architectes et créateurs (de mode) tels que John Lautner, SANAA (Kazuyo Sejima + Ryue Nishizawa) et Azzedine Alaïa.

Oeuvres rarement montrées

En plus de cette série, l'exposition offre un aperçu de l'intérêt et de l'engagement de Thomas Demand dans le domaine de l'architecture au cours des quinze dernières années. L'exposition comprend des projets rarement montrés comme *Black Label* de 2009, qui joue également un rôle dans *untitled 2013 (thomas demands here)* de Rirkrit Tiravanija, également montré au M. *Embassy* de 2007 est une collaboration avec l'architecte allemand Arno Brandlhuber. *Nagelhaus* de 2010 est un projet non réalisé en collaboration avec Caruso St John pour l'espace public à Zurich, en

Suisse. Les pavillons Kvadrat de 2020 consistent enfin en trois bâtiments au Danemark conçus par Thomas Demand et actuellement en construction.

Nouvelle monographie

A l'occasion de cette exposition paraîtra une nouvelle monographie consacrée à Thomas Demand. L'édition en est assurée par M Louvain et MACK London, la conception graphique étant due à Julie Peeters. Le livre contient des essais de Maristella Casciato & Emily Pugh, Aude-Line Dulière, Karen Van Godtsenhoven, Valerie Verhack et Adam Caruso, et une conversation entre Thomas Demand, Hal Foster et David Chipperfield. En outre, Martin Boyce, Arno Brandhuber et Rirkrit Tiravanija ont contribué avec des inserts visuels.

Commissaire d'exposition: Valerie Verhack

MODEL

Un modèle peut être décrit comme un instrument destiné à restituer une complexité filtrée, et rendue ainsi plus facile à gérer. On utilise les modèles dans tous les domaines possibles: en politique, en médecine, dans le secteur financier etc. Entendu dans l'acception large de ce mot, le modèle figure au cœur même de l'œuvre de Thomas Demand. C'est dans 'Model' (2000) que le concept est abordé pour la première fois de manière explicite dans son œuvre. Il s'agit de la photo d'un modèle d'échelle représentant à son tour un modèle d'échelle. L'œuvre anticipe à sa façon les futures 'Model Studies' de l'artiste.

'Model' se base sur un modèle à échelle existant des années 1930 qui servit la propagande politique du Troisième Reich. Il représente le pavillon allemand de l'Exposition universelle de 1937 à Paris tel que conçu par Albert Speer, l'architecte d'Hitler. Il était destiné à être placé juste en face du pavillon soviétique. Speer a dessiné le bâtiment de façon à ce qu'il soit juste un peu plus haut que celui de ses voisins - ainsi le pavillon allemand trônait littéralement et figurativement au-dessus de tous les autres. Demand a réalisé 'Model' en 2000, lors de l'exposition universelle de Hanovre, lorsque la construction de tels pavillons nationaux a été remise en question en Allemagne.

EMBASSY

THOMAS DEMAND & ARNO BRANDLHUBER

Dans 'Embassy' (2007) Thomas Demand ne limite plus la construction de l'espace à la seule photographie. C'est la toute première installation où il crée une œuvre destinée à un espace spécifique qui renforce à son tour la portée des images. 'Embassy' se compose de neuf photos qui tracent un portrait de l'ambassade du Nigéria à Rome, depuis la façade jusqu'aux couloirs et aux intérieurs. C'est là qu'eut lieu en 2001 un vol de papiers vierges à en-tête officiel qui devaient être utilisés pour rédiger de faux contrats. Il aurait dû en découler que le président irakien Saddam Hussein avait tenté de faire l'acquisition d'uranium en Afrique. Ce sont ces faux qui allaient être invoqués par la suite par le président américain George W. Bush pour justifier une guerre.

Pour cette installation, Demand a collaboré avec l'architecte allemand Arno Brandlhuber. Les images de Demand peuvent être vues dans une constellation de parois placées de façon à évoquer la perspective selon laquelle les photos qui y figurent ont été prises. L'architecture de Brandlhuber et les images de Demand guident le visiteur à travers une construction, qui est elle-même la manipulation d'un épisode méconnu de l'histoire récente. Cette façon de faire rend très palpable des sujets d'actualité tels les *fake news*.

plus d'informations sur l'arrière-plan de cette œuvre peuvent être trouvées en pièce jointe à ce fichier: 'Thomas Demand on Yellowcake'.



Thomas Demand, Embassy I, 2007, Copyright of the artist



Thomas Demand, Embassy VII.a, 2007, Copyright of the artist

MODEL STUDIES

Depuis 2011, Thomas Demand élabore différentes séries de 'Model Studies', oeuvre au coeur desquelles figure le concept du modèle vu comme l'espace intermédiaire entre l'idée créatrice et sa réalisation. Dans ces 'Model Studies', Demand s'écarte de sa pratique habituelle. C'est ainsi que, pour la première fois, il ne photographie pas les modèles à échelle qu'il a lui-même construits, mais ceux d'autres artistes, architectes et créateurs. Ces projets montrent souvent des modèles qui n'ont jamais été réalisés: ils illustrent un potentiel, une possibilité.

Les 'Model Studies' de Demand ne sont pas des rêveries nostalgiques, mais des documents témoignant de rencontres fortuites entre Demand et les oeuvres de ces autres artistes. Contrairement à ce qu'on trouve dans la majorité de ses photos, les photos ne sont plus prises de face et de loin, mais en se tenant au contraire très près de différents modèles à échelle. Ceci débouche sur des séries d'images à l'apparence résolument abstraite et tactile en raison des textures et matériaux photographiés.

Basée sur les oeuvres de l'architecte américain John Lautner, la série 'Model Studies' (2011) est exposée au M en même temps que la sculpture 'Do Words Have Voices' (2011) de l'artiste britannique Martin Boyce. Cette sculpture accrochée au plafond fait référence – tout comme la série de Demand – à un patrimoine architectural du passé. C'est en 2012 que l'installation regroupant ces oeuvres a pu être vue pour la première fois lors de la Biennale d'Architecture à Venise. 'Model Studies II' (2015) a pour point de départ le travail du bureau d'architectes japonais SANAA. Cette série est exposée dans une deuxième salle où le papier peint, par la répétition d'un motif plissé, modifie la perception spatiale du lieu. Une troisième salle nous montre la dernière série en date, 'Model Studies IV' (2020), qui renvoie aux créations du couturier Azzedine Alaïa.

MARTIN BOYCE

Thomas Demand partage avec le sculpteur écossais Martin Boyce (°1967) une fascination pour l'architecture. Au cours de la Biennale d'architecture de Venise en 2012, ils se partageaient le même espace: Demand avec 'Model Studies I', basées sur des modèles d'architecture de John Lautner, Boyce avec 'Do Words Have Voices'. Ces deux oeuvres sont à présent à nouveau réunies au musée M.

'Do Words Have Voices' est une installation de plafond qui interroge l'histoire et le patrimoine du design et de l'architecture modernistes. En 2011, entre autres cette oeuvre a été récompensée par le célèbre Turner Prize. Elle se compose de six éléments qui peuvent être exposés ensemble ou séparément. Chaque élément est le résultat d'une recherche et d'un système de construction méticuleux. Comme le dit Boyce lui-même en parlant de cette oeuvre: "Tout tourne ici autour du paysage. Le paysage physique m'intéresse, mais le paysage psychologique tout autant: dans notre environnement couvert de bâtiments que nous parcourons tous les jours, mais que nous ne percevons que de temps à autre et qui éveille peut-être alors une résonance pertinente. L'oeuvre a pour but de renforcer ces moments rares."

JOHN LAUTNER

John Lautner (1911-1994) était un architecte américain, principalement réputé pour ses conceptions de bâtiments qui ressemblent à des sculptures fonctionnelles. Après un stage auprès de Frank Lloyd Wright, il ouvrit son propre bureau d'architecture à Los Angeles. La plupart de ses projets ont d'ailleurs été réalisés en Californie. Certains modèles de ses projets qui n'ont jamais été réalisés sont conservés à l'Institut de recherche Getty de Los Angeles. Lors d'une résidence au Getty Institute en 2013, Demand eut la possibilité d'étudier et de photographier ces maquettes. Ceci déboucha sur une série d'œuvres centrée principalement sur les qualités sculpturales de l'architecture de Lautner.



Thomas Demand, Segel #49, Model Studies I, 2011,

Copyright of the artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

SANAA (Sejima And Nishizawa And Associates)

SANAA est un bureau d'architectes de Tokyo fondé par Kazuyo Sejima et Ryue Nishizawa. Ils ont conçu, entre autres, le Musée d'art contemporain à Kanazawa, le New Museum of Contemporary Art à New York et le pavillon de verre du Toledo Museum of Art en Ohio. A Almere (Pays-Bas), ils ont signé De Kunstlinie, un théâtre et centre d'art. En 2010, Sejima et Nishizawa se sont vu conférer le Prix Pritzker, le plus prestigieux prix d'architecture au monde. Thomas Demand s'est rendu à plusieurs reprises dans les locaux de SANAA, où papiers et cartons font partie du processus conceptuel quotidien. Les maquettes d'architecture expriment en général une vision abstraite, idéalisée; elles donnent de la réalité une version filtrée, utopique presque. La série de photos de maquettes de Demand nous montre un paysage abstrait de formes architecturales, dépouillé de toute dimension ou références humaines, mais où le langage créatif résonne avec clarté.



Thomas Demand, Model Studies II, Sphere 31, 2015, Copyright of the artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

AZZEDINE ALAÏA

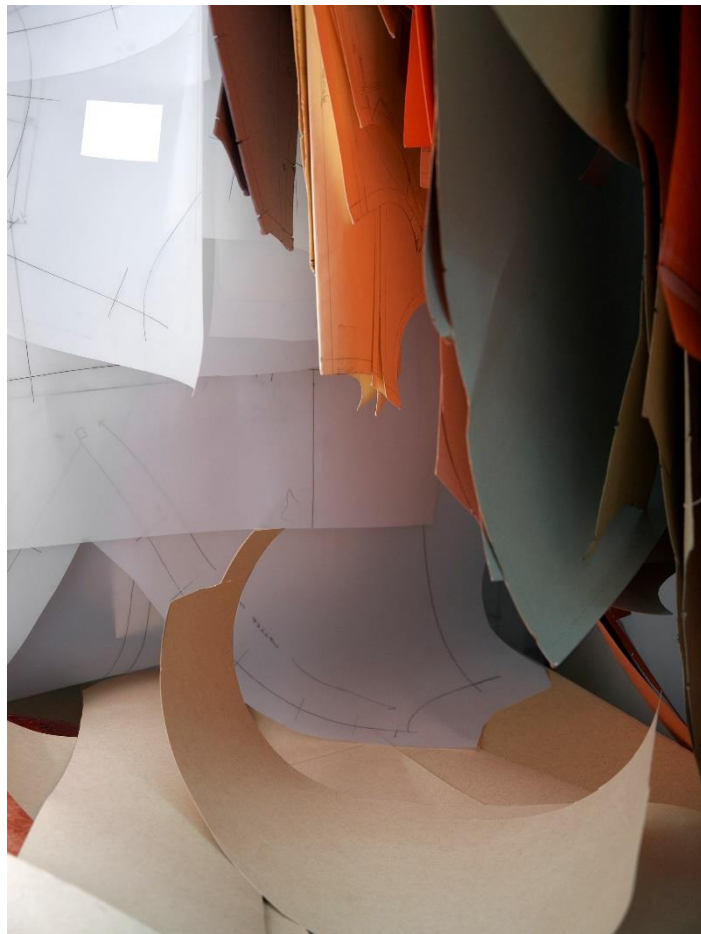
Thomas Demand a photographié les patrons utilisés par Azzedine Alaïa (1940-2017), couturier français d'origine tunisienne, pour préparer ses coupes. Ces images sont donc basées sur des objets matériels, mais l'objectif de Demand en fait quelque chose d'abstrait – on y montre quelque chose qui s'avère impossible à reconnaître. Elles n'enregistrent ni ne rendent compte de la réalité, mais se réfèrent à elle-mêmes: elle sont auto-figuratives.

Alaïa était souvent qualifié d'ingénieur ou d'architecte du tissu, et réputé pour sa quête incessante de la perfection. Il lui arrivait de travailler cinq ans au patron d'une veste - et à peine le vêtement montré lors d'un défilé, il le ramenait dans son atelier pour le retravailler encore. Son talent technique était l'égal de celui de grands maîtres comme Balenciaga ou Madame Grès dont il collectionnait les prototypes qu'il lui arrivait de défaire aux fins de les imiter ou, au contraire, de les adapter.

Alaïa est décédé il y a trois ans, mais sa collection de patrons en papier est conservée dans un entrepôt aux portes de Paris. Elle fait office de bibliothèque de modèles sur lesquels les collaborateurs de son atelier à Paris continuent de se baser. Les instructions, mesures, pointillés et spécifications techniques indiquées sur le papier sont des témoins muets de ce qui fut la main du maître, et elles constituent en même temps la garantie de ce que son entreprise a pu lui survivre. Les patrons portant parfois des taches de doigts, leurs plis et perforations, les frisures et déchirures du papier sont les reliques d'un processus de travail intense et donnent l'impression de pouvoir servir à nouveau à tout moment. Demand les montre comme étant des *ready-mades* ou objets trouvés dus à la pratique d'un autre artiste, et comme figés dans leur processus de formation.



Thomas Demand, Model Studies IV, kinglet, 2020, Copyright of the artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



Thomas Demand, Model Studies IV, chaffinch, 2020, Copyright of the artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

PAVILLONS KVADRAT

À l'invitation de l'entreprise textile Kvadrat, dont le siège est situé à Ebeltoft, au Danemark, Thomas Demand a dessiné un complexe de pavillons (2020), actuellement en cours de construction. C'est la toute première fois que des bâtiments sont construits sur la base des projets de Demand. Son approche est fondée sur une idée picturale aussi simple que métaphorique: la tente vue comme un bâtiment en matière textile. C'est en collaboration avec le bureau d'architecture britannique Caruso St John qu'il développa cette conception pour concevoir trois pavillons. Ces trois édifices prirent la forme d'une feuille de papier plié, d'une assiette et d'un chapeau en papier. Il s'agit de trois objets usuels qui suivent la logique propre au papier ou au carton, autrement dit de matériaux dans le droit fil de la pratique artistique et picturale de l'artiste.

Alors que les 'pavillons Kvadrat' sont actuellement en cours de construction à Ebeltoft, une salle du musée M témoigne de leur genèse. C'est ainsi que la vitrine contient des esquisses, des modèles en papier des bâtiments ou des cartes postales représentant des tentes, cette forme d'architecture que Demand a étudié de près pendant tout un temps. On y trouvera également des prototypes de détails d'aménagement entièrement conçus par l'artiste, comme des poignées de portes ou des luminaires. Enfin, une maquette en plâtre nous montre le paysage vallonné et l'implantation de ces trois pavillons.

NAGELHAUS

THOMAS DEMAND ET CARUSO ST JOHN

Le bureau d'architecture Caruso St John a été créé en 1990 à Londres par Adam Caruso et Peter St John. Dans leurs projets, ils accordent beaucoup d'importance au contexte où sera érigé le bâtiment à construire et ils font abondamment référence à des traditions architecturales issues d'autres époques ou cultures. C'est pourquoi il est impossible d'attribuer à leurs constructions un style, une forme ou une idéologie spécifiques.

Thomas Demand et Caruso St John ont conçu ensemble la 'Nagelhaus' (2010). Concrètement, ce terme désigne une maison de Chongqing en Chine qui a fait la une de l'actualité mondiale en 2007 comme "the most stubborn nail in history" ("le clou le plus tenace de l'histoire"), parce que ses habitants ont opposé une résistance inattendue aux promoteurs immobiliers qui voulaient y construire un centre commercial. Tous les bâtiments du quartier ont été démolis, laissant la maison toute seule dans un chantier de construction vide.

En 2008 Caruso St John et Thomas Demand remportèrent un concours en vue de redessiner la Escher-Wyss-Platz à Zurich. Leur projet consistait en une reconstruction de la maison clou ('Nagelhaus') sous un viaduc d'autoroute, en lui attribuant comme fonction: un restaurant ouvert 24 heures sur 24. Cependant, la SVP, parti de droite, a tenté d'arrêter la construction, et le projet a même fait l'objet d'un référendum. Finalement, il fut purement et simplement annulé. En fin de compte, cette maison provoqua par deux fois des protestations: en Chine contre sa démolition, en Suisse contre sa construction.

Déjà montrée en 2010 à la Biennale de Venise, la 'Nagelhaus' est à nouveau visible au musée M. L'installation se compose de la reconstruction de la maison, d'un bref montage filmé d'images tirées des médias, d'illustrations de propositions pour le diaporama reprenant des images historiques de Chinoiseries, des pavillons d'inspiration orientale sur le continent européen. Cette installation interroge les notions de rénovation et de préservation, de protestation et de développement urbain, ainsi que l'attitude de l'Occident par rapport à la Chine.



Thomas Demand, Nagelhaus, 2011, Copyright of the artist

BLACK LABEL

'Black Label' (2009) est un projet qui fait référence à un bar du même nom dans le quartier de la gare de Kitakyushu au Japon. Le café Black Label a changé plusieurs fois d'emplacement en raison des développements urbains et occupe maintenant une très petite parcelle polygonale qui détermine entièrement l'aspect du bar. Demand a reconstruit le bar en maquette dans son studio et a exposé ses photographies dans l'espace d'exposition de la CCA à Kitakyushu, où il était alors en résidence. En même temps, il a accroché une photo de l'espace d'exposition de la CCA reconstruit en maquette dans le café Black Label, pour remplacer un miroir.

UNTITLED 2013 (THOMAS DEMANDS HERE)

RIRKRIT TIRAVANIJA

Rirkrit Tiravanija est un artiste thaïlandais. Né à Buenos Aires (Argentine) en 1961, il vit à New York (Etats-Unis), Berlin (Allemagne) et Chiang Mai (Thaïlande). L'architecture et les structures destinées à l'habitat et aux échanges sociaux sont au cœur de son travail. Ses installations prennent souvent la forme d'"espaces où il est possible de manger, cuisiner, lire ou faire de la musique.

Quatre ans après Thomas Demand, il réalisa une œuvre pour la CCA Kitakyushu. Au cours de la préparation de ce projet, il visita le Black Label Bar, endroit qui avait entretemps acquis une belle réputation auprès des visiteurs du CCA. Il a été impressionné par le lieu et par sa propriétaire Teruko Ikegami qui recevait très chaleureusement tous ses hôtes. Il décida de prendre le travail de Demand comme point de départ, mais de mettre l'accent sur le contact social. Rirkrit Tiravanija: "Cette réalisation combine éléments sculpturaux et relationnels. J'ai une fois de plus travaillé en me basant sur le lieu et des modèles existants, en observant la vie quotidienne des habitants de Kitakyushu et environs."

Les deux œuvres pourront être vues pour la première fois côte à côte au M.

LE LIVRE

A l'occasion de cette exposition paraîtra une nouvelle monographie (en anglais) consacrée à l'art de Thomas Demand. L'édition en est assurée par M Louvain et MACK London, la conception graphique étant due à Julie Peeters. Le volume comprend des essais dus à Maristella Casciato & Emily Pugh, Aude-Line Dulière, Karen Van Godtsenhoven, Valerie Verhack et Adam Caruso, ainsi qu'une conversation entre Thomas Demand, Hal Foster et David Chipperfield. En outre, Martin Boyce, Arno Brandhuber et Rirkrit Tiravanija ont contribué avec des inserts visuels.

Broché, 21 x 27.5 cm, 448 p.

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LES ŒUVRES

Vous trouverez ci-dessous une description d'ensemble des œuvres exposées, salle par salle.

Salle 1.I

Thomas Demand, Model, 2000, C-print / Diasec, 164,5 x 210 cm

Salle 1.H

Arno Bradlhuber et Thomas Demand, Embassy, 2007, installation

Thomas Demand, Embassy I, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 168 x 204 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy II, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 228 x 320 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy III, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 51 x 53,5 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy IV, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 198 x 198 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy IV.a, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 88 x 100 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy V, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 224 x 164 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy VI, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 168 x 204 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy VII, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 180 x 232 cm

Thomas Demand, Embassy VII.a, 2007, C-print / Diasec, 74 x 90 cm

Salle 1.J

Martin Boyce, Do Words Have Voices, 2011, aluminium, acier, peinture, laiton, bois, composants électriques, lumière fluorescente, tissu, résine à couler, papier

Thomas Demand, Model Series I (John Lautner), 2011, impressions pigmentaires encadrées

Salle 1.K

Thomas Demand, Fold, 2015, impression UV sur papier peint

Thomas Demand, Model Series II (SANAA), 2015, impressions pigmentaires encadrées

Thomas Demand, Model Series IV (Azzedine Alaïa), 2020, impressions pigmentaires encadrées

Salle 1.L

Thomas Demand et Caruso St John, maquette du Kvadrat Paviljoen à Ebeltoft, Danemark, 2020

Thomas Demand, projets pour l'intérieur et le mobilier du Pavillon Kvadrat à Ebeltoft, Danemark, 2020

Salle 1.M

Thomas Demand et Caruso St John, Nagelhaus, 2010, installation

Martin Mörck, Nagelhaus, illustrations

Thomas Demand, Nagelhaus, film

Salle 2.A

Thomas Demand, Black Label I, 2008

Thomas Demand, Black Label II, 2008

Thomas Demand, Black Label III, 2008

Rirkrit Tiravanija, untitled 2013 (thomas demands here), 2013, installation

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- <http://www.mleuven.be/fr/demand>

- Des images en haute résolution peuvent être téléchargées au départ du site mentionné au bas de cette page presse : <http://prez.ly/1Hub>

Yellowcake,
Revisited

Thomas Demand

On New Year's Eve 2000-2001 someone broke into the embassy of the country of Niger in Rome. The Republic of Niger is known to be an extremely poor country, and as a result the ambassador and her staff reside in an unglamorous apartment in the fifth story of a modest building originally built in the 1930s. The house is located in the Via Baimonti, a street in an outlying district of the Italian capital. The only indication that it serves any consular purposes is the flag hanging over the balcony railing. The perpetrators turned the rooms upside down, but took astonishingly little with them. According to the embassy staff all they stole was a cheap wristwatch, a bottle of Bulgari-brand perfume and some stationary. Because the theft was so minimal, the police decided not to take photographs of the crime scene. That the law enforcement authorities of a city where 680 thefts occur daily should show no great interest in the burglary of a few sheets of letter paper is certainly understandable. For me, however, the event was of great interest. I should explain that everything seen in the pictures here has to do with or is to be found on paper. Like most of my works, the starting point of these images are the life-sized cardboard sculptures in my studio, which I built for the project. Why, I asked myself, would someone take the risk of committing a robbery for a few blank sheets of paper?

A few months after the break-in, contracts were leaked to the Italian weekly magazine *Panorama* — which belongs to Silvio Berlusconi, at this time the country's prime minister — and later to other media sources, which were written on the same kind of paper that was stolen from the embassy. The content of the contracts was politically scandalous. They seemed to clearly prove that Saddam Hussein had ordered the purchase of 500 tons of "yellowcake". Yellowcake is the yellowish, powdery base product from which fuel rods for nuclear power plants and nuclear bombs are produced. Niger, along with Canada and Australia, is one of the most important producers of it. Proof of this kind of transaction would, of course, have been sensational, and yet doubts quickly arose over the authenticity of the papers. The most obvious of the numerous inconsistencies was that the foreign minister of Niger who had supposedly signed the contracts hadn't been in office for over 10 years when the documents were drawn up. In fact, completely independent of the authenticity of the contracts themselves, the story was already quite hard to believe. With some basic research the journalist Elisabetta Burba, who was first shown the papers, was able to calculate that the transport of 500 tons of yellowcake would require some 120 fully loaded tractor trailers. It seemed extremely improbable to her that the dictator of a country under an extensive UN embargo would honestly believe that he could sneak 120 gleaming tractor trailers from Niger through four countries and then transfer the load — unnoticed — onto ships that would bring it to Iraq.

The whole story was so obviously contrived that no journalist showed much interest and the contracts remained unpublished. Nevertheless, a year and a half later the documents suddenly re-emerged. The United States government, in search of convincing justification for an immediate military invasion of Iraq, released these papers to the international public. They cited British secret service sources and claimed that they now had the "smoking gun" they had been looking for — irrefutable evidence that Saddam Hussein was secretly building a nuclear arsenal and that he presumably already possessed a nuclear weapon. British prime minister Tony Blair, the U.S.'s most important ally, corroborated this assessment.

As was to be expected, the story quickly collapsed like a house of cards. The scandal that resulted was, in the best American journalistic tradition, dubbed “Nigergate” and made for headlines worldwide. One of the numerous side stories to this affair was accordingly known as “Plamegate” after Victoria Plame, the wife of long-serving diplomat Joseph C. Wilson. In the 1990s Wilson had worked in this part of Africa, and in 2002 he flew to Niger at the CIA’s request in order to investigate whether the transport with the 120 trucks would have been feasible. His assessment that such an undertaking would have been absolutely impossible did not fit into the U.S. government’s political agenda. It fit even less into their agenda that Mr. Wilson did not keep this opinion to himself, but rather published it in the *New York Times* for all to see. Immediately following his statements, it was plastered all over the press that Wilson’s wife, Mrs. Plame, worked for the CIA as well. The man responsible for this intentional indiscretion was, it would later turn out, Lewis Libby, vice-president Dick Cheney’s right-hand man. This succession of events has gone down as “Libbygate” in the files of American judicial history.

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I can of course only very briefly summarize this thick web of intertwined events here. Anyone interested in the details can refer to the numerous comprehensive accounts of the affair, which parliamentary and senate committees in both Italy and the U.S. have investigated and which have accordingly been very well documented. And yet strangely, almost nothing is known about the place where it all started, the offices of the embassy of Niger in Rome. When I began searching for material for a new work based on the episode, I assumed that the easiest way to start was to create a descriptive image of the crime scene. The story had attracted massive media attention. All I would have to do is order the newspapers and keep my eyes out for a photograph on which I could base a sculpture. This is how I had successfully completed many other projects. To my surprise, in the massive amounts of press material

there was not
a single image
of this location.

I asked press photographers and archivists to no avail. Apparently no journalist had ever been granted access to the rooms and no illustrator had ever attempted to draw them for readers.

I continued to investigate and tried contacting journalists who had at least worked on the story at the time. I spoke with a handful of well-known Italian authors, with an American journalist who had described the events in great detail for *Vanity Fair*, as well as with a few British and German journalists. An extremely interesting image emerged from all these different puzzle pieces: It turned out that the break-in itself was probably a sham, invented in order to cover up a modest corruption affair within the embassy. The main secretary, an Italian woman referred to as Madame Laura, wanted to make some extra money and thus gradually handed over the address book, stationary and all kinds of embassy documents to a person closely associated with the Italian secret service. This person came up with the idea of forging the contracts — though whether she did this with the help of the secret service (which in Italy is called Sismi) is still disputed. The intention was apparently to help shore up the masculine friendship between Berlusconi and Bush.

The person calculated that the story would be printed in a couple newspapers and would inspire public outrage against Saddam. That the whole thing would be resuscitated and finally have its original intended explosive effect a year later was not at all foreseeable for the individuals involved. After all, the break-in took place before September 11, 2001. It was a minor case of

forgery processed by some CIA back office. The CIA asked the French secret service if there might be something to the story. The French knocked on the doors of the British MI6. The British said they were taking the thing as seriously as the French. And so the CIA already had two allies that were a little uneasy. The affair had gathered some steam, mostly on the basis of hearsay.

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Niger is a democratic country — according to the German aid organization German Agro Action (*Welthungerhilfe*) it is the fourth poorest in the world. The legally elected ruler does, however, not really fit into our conception of a tried and true democratic leader. The only significant source of income for Niger is the extraction of uranium. The uranium operations are entirely owned by the French, which is why the French secret service was involved. The French took over the uranium mines when they freed the country from colonial rule. I spoke with someone who was there. Anyone wishing to go there has to travel three days through the desert and then across the entire Sahel region — assuming he or she is granted permission. There are two military posts and otherwise nothing. There are no people walking about, everything is dead. But when you arrive everything is suddenly just like in France — three, four supermarkets, champagne, oysters, pâté. Every day seven to eight airplanes arrive with the latest newspapers and everything a Frenchman might need to feel at home in a foreign country. They have built a kingdom in the middle of the desert. Uranium is relatively profitable, and the mines are internationally monitored. It would be impossible to secretly divert 120 tractor trailers.

Everything that I have described here I picked up from newspapers, conversations with journalists and a few books that have recently appeared on the subject. I always

base my work

on information and

photographs that

are accessible to

everyone.

Here too I had the feeling that everyone must know the story to some extent or another. That these specific images were lacking seemed strange to me. This is why I wanted to get into the embassy and have a look at the rooms. So I went there, took the elevator to the fifth floor and rang the bell. The door opened a crack and an older woman asked me what I wanted. I claimed to want to apply for a visa, as I thought this would be a good pretext to be invited in. Unfortunately I was mistaken. She disappeared for a second, came back, handed the form to me and closed the door. I decided to let sleeping dogs lie, gave up trying to enter the office and tried instead to establish contact with a few of the journalists who had first covered the story. As is generally well known, journalists don't like being asked a lot of questions. But since I didn't have the faintest idea how to get into the embassy, I wanted to get some tips from a professional.

The particularities of domestic politics in Italy are to blame for the fact that *La Repubblica* in Rome maintains a maximum security area for its journalists, who are subject to great risk especially when the mafia is involved. This, however, was a story that had long since been covered and so it wasn't too difficult to be admitted to the office of Carlo Bonini, the first man to make the association between the embassy break-in and the forgeries. I explained my objectives and asked him for advice. Should I go to the embassy and say I wanted to photograph the natural wonders of Niger for a calendar and that I needed permission to do so? He laughed in my face and said that Niger had absolutely nothing worth seeing. It was a massive desert — I wouldn't get very far with that kind of story. My next idea:

would it be possible

to bribe someone?

He replied that that's what he would probably do and that it might work in a detective story, rarely in real life. The question was, he said, who would I bribe? The woman who opened the door was none other than Madame Laura, the secretary who had sold the papers. She still worked there. In fact she was the only one who still worked there. All other embassy employees had been replaced immediately after the affair. In other words, it was quite clear that Madame Laura was working for the secret service. Even if I were to agree upon a sum with her, I would have to assume that when it came time to hand over the money the police would be waiting for me. And then I'd be in some pretty hot water, especially since an embassy was considered foreign territory. Bonini concluded that this would not be a good idea. I suggested a private detective. Would he be able to recommend me one? He predicted I wouldn't find one willing to do the work. I was out of ideas. He at least had some sympathy and offered one last possibility: "Why don't you just go there and tell them that you want to make a life-size cardboard sculpture of their offices? They'll be so surprised that they'll think it's just a cover. Maybe you'll get to speak with her for a few minutes." It sounded plausible enough.

So I drove out to the Via Baimonti again and rang the bell. Once again Madame Laura opens the door. She recognizes me and goes to close the door, but I have a thick book of my work in hand that I shove through the crack in the door while calling out, "It's an art project. Can I please talk to the Ambassador?" Madame Laura hears the word "art" and — maybe this kind of thing is possible in Rome — actually proceeds to let me in, though only into the first room.

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I am allowed into the foyer and she lets me have a seat on a leather sofa in the bare white room. According to Carlo Bonini I had already made it further than any journalist. I sit and wait, able to hear hushed negotiations going on somewhere. In front of me is a flag hanging limp. Over the passage to the embassy office hangs a picture — the only picture I've seen here. It is the official portrait of the president of Niger.

Madame Laura comes back, picks up the catalogue and shakes her head. She only leaves again after I assure her that I can wait all day if necessary but that I must speak with the ambassador. She says that this probably won't be possible. I look around some more, study the electrical outlets, the door knobs and other details. Finally Madame appears again and says with an acerbic smile I can now speak with the consular representative. It turns out that the ambassador is almost never in the embassy, as she is mostly in Niger. As a result the consular representative is responsible for everything.

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I am led into a darkened office which consists of two connected rooms. The blinds have been lowered because of the sun, and the fluorescent lights are on. In the corner of the back room sits a small man on a chair with a cup of coffee, strong cigarettes and a telephone on the table in front of him. He waits there and asks in French what it is that I want from him. I attempt to explain to him in German, English and horrendous Italian. That the communication is so difficult is an advantage — I'm buying time. I discreetly look around, attempting to imprint the objects in the room on my memory. I notice the fax machine is the same one I have. The envelopes on the extravagant tables have an official, pale color and look as if they'd never been opened. Meanwhile I attempt to explain to him what my intentions are. He picks up the catalogue and looks through it. I explain to him that it is a catalogue of my exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He opens it and I see that he doesn't have a clue what he's looking at. This is a

good thing, since I have a long and winding way ahead to actually to explain to him what I'm intending to do:

make a life-size

model of his entire office,

including the chair

in which he is sitting,

out of cardboard.

He doesn't seem to really understand why it is that people take photographs. The man seems quite cultured, but I notice that the art of photography is quite foreign to him — how much more so my eccentric model constructions. And yet despite all the complications and communication problems at some point he understands what it's all about. He closes the book and says, to my absolute shock, in fluent English: "The republic of Niger does not have any interest in what you do, please leave this room".

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Fortunately I had already seen everything I wanted to. It was, incidentally, extremely trivial. But then what did you expect? In the end most places that are considered meaningful because something important once happened there are trivial. In this case it was a completely unspectacular apartment, built during Mussolini's time, which nowadays serves a poor, unknown African country as a consular office and happens to be the setting of the first event in one of the most deceitful episodes in recent history. Of course there are no evil intentions to be seen there, no conspiracies or falsehoods, and these things aren't to be seen in my photographs either. I hope nevertheless that the images provide an evocative impression of the rooms.

Maybe the most intense way of immersing oneself in a setting like this is to attempt to recreate and describe it. The sensual and abstract, the logic between the objects and what the camera records, that which is preconceived and that which is invented and that which is real and what really happened all go into this imaginative process, which in turn leads to an accessible environment or a connection in an unpredictable manner. In this way this group of pictures is both a documentation and a narration, reportage and illustration.

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After visiting this double room which radiated an order foreign to me and yet consisting of familiar objects, it became clear to me that I had to keep going. And so I asked to see the ambassador again, this time through official channels — the foreign minister in the capital, Niamey. After a few months I received a polite letter (on embassy stationary!) which posed a series of mistrustful but harmless questions that I would have to answer in advance. I overcame this hurdle as well and after a few more weeks and countless phone calls I was cordially offered an appointment. And so I managed to enter the embassy a second time. I took a seat near the ambassador's coffee table and tried to comprehend the situation, but above all to be polite. At this point I had already completed my work. I had long since internalized the surroundings. I was actually finished.

The ambassador spoke English. I commenced to explain to her the occasion for my project — the Biennale in Venice, the theme of which that year was Africa and where this series was to be shown for the first time. I argued that it was more apt for a European artist to show the

consular offices of an African state in Europe than to journey to Africa with a camera. That made sense to her. More difficult to explain was why I had chosen the Republic of Niger of all places. She found that strange and emphasized that her government was above all interested in ways of revealing to people the beauty and wonders of Niger, and that she would of course not support anything that would create a negative image of the country. At this point I asked whether the fact that most recently Niger was associated with a scandal called "Yellowcake" was good or bad for her nation's image. The atmosphere immediately changed.

Clearly incensed, she began an outraged defense. Niger had been shamelessly betrayed. Her country had clearly done nothing wrong (in fact it hadn't), and had never had the chance to prove its innocence to the world. No one would have dared do something like that to Canada or Australia. Niger simply didn't have the same influence. After this, a long conversation unfolded about the damage to the country's image that would result from the fact that in the Google world Niger would be associated with this affair alone for the indefinite future. A turn in the discussion that I, considering the special circumstances of my visit, found pretty extraordinary.

Thomas Demand, *Model Studies*, 2011

“Does this mean I have to give up brie?” John Lautner had written these words on a copied list of dietary restrictions, given to him by Dr Mauer, for whose father he also built a house. The architect’s handwriting looks rather square, with many diverging energies, large letters and dynamic diagonals – not what I expected from a 80–something– year–old architect, who presumably had a life of drawing some rather eccentric buildings behind him. This, amongst countless other notes of less or more relevance to the history of architecture, can be found in the vaults of the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, which looks after Mr. Lautner’s professional bequest. Part of this collection are 12 models made by Lautner and his studio since 1960 that were mostly used to study and work on his audacious projects. These models are all a little run–down and certainly not fabricated to impress or convince a client, even if they played that role at times, too. In other words, they are working tools, and on those rough models; in fact, I tried to avoid making images of architecture. It’s the sculptural presence and the traces of someone’s practice, of understanding and remodeling, which raised my attention. Given the temporary purpose of the models, their material components are equally cheap and fading: cardboard, aluminum and found objects, indications of vegetation made with a colored pencil, comments and traces of discarded alternatives. One of them is just the landscape, no house left (Concannon House) and another one only the roof (Hope House) and that wasn’t built in that shape either. But such information is pointing to the referential aspects of these models, for instance; one could compare them with the incarnation as an actual house or muse about the what–ifs. However, I’d like to ride this horse towards another claim. In my view, the images in this book are like distant cousins to the images made by students of the Wchutemas school of architecture (1920–27), for which it was mandatory to photograph their rather unelaborated drafts as an exercise. It was of course part of the foundation for a Soviet avant–garde architect to understand how much the image of a work of architecture is an essential aspect of the building itself. Lautner, coming literally, geographically and probably politically from the other end, didn’t make much of that correlation; somewhere in his notes I found a nebulous equation that read, **“the image is the reality, therefore there is no reality”**. Let’s assume this means as one soon finds out when studying Lautner’s work, drawing wasn’t one of his many talents. So I like to imagine that this man–with a notoriously powerful handshake and no fear of large

gestures in concrete—would have inspired himself with these modest cardboard objects, which have since weathered over time and have now become the concern of conservatorial efforts at the Getty. **“Architecture should be really odd.”** Frankly, I wasn’t a fan of Mr. Lautner’s buildings when I started looking into the 70 boxes of the bequest, but I knew that the opinion about his work is split between avid admiration and spiteful damning. The argument I heard repeatedly from both sides was that his work is ‘cinematic’. It would describe the weakness of a hollow gesture made for James Bond as much as the splendor of a surrounding that lets the inhabitant feel like a film star. But ‘cinematic’ also means that the camera moves, or the actor moves through a space when filmed, rather than stands still. And I realized that was why I didn’t get the point of his architecture until I stood inside one of his buildings myself: it doesn’t photograph well, and even a master of that trade like Julius Shulman seemed to have trouble representing the particular quality of the designs in his photographs. Wherever you stand in these constructions you experience space in a different way, even if the idea seems to be simple and straightforward. The collection of images in this book doesn’t try to fix that problem. Instead I decided to focus just that (unlike most architecture) reality is a flexible concept. The Cubists reminded us that space and shape can be described in ways other than the mimetic representations proposed over centuries by Brunelleschi’s perspective. Picasso’s cardboard guitars (between 1912–1914) come to mind, and their freedom in rethinking a commonly known volume might find a distant echo in some of the spatial concepts shown here. Above all, I would like to express my gratitude to The Getty Research Institute, which generously invited me as a scholar in 2010/2011 to come and see what’s in their vaults. Except for the Goldstein Office model (which belongs to the Foundation) all the objects were introduced to me by Albrecht Gumlich from the GRI, who keeps fighting to prevent time from taking its damaging toll onto their holdings. Frederike Seifert, Naomi Mizusaki and Vina Rostomyan were all as instrumental as they were inspiring and indispensable in putting this book together. I want to thank the Lautner Foundation for its openness to this project, and most notably the dapper Mr. Frank Escher for his first-hand information and procurement. Finally, the book finds itself in the reader’s hands mostly because of the patience, vision and trust of the team at Ivory press, namely Iñaki Domingo and Elena Foster.

(899 words)

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