



Goldstein 13 (2011). © Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London

Thomas Demand

Thomas Demand was born in 1964 in Munich, and lives in Berlin and Los Angeles. He is one of the most acclaimed German artists of his generation. He has had solo exhibitions in many of the world's major art museums. This is his first exhibition in a public space in Britain since his Serpentine Gallery exhibition in London in 2006. *Model Studies* is a departure from the images for which he is best known.

Caruso St John, the architects of our building, have often collaborated with Demand on unusual designs for his exhibitions. On this occasion, he has chosen not to alter the exhibition spaces in any way, because, in his opinion, they are already “really perfect”.

Demand has experimented with film, installation and other media, but he is best known for photographs of life size models laboriously made from coloured paper. Ordinary looking interiors turn out to be related to extraordinary social and political circumstances. When we approach his photographs the illusion is dispelled and we recognise that what we are looking at is not reality photographed, but a photographed sculpture.

In an unusual departure from this method Demand has chosen the work of a famous 20th century architect, the late Californian modernist architect John Lautner, as his

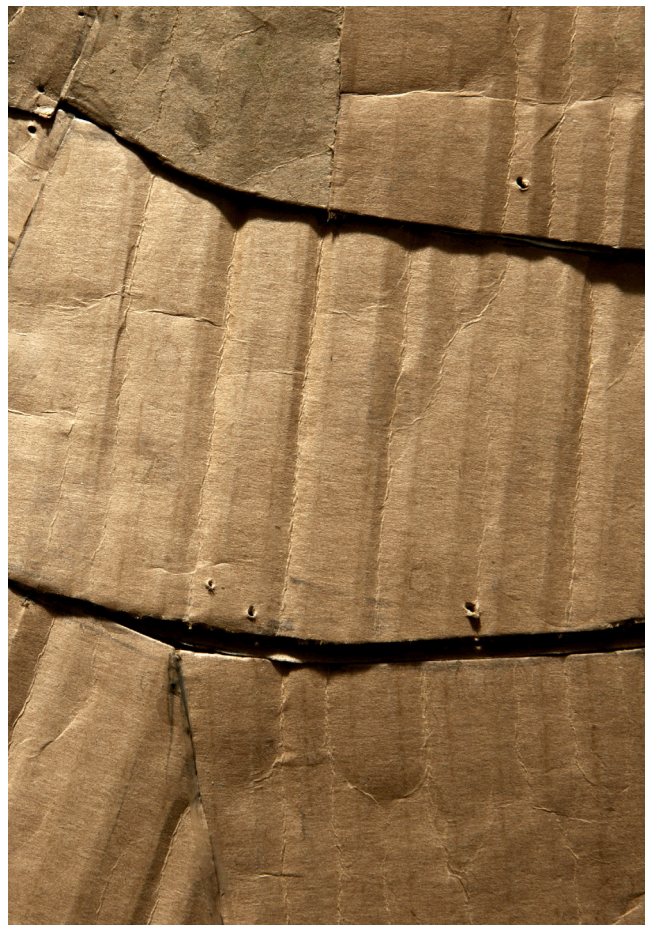
subject. Instead of making the models himself, he has chosen to photograph Lautner's models directly as he found them at the Getty Research Institute in L.A.

Architecture, in a literal sense, is almost always the subject of Demand's work. It is not usually the architectural value of the spaces he represents that is significant, but the significance these spaces acquire once they are occupied. Seen close up and at various angles, these humble, decayed models lose their architectural status altogether. Instead, as Demand suggests in his text that follows, they are more reminiscent of the spatial experiments of various modern artists, Picasso's Cubist reliefs included. They are meditations on aspects of Twentieth Century painting and sculpture conducted, indirectly and paradoxically, via Lautner's architecture and Demand's photography.



Beyer (2011). © Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London

“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 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.



Detail Wood (2011). © Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London

“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 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.



Goldstein 98 (2011). © Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London

In my view, the images in this book are like distant cousins to the images made by students of the Vkhutemas 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 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."

Thomas Demand

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With special thanks to Esther Schipper



Detail of Beyer (2011). © Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn/DACS, London