

Press Release

Thomas Demand

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Sprüth Magers, London

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Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to present Thomas Demand's fourth exhibition in the London gallery, featuring new large format photographic works and a selection from the latest iteration of his *Model Studies* series.

In the front gallery, *Pond* (2020) presents an archetypal view of nature. Water lilies have traditionally symbolized purity, tranquility and rebirth, reproducing in water rather than in soil. Sprouts of reeds appear from between the mysterious lipped pads as clouds above place some of them in shadow. Borrowing a trope from art history, and in a composition that has no shore, this play of light across the scene emphasizes its dreamlike serenity. The artificiality of such a scene – an artificially made image showing an artificial production – is emblematic of Demand's tautological practice in its ability to question photographic truth in a self-referential manner. Demand creates life-size models with meticulous detail before photographing and then destroying them.

The calming green of this non-technological landscape of the past is in contrast to the violently pink landscape of the future in *Nursery* (2020), presented in the back gallery. Suspended pink lights heavily illuminate long tables of horticultural specimens. Complex networks of pipes and cabling run through them, interspersed with labels, clipboards and watering cans. Immediately recalling a recently uncovered crime scene for the hydroponic growth of cannabis, this lab is in fact legally compliant and a scene from the future of farming. Based in Ontario, this is where students study for degrees in commercial cannabis production. The emerging legal cannabis industry has taken advantage of changes in government legislation and new technology to turn this previously nefarious activity into a multi-billion dollar business.

Nature has been reconstructed with new forces that are both more resourceful and economical, and presented here as wholly artificial, reminding us that our idea of nature as an idyll is obsolescent and highly fabricated. As in *Pond*, previous representations of nature in Demand's work such as *Clearing* (2003) and more recently *Bloom* (2014) demonstrated how our notion of nature is anachronistic and can border on the kitsch. The

reality of farming and food supply today is this glowing pink lab, spearheaded by firms that have developed highly efficient vertical farms and other technological solutions for agriculture. During our current crisis, the result of excess and poor management of the relationship between humans and nature, we are asked to recalibrate and reconsider how we treat the natural world and try to conquer it. *Canopy* (2020) also speaks of this moment, showing a solitary balcony with its canopy fully extended, its inhabitants shielding not only from the harshness of the sun's rays but the trouble in nature that has unfolded around them. The ordered seriality of the balconies is in contrast to the disorder beyond, as the world fails to contain a virulent disease. The lone crumpled paper towel of *Tissue* (2008) becomes newly pertinent too, alluding both to the state-ordered messages to wash your hands and the carelessness with which we discard what we no longer need.

The exhibition also includes new works from the *Model Studies* series, a departure in Demand's own practice in its portrayal of models not of his own making, but to date those of architects John Lautner, SANAA and Hans Hollein. In this latest series Demand focuses his attention on the atelier of the late fashion designer Azzedine Alaïa. For Demand, the model or in this case the pattern, is a sculptural object used to convey a series of ideas, a means of making sense of information.

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Annotations, instructions and traces of tape and glue are visual markers of the labour that has worked to create them, bearing witness to their life of use. Shimmering tracing paper testifies to the practice of copying and reworking existing patterns. The rigidity of the multi-coloured thick card is in contrast to the seemingly haphazard means of presentation and operations of the atelier. Demand sees a similarity with these to Matisse's paper cut-outs, abandoned leftovers on the studio floor that could become part of a work.

Unlike the architectural models of his earlier *Model Studies*, which may be used to trigger a seemingly endless chain of thought, Alaïa's patterns are designed for use and reuse as a manual for the repetition of an idea in fabric. Both these and those produced by architects are a working model, however, with an inbuilt history and biography. Demand continues to investigate how our interpretation of new and existing models can shape meaning, and in his pursuit of technical exactitude and sculptural form, studies the model as a way of rebuilding an impression of the world.

Thomas Demand (born 1964, Munich) lives and works in Berlin. Selected solo exhibitions include those at Fondazione Prada, Venice (2017, 2007), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (both 2016), Stiftung Insel Hombroich, Neuss, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (both 2015), Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, and National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (both 2012), Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2010), Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, and MUMOK, Vienna (both 2009), Hamburger Kunsthalle (2008), Serpentine Gallery, London, and Lenbachhaus, Munich (both 2006), MoMA, New York (2005), Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2004), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (2003) and Castello di Rivoli, Turin, Italy (2002). *House of Card*, a major exhibition of Demand's work that includes the *Model Studies* is currently on view at M Leuven, Belgium until 14 April 2021. Further solo shows in 2021 will take place at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (11 September to 30 January 2022) and the Fundación Botín, Santander (9 October to 3 March 2022).

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