

ARTFORUM

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Thomas Demand

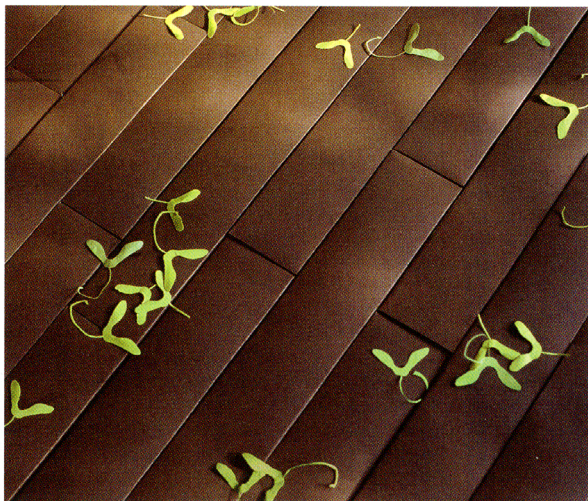
MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

The title of Thomas Demand's recent exhibition "Dailies" evokes the cinema—dailies (also known as rushes) being the raw footage of each day's shooting prepared for viewing the following day by the director and crew. But while Demand has made films in the past (for which he may well have used dailies as part of his working process), this was a show of still photographs. As would be expected by anyone familiar with the work of this photographer, who trained as a sculptor, everything in his new images appears to have been fabricated in the studio from basic materials such as cardboard; as ever, he presents a sort of Strawberry Fields, where, as the song says, "nothing is real." The sense of eerie unreality conjured by the clean surfaces devoid of detail in Demand's scale models (made only for the eye of the camera) has often carried an ironic charge, since the images are derived from news or other kinds of documentary photographs linked to real historical events. *Model*, 2000, for instance, is said to refer "to the moment when Albert Speer presented his draft for the German Pavilion at the world expo in Paris to the Führer"—though, like all his other images, it presents an unpeopled space—while *Space Simulator*, 2003, replicates the pod in which Apollo astronauts trained in the 1960s.

Some of Demand's best work, however, has emerged when he has pushed beyond his standard methodology of working from found photographs of historical places. For his remarkable 2007 exhibition "Yellowcake," he became a sort of reporter himself: Its images of the office of the Embassy of the Republic of Niger in Rome—supposedly the source of stolen papers (in fact, they were forgeries) documenting Saddam Hussein's efforts to buy uranium—were based on his own observation and recreated from memory. In "Dailies," by contrast, Demand has eliminated

Over" depicted his own everyday environment, Demand seems to have decided that historically fraught subject matter is dispensable—and, like that of Tuymans, his work hasn't suffered one bit. On the contrary, the overt modesty of the new images demonstrates, for one thing, how much sheer visual wit goes into Demand's art. As deadpan as his work is, it can also be almost comically lively: In *Daily #14*, 2011, the outdoor flowers leaning up against a frosted glass window seem to be trying to peek in; the wordless red "do not disturb" tag on a hotel door handle in *Daily #12*, 2009, might as well be broadcasting that there is some hanky-panky going on inside. Realized as dye-transfer prints (rather than the C-prints he's shown in the past), these "Dailies" also manifest a marvelous tactility that's probably far indeed from the lo-res smear of a casual cell-phone shot. You can feel the chain-link fence squeezing against the plastic cups that have been jammed into it in *Daily #15*, 2011, or, by contrast, sense how delicately the maple seedpods in *Daily #11*, 2009, lie atop the brown roof on which they've fallen. In these works, Demand shows himself to be a poet of the unnoticed details of daily life.

—Barry Schwabsky



Thomas Demand,
Daily #11, 2009,
inkjet print,
28 7/8 x 32 1/2". From
the series "Dailies,"
2008–12.

any overt historical references. The modestly sized images on display here, made between 2008 and 2012, derive, we are told, from the artist's own cell-phone photographs, and they depict ordinary things that apparently are just as ordinary as they seem: a ceiling with a few of its panels missing and a couple of others looking like they're ready to drop (*Daily #5*, 2008); a bar of soap—a yellow cake, in fact—on the edge of a bathtub (*Daily #21*, 2012); a rubber band resting on a saucer (*Daily #13*, 2011).

Like Luc Tuymans, who, in his recent exhibition "The Summer Is