

# Fondazione Prada

*press release*

## **The Fondazione Prada presents Thomas Demand at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Isola San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice**

**Thomas Demand  
7 June – 7 July**

The Fondazione Prada is presenting a project by the German artist Thomas Demand, curated by Germano Celant at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice. The proposed work consists of two large installations; *Yellowcake*, composed of a series of new photographs, exploring a place in Rome which was instrumental to US intervention in Iraq, and *Processo grottesco*, which presents for the first time aspects of Demand's working method that led to one of his major recent works, *Grotto* (2006).

Demand (Munich, 1964), well known for his complex and disquieting images, has drawn the attention of the international art world for his innovative use of photography. Often starting from a pre-existing image—referring to controversial socio-political events, the artist proceeds to reconstruct the scene with a cardboard model. The photograph he takes of this model is the final stage of his work, and it is only this image that is exhibited, not the models. Observing Demand's photographic images, the most attractive and intriguing characteristic is the dazzling yet fleeting way he overturns our own definition of reality. The more this reality appears to present itself in a simple and innocuous manner, the more it creates perceptual short-circuits upon careful observation of the represented scene.

For the exhibition presented at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, Demand has developed two large installations. The title *Yellowcake* refers to its technical meaning: "yellowcake" denotes a concentrated form of uranium, which when enriched may be used to make nuclear weapons. This word recently emerged in mainstream political discourse because it was the fulcrum of President George Walker Bush's famous accusation in his State of the Union Address in 2003, in which he stated: "The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of Uranium in Africa". The evidence was paperwork supposedly stolen from the Embassy of the Republic of Niger in Rome and passed on to British and American intelligence by SISMI, their Italian counterparts. The documents were supposed to be a contract for the sale of hundreds of tons of yellowcake to the Iraqi authorities, which soon turned out to be obvious forgeries.

Demand's work consists of a series of photographs about the location where the trail leading to this 'smoking gun' originated. Usually, the artist bases his works on existing photographic sources, but with *Yellowcake* there were no images available: no one covering the story had gained access to Niger's Embassy in Rome. It was thus a story that had yet to be illustrated. Lacking photographic evidence, it remained unanchored to its site. Demand's first step, then, was to try to gain access to the Embassy. By entering the apartment-cum-embassy he also crossed an extra-territorial frontier between Italy and Niger (and Europe and Africa). The meeting yielded

nothing much, but while there, Demand was able to memorize the site and begin a conversation with the embassy's staff.

The information he gathered from these visits was the basis for a life-sized reconstruction of the very same place, built over a period of months in his studio and, subsequently, the large photographs that constitute the finished work and are presented at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. So the infamous story that has been named "Nigergate" has finally received a pictorial representation of some kind.

The second installation, entitled *Processo grottesco*, refers to the theme of the grotto, a sculpture on which the artist worked for more than two years. For this occasion, Demand allows the viewer to discover the creative process that led to the realization of the photograph and to the way, through continuous research and experimentation, the work itself metamorphosed and changed over time. In *Processo grottesco*, the artist presents the source material he collected for the work for the first time. Postcards, books, tourist guides, photographs, catalogue illustrations, and other paraphernalia are exhibited alongside the 36-ton grey cardboard object, shaped and measured by computers and divided into 900,000 different layers, together with the final photograph of the sculpture. In this way, the visitor is invited to follow the different stages of Demand's creative process, going backstage of the stunning photographic image known as *Grotto*.

The grotto is a subject encountered throughout the history of art and architecture. From the Sixteenth century onwards, the imitation of nature was the basis for the Tuscan and Rustic orders which derived their motifs from grottoes and caves, trees and boughs in an attempt to endow buildings with functionality and a spare, primitive adornment. At the same time, these architectural concerns are linked to the very naturalness of the materials, which are humble and simple: "Demand adopts a similarly elementary approach to construction in his recourse to cardboard, which is light but robust, solid and coarse. In fact, *Grotto*, which was constructed in his Berlin studio, recaptures the natural process of calcareous incrustations. It is rustic despite being created by an electronic 'inlaying' that allowed each part to 'drip' onto the next. It is thus the result of a process that is half rustic, half logical, with an awareness of the delicate balance between the contrasting elements, such as the manual and the digital. This same opposition informs Demand's representation of reality, which is inspired by a real place that then proves to be 'unreal', if not surreal, because of its subterranean, mysterious, disturbing connotations." \*

A two-volume boxed catalogue set will be published to accompany the show. Volume one contains a seminal essay by Germano Celant and rich, exhaustive iconographical documentation including postcards, works of art, drawings and photographs dedicated to the *Processo grottesco*. The second book, which displays the political event that has the Embassy of the Republic of Niger in Rome as its fulcrum, presents two essays by Robert Storr and Alex Farquharson, and a summary of 'Nigergate' by Carlo Bonini, who was one of the first investigative journalists on the case. In this context the documentation of the reconstructed site within the book becomes an illustration as well as a reproduction of the new body of work that the artist presents for the first time at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice.

\* Germano Celant, 'The Cavern of Images', in *Thomas Demand Processo grottesco*, Fondazione Prada, Milan, 2007.

#### *Details of the exhibition*

*Title:* Thomas Demand  
*Dates:* 7 June – 7 July 2007

*Press preview:* 7 June, 9 am  
Private shuttle from San Zaccaria stop to San Giorgio Island and back to Giardini and Arsenale stops starting from 8.30 until 11.00 am  
Water bus n. 82 from San Zaccaria to San Giorgio and back to San Zaccaria every 10 minutes

*Opening:* 7 June, 6 pm  
*Venue:* Fondazione Giorgio Cini  
*Address:* Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice  
*Opening hours:* Tuesday – Sunday, 11 am – 7 pm; closed on Monday  
*Admission:* free  
*Catalogue :* Fondazione Prada  
*Information:* Fondazione Prada – ph. +39 02 54670515, fax +39 02 54670258  
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Press release no. 2

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