

Bart Lootsma, *Doors, Ovals, Sculptures. An Interview with Thomas Demand on the occasion of his works Presidency and Embassy, 2010*

In December 2008, I unexpectedly received an issue of the New York Times Magazine from Thomas Demand in the mail. A little card referred me to page 55 where I found a recipe for a Green Goddess salad. Bemused, I spent a little while pondering the question why he should want to bring my attention to this recipe. It was only later on that I discovered that a work by Thomas Demand himself was hidden in this magazine, namely the series *Presidency*, a work commissioned by the *New York Times* to mark the occasion when George Bush passed on the presidency of the United States to Barack Obama. "After the Imperial Presidency" was the title on the issue's cover.

I probably didn't realize what was going on right away because you usually don't expect anything from the *New York Times* besides photos of the Oval Office, and they always look a bit stiff—as if they were taken as part of a stage setting or Hollywood set. In any case, we all know the Oval Office more from films and TV series than from reality. (For example, I have never seen pictures of the windowless corridor, even though important things have happened there, according to diverse rumors and records.)

Thomas Demand's photographs thus fit perfectly into this context. Generally, they show paper models of places where important events have occurred or places that have gained a special significance as a result of other circumstances. The templates for his models are photos and newspaper photos. Although they look extremely realistic at first sight, Demand's images have, due to the limitations that recreating a reality with paper entails, a somewhat rigid quality.

However, I had the feeling that the way in which the photos had been made—or rather the type of modeling—had changed quite a bit compared with Demand's earlier works. Perhaps this had to do with the decorations adorning the frieze and furniture— I don't recall seeing those things in other works. But perhaps it also had to do with the perception of the material itself. The carpet looks very woolly. Although the article in the *New York Times* mentioned that the photos were made using a life-size set, I couldn't help asking myself whether everything really was made of paper. The question would have perhaps been immaterial if *Presidency* had not appeared to have somehow possessed a dollhouse-like quality— something that I had not yet noticed in his works. This dollhouse-like quality is mainly evoked by the table legs, the wood carvings and the carpet.

While Demand often creates complex structures in other photographs (leaves or ivy, for example), his architectural pictures reinforce and intensify the blandness of modern buildings, bathrooms, airports, machines and hallways. The very same effect of modernity that Georges Bataille sees in Édouard Manet's works emerges here. Relentless modernity is displayed relentlessly.

Yet the dollhouse-like quality creates an air of harmlessness here. After all, we make small models in order to make things more innocent and tangible. This room, which represents the Oval Office, is somehow cozy. The weak January sun is shining outside— there is hardly anything presidential about it. You'd expect to see the Tracy family (the talking puppets from the Thunderbirds) in this setting. The blandness of the scene is preserved in at least one aspect, however: the president here looks more like an actor. The Oval Office is not the center of power, but rather a facade for the real powers that be. In this regard it reminds me of one of the earlier works by Diller + Scofidio, *SuitCase Studies: The Production of a National Past*, that documented the homes (and birthplaces) of presidents and other dignitaries and showed that, in view of these tourist attractions/ memorials/pilgrimage sites, Baudrillard's interpretation of the simulacrum is still subdued. Almost everything here is purely staged and has little to do with reality.

When I thanked Thomas Demand and sent him my thoughts by way of email, he wrote back that the decorative elements had been difficult for him “even though everything is always made to life size. Unfortunately, I quickly realized that the template for this work is so famous that if I would have left anything out of it, it would have told a different story than the one intended (which you astutely referred to in your last paragraph): You can't paint the Eiffel Tower without the arch, and if you do, then it becomes a question of form—as we can observe with Sonja Delaunay.” He wanted to discuss the matter with me at greater length because he found the issue to be so ambivalent, “but in connection with my previous works this was so compelling (particularly *Embassy*: representation vs. trivial-ominous), that I couldn't help myself.”

Embassy, a work from the year 2007, is a series of pictures depicting the Niger Embassy in Rome where documents, stationery, seals and stamps were stolen during a break-in in 2001 and used to fake potential transactions of yellowcake uranium between Niger and Iraq. This faked report was cited by George Bush in his 2003 State of the Union address as evidence that Saddam Hussein was trying to revive Iraq's nuclear program—and thus helped trigger the Iraq War.

So the Oval Office and the rooms of the Niger Embassy—*Presidency* and *Embassy*— are thus connected in a mysterious way. In the fall of 2009, they were exhibited together for the first time at the Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien. The book of the exhibition offered the opportunity to realize Demand's dream. In September 2010 he came to Innsbruck, where we had the following conversation:

BL: You made two works for the *New York Times*. *Parlor* in 1997, which takes a brothel room close to Times Square as its subject, and *Presidency* in 2008, which is about the Oval Office in the White House. Is it a coincidence that the *New York Times* contacted you again?

TD: No, not at all. The *New York Times* had contacted me on a number of occasions. The commission for *Presidency* was very appealing because the *New York Times Magazine* is a great magazine that has always had a strong focus on images and the photo editors of the magazine approached me about doing this project. Kathy Ryan, who was involved in both projects, is one of the best photo editors there is—she's fantastic. That's how I got hold of my source material. *Parlor* was about something that disappeared: the *New York Times* left Times Square. In order to mark this significant event, they asked several artists for contributions. And instead of going out there myself, that weekend they sent their photo editors to the archives at my request, where their sole task was to search for photos. I gave them some keywords and they began to look through the visual memory bank of the *New York Times* itself. In the case of *Presidency* it was soon clear that there was not going to be much time for research for, seeing as the *New York Times* had only called me three weeks before the issue was to be published. This time they put together an extra group of researchers who were supposed to show me every photo of the Oval Office they could find in their files. I stopped them at 6,000: that was enough. So what I'm telling people with my work is essentially a retelling of what photo journalists already told 30 or even 50 years ago. It's not just about the fact that I wanted to reconstruct the Oval Office—I wouldn't have anything to say about the thing itself, but rather about its context. And the context was: because the photo editors felt that the traditional images were not an effective enough political contribution, they thought about how the subject matter could be photographed in a more abstract way. Everybody was extremely politicized three weeks before the election, and the

subject matter, which was of a very fundamental nature, caused them to look for a fundamental photographer. And of course the fact that they thought of me was flattering, too.

But what you just described earlier was precisely the problem. You assume that you can reproduce political affairs, and that once you've reproduced them, that you'll be able to describe them in some way. People always jump to the conclusion that someone is making political images or political work. Every once in a while I'm asked whether I make political art, which I think I couldn't claim to do, because I'm not sure how such an affirmed action could suggest any kind of conclusion. If anything, the most I could do is to talk about what happens in the viewers' heads, that they recognize that or perhaps even recognize their recognition. But I can't comment on the real state of affairs as I don't know any more than anyone else flipping through the *New York Times Magazine*. The other thing you addressed is the relationship between decoration and object, which comes down a bit heavier on the side of decor in *Presidency* than in my other works. That was one of the several reasons why I hesitated to do it: because it doesn't reflect the way I work. Of course the Oval Office's decoration has to do with the need to convey a certain image. Perhaps you only confirm the circumstances when you reproduce them.

The room's mock Louis XV style doesn't interest me at all formally and the general impression has more to do with the Presidential Suite in the Westin Inn than with the White House. I had never included anything like that in my previous work. I generally like to leave such things out if they are not really helpful for establishing the truth. But here it was like a text: you can't leave out text. You can't leave out certain things with the Capitol, either. If you do, it's not the Capitol anymore but rather an identification of the place as it is. So you need three or four stylistic devices that are, formally speaking, extremely questionable because you can only use them to make a citation. Take the flags in the Oval Office: there are golden eagles at the top. And even though I only had three and a half weeks, it took me a good week to finish them. The curtains were made using a traditional method from Apulia in which paper webs are soaked in a special liquid. There used to be entire church fittings made like that in the Baroque period.

BL: You reproduced a few things in more detail, but chose to leave other details out— like on the chairs, tables and the chest of drawers.

TD: Yes, I thought that if I restrained myself with the other things, then it would look like a TV set, which is something I wanted to avoid. I wanted them to be sculptures standing in a room, objects that I made and that possessed a certain assertiveness as objects—not just as things depicting what can normally be found anywhere. That’s why I felt that a certain degree of detail was required for the Resolute desk. The carpet is very crudely made from confetti, which has a roughness about it that doesn’t try to be a carpet, and instead just took on the shape of one after being strewn there. When you look at it in the photo, it looks coarse and thick. I assumed that it would stand out more, but some people didn’t see it at all.

The chest of drawers to the right didn’t have knobs or anything else on it. It is essentially just a shape. While the center was highly detailed it was quite important to me that the edges were toned down.

I ended up making the eagles at the top of the flags out of the cheap gold wrappers from Hanuta candy bars. I started out by making cut-outs. Initially I thought I should make everything using cut-outs, layering the leaves in such a way that you could see how they formed the shape. I just cut a pattern in the shape of an eagle and placed two or three more layers on top. This way I could get the precise shadings and everything else necessary to recognize that it was an eagle without surrendering myself to the decor. But it didn’t work with the eagles. At some point I ended up performing the art of paper-crumpling, which was enough to represent the golden decoration up there, even if it’s not really an eagle or an emblem. But I couldn’t have left it out—every American expects it to be there. By contrast, I had the feeling that the stars on the flag are redundant since everyone knows how they look.

BL: Even if most of us have a more or less clear picture of the Oval Office in our minds, its furnishings actually change with each presidency. The oval carpet and the wallpaper; the furniture, paintings, sculptures, memorabilia and photos: it all changes each time. However, it doesn’t mean that the image of the Oval Office changes radically. Traditions are important. All of the objects are significant. In August 2010, relatively soon after the completion of *Presidency*, President Obama carried out the latest makeover. The walls Bush had painted beige were decorated with light and dark beige vertically striped wallpaper; and the carpet designed by Bush’s wife with radial stripes—which reminded George Bush of the optimism of a sunrise—was replaced by a beige version with the following text

woven into the corner: “GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE AND FOR THE PEOPLE,” a famous quote by Abraham Lincoln, and “THE WELFARE OF EACH OF US IS DEPENDENT FUNDAMENTALLY ON THE WELFARE OF ALL OF US,” quoting Theodore Roosevelt. The embroidered blue and white chairs that belonged to Bush were replaced by more businesslike models, and the sofas were exchanged for beige corduroy-covered models. Slightly more modern lamps and a salon table completed the picture. But much stayed the same as it had been: from the portrait of George Washington to the fireplace to the Resolute desk made from the wood of a British warship. The desk was a present from the English to the president Rutherford B. Hayes. The way in which presidents have had themselves photographed in the Oval Office is significant, revealing a great deal about how they view their office.

TD: The Resolute desk has been used by almost all of the presidents. Franklin D. Roosevelt had the opening in front covered up since he felt that the president should not be seen in a wheelchair. John F. Kennedy had the famous photo of his son playing under the desk, looking out through the little door inside it. The interesting thing about it is that it's all photographic representation. Or how Kennedy stands to the left by the window, arms and hands together behind his back, looking out—a black and white photo, a silhouette against the world. This immediately brings Khrushchev and the Berlin crisis to mind and you immediately think that the world is on the brink of disaster and the young man standing there needs to save it. Bush had the same picture taken, but with a totally different connotation. Yet he is standing there in just the same way, his hands clasped together behind his back. But because he has such a short neck and a very different stature, he looks completely different, as though he'd been waiting for his mother to come home after doing the day's shopping. Maybe it will look different again in ten years when you put it next to a photo of Obama. Obama knows that, and it is extraordinary how closely the images of his presidency are monitored—just think about Osama's execution. There was that infomercial Obama made—something that had never been done before. Three weeks before the election, he had bought a half an hour on prime time television to present his message so the viewers had enough time to really see and get used to him. The message was “Yes we can!” In the ad he's standing there in a wood paneled room with three bay windows behind him revealing some greenery.

He has one table in front of him and a smaller one behind him. It isn't the Oval Office without the American flag, of course, but you are reminded of it. He stands inside the room quite naturally and you think: yes, I could imagine that. That was, of course, the message that these pictures were trying to convey. The feeling that, hey, this isn't so bad after all—that they won't be throwing any parties there. After all, the infomercial came after that unfortunate cartoon was published on the front cover of the *New Yorker*, in which Obama and Michelle are having a costume party where they're standing in front of the fireplace, he dressed as a Muslim and she toting a machine gun. It is interesting to note that the cartoon only works because the fireplace view is so institutionalized. Instead of the portrait of George Washington, we see a truncated part of Osama Bin Laden's head. In my photo there is a fireplace with a cut off portrait of George Washington. This is how it's set up: You need two flags. They stand somewhat to the right of the windows because the idea is to break the symmetry. The ancestors are pictured on the tables behind the president, which was often the case in Roman villas, where there were images of family members and mentors. Since it's important that the most powerful man in the world never has unfinished work lying around, there was almost never anything on the desk in any of the photos I found. Reagan had a candy bowl and George W. Bush had a blue folder that was given to him every time he needed to sign a document. But otherwise it was always clean, empty. The only person I found who looked like he really worked there was Gerald Ford. He pursued a particularly interesting image strategy. He was the first president who no longer celebrated the Oval Office as a center of power but as a family-oriented place: his wife, his dog and even his briefcase—he had a real car salesman's briefcase with buckles. When that was on the table, suddenly there was a bit of life in the scene. He had brought his personal photographer with him (who, by the way, went on to become Dick Cheney's personal photographer) to act as an advisor for the portrayal. Ford mostly had himself photographed with real work lying in front of him, sometimes with his feet on the table.

BL: So *Presidency* uses furniture and decorations from different presidencies. The button to trigger an atomic war is from Bush's era; the carpet is from Clinton's. The real carpet is now in his Presidential Library in Little Rock, Arkansas. All American presidents receive a library in the place of their birth after their incumbency. Was this a topic that interested you early on?

TD: When I was 22 or 25 I traveled for several months throughout America. I thought I could travel from one Presidential Library to the next, but after visiting the second one I lost interest. In the end, I only saw the Carter Library and the Reagan Library. The Reagan Museum is a very interesting museum, by the way. It's in Simi Valley, California. But that's only one small niche in contrast to the multitude of reproductions, all the television series and films, and everyone knows what the Oval Office looks like.

It is a most potent image depot or image reservoir. As such, *Presidency* was also an open experiment for me. You bear in mind that the magazine has a run of 375,000 copies and is available for purchase throughout America. But probably only one percent of the readers will have understood what it was they saw there.

BL: Exactly. I didn't notice it at first either. You get the feeling that you can see it all the time in the *New York Times*. It's truly remarkable that the Oval Office is different every time, with different details. We don't register that somehow. It is really a kind of stage or TV set even though its physical size and composition seem quite personal, like you could have a private meeting with the president in his home.

TD: Yes, it's very small, it's only 35 by 29 feet squared and 18 feet high. At 23 inches, the dome is relatively low. Almost all of the photos are taken with wide-angle lenses, which make the room appear much bigger than it is. That's why you always see the same. You can't take photographs from anywhere else other than two points, positions that hundreds of others have also used. That means that you are working with predetermined views. You can shoot the sofa, but then you're standing pretty much in front of the Resolute desk. There is only one other very nice view, and that's from the door of the hallway, which became famous in Nixon's time— you could see his assistant's telephones.

BL: But you chose very different angles.

TD: Yes, diagonally from above. You couldn't shoot from that angle in reality without hanging from the ceiling with your camera. It is completely fictional: that angle doesn't exist. And then there's the angle where you look diagonally at the

desk where you see that famous red button, the famous blue folder and the telephone.

BL: And there's the photo with the chair from underneath. That's a perspective that we only know from cartoons, where the baby or the dog or the piggy looks up in bewilderment.

TD: Yes, exactly, that's the picture with the dome. It's a very original photo—photos like it had been taken before—one of the few which represent the exercising of power quite well. The light at the top of the dome creates a kind of halo.

BL: You gathered photos from the *New York Times* and studied the topic beforehand. You always do a lot of research for your projects. Aside from the photos, what else did you research? Or did you collect material over time as the project began to take on a life of its own?

TD: That's always different. The amount of research depends on the project. For *Embassy*, for example, there was simply nothing. The advantage with the Oval Office was that it's so famous that you only really need to flip through books and magazines and you have everything you need. For *Embassy* I really had to go there. I found it surprising that there were no photos of it. I started by talking to the journalists who had written the original articles. They—three people—really got to the bottom of the matter and brought it into the public eye. During G.W. Bush's 2003 speech, the American Craig Unger had suddenly remembered that someone had once been offered a particular story one and a half years earlier. That someone was Elisabetta Burba, but she didn't print the story since it was quite obviously a fake. Unger put two and two together and exposed it for the first time. I met everyone and suddenly it became quite clear to me that investigative journalism, which we take for granted, is an incredible feat, especially in view of the fact that we get everything from the Internet. Of course, most journalists also get most of their information from the Internet, but these news stories must have gotten there somehow. How does this work? How does a story that wasn't copied from somewhere else actually get there? Almost all of the journalism we see today is purely opinion. But how do the original news stories really get brought out into the world?

Photographers also experience a quite natural limitation. The photographer is only there where he is standing, and he can only take photos from that spot. The photographer doesn't see everything else, so everything else is not going to be conveyed. That means that the war photos that we have are, of course, the war photos taken by the photographer in the place where he had been. And this condition is extremely instructive, we cannot forget that. In the meantime, photos by soldiers can be added to the mix, taken with their own cameras or cell phones. Yet this is only a tiny portion of what's out there. And it's precisely this topic that fascinated me, along with the topic of documentary illustration, or the question: What is the relationship between image and text?

I had initially asked a friend of mine—a reporter for German radio in Rome who'd never taken a picture in his entire life—to go to the Niger Embassy for me. I sent him a camera, but of course he didn't even get through the door—the door with the brass sign. I asked him what he had seen, and he described to me what he had seen through the door past an old woman, but I couldn't use any of it. When you work for radio, you focus on atmospheric things. “A fairly old apartment building”—that didn't tell me anything I didn't already know. “Wooden doors”—well, fine, most doors are made of wood, but that didn't help me either. What sort of wood? And which shade of brown? Was there anything carved into it? He hadn't paid attention to that at all. The fact that the elevator was by Ferrari stuck out to him, which was information I really had no need for. You realize, of course, that the view of one and the same room is different at any given time. And I suppose my view is a bit eccentric indeed. But I had somehow sunk my teeth into it and just wanted to get inside. I had even rented a room in the same building three floors above the embassy. There were some office rooms available there. I thought that it could help me find out what the embassy rooms look like—to find out how big the windows were, for example. But it didn't work out because my room had been completely converted and was in the back of the building. Unfortunately, there wasn't any room there like in the embassy. But you have to try everything, I suppose.

The only way to get ahold of pictures for *Embassy* was to go there myself. I had discussed with the journalists whether it would be possible to do it, but that's a whole other story. I somehow talked my way into the anteroom where the flags are hanging and soon realized that there was someone standing behind every door. I thought that if they saw me taking pictures I'd be thrown out immediately, so I gave up right then, realizing that my memory was much better. In the end I

tried to memorize everything as well as I could. For instance, I tried to remember how the wall went up to the ceiling: Is it round? Is it straight? Is there an ornamental strip? In this case, the transition is round. And are any pictures hanging there? Just one single picture was hanging in the entire embassy. Such things, when I want to use them in my work, are far more important to me than what the photo shows. In the end, the research consisted of writing down my memories in as much detail as possible afterwards. And I did just that as soon as I walked out of the building.

I had to look at things very closely: What sort of sofa is that? How does it look? Like this one or that one?—and commit as much to memory as possible in a short period of time. I was certainly able to take a look around. I had realized that the communication problems with the embassy staff were an advantage for me. I pretended that I couldn't speak Italian and they couldn't speak any German or English, so the longer I needed to explain to them what I wanted, the longer I was in the room. I explained the whole thing very slowly to the man in German, and then in all the languages that I speak. He didn't understand because he only spoke French and Italian. When at some point they understood what was up, they kicked me out immediately.

BL: Your work often involves extracting photos, famous photos we all know quite well from the media, making a model of them using paper and then photographing it. The result ends up having its own, unique link to reality. Would it be fair to say that any existing photos would have disturbed the play on reality in this situation?

TD: For *Embassy*? Of course, very much so! Then again, it's convenient that the whole world consists of more or less the same objects. You can go anywhere in the world and you'll find a hole puncher there.

The funny thing about this was that when I went in and was sitting with them, the first thing I saw was a fax machine in the corner, exactly the same one that I have at home, the same Panasonic KX, a combo model. Fantastic, I thought, this is getting off to a great start. All the rest was the usual desk lamps, ashtrays (they had a very specific type of ashtray that had this funny round-triangular shape in this funny turquoise color just like the ones you see in bars). So I just knew which sorts of cheap pens were lying around there; and I just knew that this was the

exact same furniture.

It was the exact opposite situation with *Presidency* by the way: everybody knew everything. After the project—in January—I went there myself. You have to wait a while to get an appointment. Even the *New York Times* didn't get an appointment because it was too close to the elections. But even if I had managed to get an earlier appointment, I wouldn't have flown there because I could've used the time I would've spent in the plane more productively. To go there and only focus on details like electrical outlets would have been far too banal. There is no patina there like in Versailles. Even if Versailles fell to pieces, it wouldn't be banal. But the White House now has a different type of patina, and it's quite strange. It stems from the fact that children live there now. There are two children's room windows above the driveway with little butterfly stickers on them. Those are the signs of the house's true inhabitants, and that's simply fantastic.

BL: On the one hand we have the Oval Office, of which there are probably a hundred thousand pictures that we see regularly, and on the other we have the Niger Embassy where everything happened in secret: a theft, a break-in, secret service men and journalists. That reads like a spy novel in a completely anonymous setting.

TD: Yes, it's quite a haphazard setting, and that's a good thing.

BL: The contrast between both of the places is enormous, which is also clear based on the furnishings. But they are secretly connected to each other. The public side of politics doesn't work without the other anonymous, hidden side. Had you been looking for a way to combine the two works at all? In an exhibition or a book?

TD: The interesting thing about the exhibition at the mumok was to see that they really pursue two totally different material worlds. There are two architectural forms in both works. In *Embassy* it's the doors: there are always closed doors opposite the open ones. And in the other work it's this closed oval shape. In every picture you always see this oval shape, cut off, but not a single door. That's why I left out the one photo I took through the door in the exhibition. I didn't want to have the door there as it represents a degree of accessibility. This closed oval creates its own circle, so to speak—its own sphere. Everything that happens in

here is locked in this oval, and I found that quite interesting. In *Embassy*, on the other hand, everything could be heard through open and half-open doors. The works are really quite different. The obsession with decoration in the Oval Office provides a stark contrast to the truly empty building of the Niger Embassy. Walls are almost never blank in Central Europe, but in the Niger Embassy there is not one picture on the walls. Plain white walls. Something might be standing in the corner, or a light might be installed, but the walls themselves stay blank. There's nothing there. Seeing those sorts of things contrasted in the exhibition was very interesting for me.

BL: The faked story was actually about diplomatic, official and administrative activities with regard to yellowcake uranium. It was about stamps, seals, stationery, signatures, faxes, etc. All these things are absent in the Oval Office, but they represent real power in today's world. They testify to the authenticity of documents and their content. They thus execute decisions and exert power. They are fundamental. There is a truly incongruous relationship between *Embassy* and *Presidency*: one is an office in which important administrative activities occur or have occurred without any kind of prestige, while the other is a prestigious office, a stage where there are only actors, which then conveys the feeling that the decisions are really made or at least executed somewhere else. Do you make that comparison as well?

TD: Yes, which is why it's a bare desk in the Oval Office. Of course I could have put something on it—then it would have seemed more alive. But I thought it would be better the way it is because you so rarely see anything lying there in photos. No work is done there; it is only announced to the public there, so to speak. If it reaches the president, then the problem has already been solved: and if there is a conflict, then it stays within the confines of this oval. It isn't shown there at all. It's no coincidence that journalists are allowed to go in there. The contrast to *Embassy* is the symmetry. In *Embassy* there are no symmetrical photos, no symmetric installations of any kind. There's no need for them either. The symmetry in the Oval Office is natural: there's always that table, always that focal point in the center of the picture. At the beginning I thought I should walk to the left or right in order to somehow break this symmetry, until I realized that you can't break the symmetry at all. That's the point. You can move the flags away from the center and perhaps put a chair somewhere else. Otherwise you could just draw an axis

in the middle of it and it's the same to the left and right.

BL: There was also a difference in the presentation in the installation at the mumok. In the section devoted to *Embassy*, you recreated the floor plan of the embassy, while *Presidency* was presented in the style of a classic monumental museum.

TD: For *Embassy* you had to get up and go there. You had to enter into this architecture in order to see anything at all and then go out the back door. The light was focused on the ground. In *Presidency* everything was spread out, so to speak. The light in *Presidency* was very much tailored to the individual pictures in a brightly lit room. The walls were lit evenly.

The formats were derived from the size of the pictures themselves, i.e., from the size of the sculpture. In *Presidency*, which consists of two small pictures and three large ones, you need a central image in portrait format. You hardly see life-size portrait pictures. The symmetry is always a question of composition; we know this from the world of religious art. The question is always how to structure it appropriately. It's easier with a landscape format. In *Embassy*, I used several small landscape formats and two large ones which showed the apartment from one room to the next and then the other way around.

BL: Do you prefer one of the two series?

TD: Yes, I like *Presidency* more on two levels: because certain buildings or things are proof of how they have changed the general consciousness. You can also see that in political cartoons. In a sense, the photo editor did my work for me with the Oval Office piece. He recognized that my photo series would be able to show something that no other photo in his magazine could. Which means we've come full circle and now another stage begins when someone rips something out of that magazine—my pictures—and makes something else out of them. Now I see what my pictures are capable of achieving, so to speak. The photo editor doesn't know anything at all about art or philosophical debates about images, but he realized what my type of photograph can achieve.

In terms of the images, I prefer *Embassy* because it shows the lengths you can go to when describing an apartment. There was this display by Herbert Bayer in the Museum of Modern Art in New York where the photos were exhibited all

around you—a panopticon using photographs. Or El Lissitzky at the Pressa Cologne in 1928. Or exhibitions from the 1970s like *Signs of Life* by Venturi, Scott Brown. Those were photos that really stretched out into the space. One like that don't exist anymore, now you usually only see them in displays of trade show stands. This is an aspect that has almost completely vanished from photography because now only individual pictures are hung on the wall. We walk up to them, read the title and that's that.

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