

Karola Kraus, Preface, 2010

In his works *Embassy* (2007) and *Presidency* (2008) Thomas Demand portrays two places of historical interest which, despite being very closely linked to one another by political intrigue, could not be more different in terms of their geopolitical function and location. On the one hand, we have the Niger Embassy located on the outskirts of Rome, an official building of one of the world's poorest countries that is peripheral in every sense of the word. On the other hand, we have the Oval Office of the President of the United States in the White House, where the strings of world politics are pulled. The architectural circumstances and the representative regalia, which Demand refers to in his sculptural, model-like reproductions and photographic interpretations, are just as diametrically opposed. The unglamorous ambiance of the embassy and the bombastic presidential headquarters are linked by a political scandal that attracted global attention in its time: During a break-in at the Niger Embassy, stationery and stamps were stolen that were then used to forge letters implicating Niger in illegal uranium shipments to Iraq, which in turn justified the US invasion of Iraq under President Bush. Thomas Demand meticulously researched the commotion surrounding "yellowcake," as the yellowish uranium material is known, and writes about the obstacles he had to overcome while doing so in the text accompanying his project. While it was easy for him to find photos of the President's office as reference material for his work, his search for reference material he could use for the interiors of the Niger Embassy not only proved to be adventurous, but also revealed more about the scandal's consequences, which are still affecting both Niger and the US today. That his work sheds light on a process of defamation without being superficial or agitating is also proof of how much room Demand's concept of reconstructing spaces, objects and events leaves for interpretation. Just as the stories of deception do not visibly manifest themselves in these spaces, Demand's images of the spaces do not instantly reveal the plots and conspiracies designed within them. However, they do convey "at least a vivid impression of the premises," as the artist himself cryptically notes.

The two pieces, displayed side-by-side at the mumok, show the extent to which Demand's reconstructions refer both to the architectural spaces and the historical areas, as well as the interplay between them. However, reconstruction inevitably means interpreting and transforming the past, which then, in a sense,

disappears. It would seem that Demand also implements this logic of interpretation in the way he works, allowing the models that serve him as the “true” subjects of his photographs to be destroyed and thus vanish once again. For Demand, interdisciplinary work means moving between both historical research and contemporary artistic settings, while simultaneously mediating between architecture, sculpture and photography. That is why his exhibition stands out within our program of exhibitions, making an independent and clear statement that deeply reflects and at the same time sharpens the museum’s profile, known for its medially diverse, discursive and socio-analytical alignment. My special thanks go to Edelbert Köb, my predecessor as director of the mumok, who invited Thomas Demand to put on this exhibition and acted as its curator, supervising the catalog up to its completion. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Thomas Demand and his studio for the planning and realization of this exhibition, as well as to the catalog authors Karl Schlögel and Bart Lootsma for their insightful texts, and to Naomi Mizusaki for the wonderful graphic design of the catalog. Our special thanks go to all sponsors of the exhibition, as well as to Christian and Franziska Hausmaninger and the mumok Advisory Board for their generous support regarding the catalog. On behalf of the entire mumok team, I would like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to Tina Lipsky for the exhibition organization and Susanne Koppensteiner for the catalog production.

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