

The image is very slightly blurred, the edges not sharp, and the window frame only slightly out of focus, like it is moving or something is moving toward it. Yet Thomas Demand has meticulously constructed the space according to his own methods-cutting and pasting together paper and cardboard in order to try to capture the essence of a location or environment, and in this case, it is Jackson Pollock's barn studio. Once Demand completes the structure, he carefully places the large camera on the tripod and with a long exposure takes the picture. Nothing moves in Demand's studio. The click of the shutter breaks the silence.

Demand checks the image with his loop. His worst fears are confirmed—the edges of the window are indeed out of focus; yes, somehow the image moved. Space does not move but something was in motion and it was quite disturbing. The work was ruined. More importantly, Demand feared that in scrupulously reconstructing the space he could have brought back a kind of poltergeist, a soul or a ghost trapped in some corner of the image.

The edges moved like objects on a psychic's table. Something or someone moved Demand's image.

These concerns are inextricably linked to his photographic practice. Could it be that he not only recreates a near perfect image but also breathes life into them? In fact this particular image was haunting. It was Pollock's last studio in Long Island, which consisted of two windows; the rest of the barn was saturated with only a bit of light leaking through the cracks in the planks. Demand was fascinated with this image he found in a magazine. It was not simply a studio but also a shrine where the spirit of the painter rested. A space where history, art history, was made; it was the site where Pollock simultaneously opened and closed the notion of painting. Now, the painter's ghost was shaking Demand's space. Was this the first time he had recreated the space of a dead person? He couldn't remember exactly. In any case if ghosts exist one was definitely inside that paper barn in the middle of Berlin.

Demand took the picture and once again the edges were blurred. Yet this time he was not scared. He felt that the ghostly presence in the barn was trying to tell him something about his work, the realm of images, their life, and their independence. The fact that Demand's work is deprived of any language is very important. Erasing any presence of language was Demand's way to respect the spirit of the image. In the Middle Ages, monks started reading with their minds, in silence rather than aloud. After centuries of reading aloud, the silent reading was a new way to acknowledge the independence of thought from the physical reality of the world. Demand's erasure of language is his way to say that images also have a soul and that they exist independently from their verbal meaning or description. Images occupy space, like mountains within the landscape even if a map does not tell us the specific names. Looking at any of Demand's photos is like looking at the physical representation of memory and its spatial dimensions. It is a metaphysical experience like looking at a De Chirico painting. But what are memories and dreams made of? In Demand's world-paper. They are light and thin and they can be destroyed by a simple noise, a wind blow. For Demand, looking at an image is not just a visual experience but a structural one, the same way a sculpture is in relation to the structure of a piece of stone, wood, or clay. Like a sculptor, Demand looks for the shape of the soul inside the image. For the artist, it is a spatial journey to understand if space travels in time.

The presence of a ghost in his Pollock photograph reminded Demand of *Unpainted Sculpture* (1997) by the Los Angeles artist Charles Ray. Ray casted, piece by piece, a car destroyed in a fatal crash. Demand wondered in making this work what happened to the ghost of the car and to the ghosts of the people that died in it. Would they move from the original into the perfect replica of the car? Pollock died in a car crash, the rock where his car smashed against is also a kind of shrine, a small monument like the empty barn. If the ghost of Pollock was trapped in Demand's paper reconstruction of the barn studio then how could he free him? Should he destroy the space and the photo? No, this was not a solution. Demand succeeded in bringing back a ghostlike space and with it all the ghosts that lived in it. To destroy that reality it would have meant to trap those ghosts even more. It could mean to condemn Pollock to an endless cycle, dooming him to live forever in paper napkins or even worse inside toilet rolls.

In spite of his dislike for painting, Demand has the utmost respect for Pollock. Demand was actually inspired by Pollock's work, that has always been a reflection of the spaces where history becomes pregnant with its children. To sentence Pollock's soul into a Kleenex box was like locking a genie into a beer can. No, Demand could not do that to him. For a moment, he thought about bringing back the ghost of the entire New York School, building out of paper a Mark Rothko bathroom or a Barnett Newman kitchen. Demand wondered if other ghosts would exist in his other photographs. Do people leave chunks of their souls inside the spaces where their history began? Does Bill Gates's soul hide inside the corner of his old office? Perhaps there are many souls hiding inside the various holes in *Peg Board*? Or perhaps there are millions of tiny souls from a premature ejaculation floating in the red lights of his *Parlor*? Or the ghost of a dead spectator might be sleeping underneath the table of *Studio*, or a guest inside one of those paper lamps in *Terrace*. Maybe a student inside a copy machine of *Copyshop*, a manager inside the electric socket of *Mural*, a miner inside *Pit*, or the ghost of a fly inside one of the microphones of *Laboratory*. Maybe L. Ron Hubbard, the father of scientology, is still inside the yellow cup in the room where he wrote his seminal text, *Dianetics*.

Demand thought about his own soul and wondered if it could still be inside *Factory*, the only work with language. If his soul was not there perhaps he had a solution to this problem.

The ghosts were trapped because language was missing as a vessel toward the outside world. Language is closure and when it does not appear in our dreams, it recurs over and over until the silence is broken, space opens, and memory is released. Demand's spaces are closed, his images sealed, no language enters, and no language leaves. "My work is in itself a ghost of my vision," he thought. "Even my last work *Escalator* is moving on the giant screen in the streets of Seoul not because of movement but because the endless repetition of stillness, a ghost of a movement." Then suddenly he realizes that all of his work means nothing but the desperate attempt to free history from its body, kill history so that its spirit could move into the universe of images and free from the weight of time. Images with no history, no past, no future, no present.

So he understood that he was a religious photographer, one who was trying to build icons from a time devoid of faith. He was trying to erase language from an odd form of iconoclasm, or better yet, verboclasm (the destruction of verbs and words). In the beginning there were no words, only space. That was Demand's revelation. What he was striving to find in the dark was suddenly revealed. To build spaces and images over and over was to bring them back to their origins, in much the same way that certain icons bring back the origins of Jesus or Buddha. Everything can be saved but time. Time dies over and over again as soon as it appears. Demand thought that his work was a strange alchemy to time's death. But now that Pollock's ghost was shaking around in Demand's paper barn his efforts were defeated. If any ghost could travel in the images and blur the space in Demand's work it was destroyed because the sharpness of his photos was not a technical feat, but a spiritual and philosophical one. His images were perfect because they were celebrating time's resurrection from history. Pollock's ghost was instead bringing back history, sealing off time into the bottomless pit of Nosferatu's curse. Yet maybe language itself could have been the antidote to those ghosts and souls. However, which language? Pollock's name scribbled on a piece of paper and left on the floor of the barn? No smart ghosts would have gone for it. Demand felt that it was time to surrender. He sat in his studio in silence looking at the space that resembled a rock but instead was moving from within.

Then one day he knew that the ghost was gone. He was now sure that the space was still. He sat the camera, took the picture and sure enough the edges were in sharp focus. The image was perfect. Time resurrected and history defeated. A great joy invaded his mind. Outside the air was cold, the sky bright over Berlin, the usual traffic jams, only a few people in the streets, no buses. Yet for Demand, it seemed that he was surrounded by a calmness and an empty muteness. He had defeated a ghost and history was on his side. He ran down the stairs of the subway station but nobody was around; the platform, like one of his pictures, was empty, no language in site, no trains. He waited and waited and waited. He open his newspaper and read loud in the echoing tunnel of the station: "Berlin paralyzed for a 24 hour public transport strike." He walked home and the next day the strike was over, and the ghost was back, and the edges blurred. Demand never realized that his studio rent was so cheap because it sits on top of that very train station.