

Urban Spaces
Lists of works

By Benedetta Carpi De Resmini

ANDREAS GURSKY**Schwimmbad Teneriffa, 1987***Tenerife's Pool*

C-Print. 46 x 60.5 cm

Private Collection. Naples, Italy

Courtesy Lia Rumma Gallery

At the outset of the eighties, Andreas Gursky abandons black and white, to arrive at a naturalistic observation of the reality that surrounds him, often reproducing images of recreational activities, where the protagonists constitute a minor detail in the midst of a vast landscape. Frequently using a wide angle lens, which allows him greater depth of field, he manages to give a sensation of collectiveness. In these first photographs a subtle social commentary can be noted, perhaps an influence of the politics of East Germany, where he was born. Especially in the work *Schwimmbad Teneriffa, 1987*, Gursky reproduces a swimming pool sheltered by a magnificent jetty on the Atlantic Ocean. The people are not only merely an accessory to the image as a whole; they do not have an essence of their own, but rather represent a constellation in the composition. Adopting a bird's eye view of the architecture that almost completely invades the jetty, a clear denunciation of man's ever increasing invasion of nature emerges.

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Dresden, 1988

C-Print. 247 x 207 cm

Private Collection. Naples, Italy

Courtesy Lia Rumma Gallery

Among the Bechers' students, Andreas Gursky has been one of the first artists to use a large format camera; this allows viewers to enter into the image, living the space and managing to capture every detail. Gursky's works are always large panoramic views, where details are only part of the whole; it is the aesthetic of the image that takes on relevance. *Dresden, 1988*, depicts the façade of the Semper Opera House in the city of Dresden. It is interesting to note how the artist creates a choral image merely by presenting a special foreshortening in the Opera's façade, that is, taking only some details. Positioning himself at a certain distance allows him to take in the entire subject, managing to capture all the details of a community on the occasion of a possible Sunday stroll. The elimination of a particular light or atmospheric condition homogenizes the entire composition while maintaining a unified point of view. By way of a lateral perspective view, he captures the prominent row of pilasters that occupy almost the entire image; the statues positioned on the top make up the root and the closing of the photographic composition overall.

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Hong Kong Grand Hyatt Park, 1994

C-print. 210 x 170.5 cm

Private Collection. Turin, Italy

Andreas Gursky always portrays aspects of our contemporary civilization with irony and in a certain critical vein; in fact, during a dialogue with Roland Barthes he underlines how “to go to the centre city is to encounter the social truth, to take part in the magnificent plenitude of reality”¹. Framed from a bird’s eye view he transcribes the innumerable realities of contemporary metropolises. In *Hong Kong Grand Hyatt Park*, 1994, the activity in Hong Kong’s port creates a dissonant contrast with the city park. The extremely small figures that appear in the Grand Hyatt Park while walking or doing their tai chi exercises look like figures in a model, while the port’s cranes bring construction set games to mind. Everything is constructed in minute detail by way of digital recomposition, although the final result is not a frigid view, but a meticulous vision of today’s reality.

¹ Taken from the text by Martin Hentschel in “Andreas Gursky Werke 80-88,” Hatje Cantz, 2008, op. cit., pg. 28. The original text was published in *Ein Gespräch zwischen Andreas Gursky und Bernard Bürgi*, in Andreas Gursky, Kunsthalle Zurich, Coonia, 1982, pg. 7.

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Singapore, 1997

C-print. 186 x 235.5 cm

Courtesy La Colección Jumex. Mexico D.F., Mexico

Andreas Gursky has focused his attention on the big Singapore Island. He uses a wide angle, from an elevated point of view, that allows a complete vision of the city’s pier, modulating each single thing in order to articulate it in a wider dimension. Each element is weight up for the emergence of the formal quality of the whole. Dozens of ships are set along Singapore port, and the leaving ship in front conjugates perfectly with the shore’s sight. The artist stops on a piece of land that remains untouched by the increasing urbanization but completely shaped by each inlet, making the spectator not able to forget the invasive human intervention.

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May Day IV, 2000

C-print. 208 x 508 cm

Lia Rumma Gallery Collection. Naples, Milan, Italy

Tote Hosen, 2000

C-print. 208 x 508 cm

Courtesy La Colección Jumex. Mexico D.F., Mexico

The human being, understood collectively, is always at the center of Andreas Gursky’s search. By way of digital elaboration, a technique he began to use during the mid-nineties, he recomposes images eliminating all narrative elements, thus creating a short-circuit in which the viewer cannot distinguish whether or not the photo’s reality is such. *May Day IV*, 2000, pertains to a series dedicated to massive gatherings of people in which every individual becomes part of a huge puzzle to be put together. The title of the work refers to the festivities of May 1st, conceived of to celebrate workers’ social and economic affirmation, but this alone is introduced in the intentions that lead to this collective rite. Every single space in the image ground is entirely occupied by the myriad of bodies crowded together in a place whose context is unknown.

Tote Hosen, 2000, describes the euphoric excesses of a crowd in a punk group concert, shaping the essence of the massive fanaticism phenomenon.

The relationship between each one and the other is due to digital elaboration of color that allows him to underline the link between them and to capture the abstract composition of the image in this form of social organization.

CANDIDA HÖFER

Tomba Monumentale Brion S. Vito d'Altivole Treviso V, 1983

C-print. 21 x 29 cm

Artist Collection

Tomba Monumentale Brion S. Vito d'Altivole Treviso VI, 1983

C-print. 20 x 21 cm

Artist Collection

Tomba Monumentale Brion S. Vito d'Altivole Treviso III, 1983

C-print. 21 x 32 cm

Artist Collection

These works pertain to one of Candida Höfer's first series in color. At the outset of the eighties, the artist had taken photographs of architect Carlo Scarpa's Tomba Monumentale Brion, constructed between 1969 and 1978, using a portable medium format camera. The artist does not approach Scarpa's work by way of a conventional point of view, she certainly does not wish to hone in on architectural details, but rather to allow its poetic side to emerge. Upon contemplating these empty spaces, the sense of solitude particular to cemeteries is not perceived; what we perceive in these photographs is the artist's need to reflect the atmosphere: that closeness to the sun and the earth that Scarpa had formulated in describing his project. In work no. V the sunlight filters through the windows and the completely circular arch. Höfer focuses her gaze on the festive, iridescent effect created by the light. Nothing in these images produces a sensation of immanence, in spite of the fact that the attention paid to every detail makes the viewer feel that she/he is entering into them only to pass through them.

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Stadtbibliothek Stockholm, 1993

Stockholm State Library

C-print. 38 x 57 cm

Artist Collection

Stadtbibliothek Stockholm, 1993, is one of the photographs that Candida Höfer made using a medium format camera without a tripod. The human presence is almost an unimportant detail within the overall composition: they are silent figures dissolved into the atmosphere, who suggest the passing of time. The slightly enhanced lateral viewpoint accentuates the circular nature of the reading room. Höfer seems to want to transmit the feeling that the "knowledge" that awaits in the books on the shelves forms part of a broader, almost cosmic vision. While maintaining formal perfection, one notes how the artist's interest in this work tends to express an idea about the composition of the place as a social space, as if the hemispherical nature of the structure was part of a broader concept that arises from the characteristics of the surroundings.

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Kunsthhaus Bregenz I, 1999

Bregenz Museum I

C-print. 152 x 152 cm

Artist Collection

During the last half of the nineties, Candida Höfer begins to use a larger format, using a Hasselblad 6x6 camera which allows her a greater control over details without losing sight of the whole. The work *Kunsthau Bregenz I*, 1999, is part of this unfinished series of photographs of museums that the artist had already begun in the early eighties, and depicts the foyer of the Bregenz Museum. As in all her photos from the mid-nineties onward, man does not appear; there is a presence-absence that exalts the spirit of the place. While still choosing a perfectly frontal and symmetrical focal point, the artist animates the space by maintaining double illumination: the light from the lamps that reflects on the grey floor and the daylight that filters through the large window in the background. The bench semi-attached to the window allows for an articulation of space that encloses it visually. The peculiar focus, in addition, draws the viewer toward the interior of the place, inviting the possibility of becoming part of it and capturing its essence.

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Milchhof Nürnberg I, 1999
Milchhof Building Nuremberg I
C-print. 152 x 152 cm
Artist Collection

Candida Höfer, always taking photographs of new spaces that range from libraries to theaters and industrial interiors (Milchhof Nürnberg), remains anchored to a practice of transposing the intangible aspects of the topic photographed, going beyond a purely documentary vision. The place is not only the topic of her photographs but also turns into a real space for the viewer, a pictorial space, and also a mental space, often suggested by other sources of light.

In the work *Milchhof Nürnberg I*, 1999, these three aspects can be easily perceived. We find ourselves in front of the old offices, now in disuse, of the Central Milk Exchange, designed by architect Otto Ernst Schweizer during the thirties. This photograph is one of the rare shots taken from the outside. In this case, the viewer is not invited to live the space, but becomes a witness instead.

The space is sub-divided vertically across the building's three floors, as if it were a composition grid, but in depth as well: the space's external surface, the inner space, where activities of readjustment can be intuited, and the space that lies behind, from where light filters in and trees can be seen in the distance.

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Schloss St. Emmeram Regensburg XXVIII, 2003
St. Emmeram Regensburg Palace XXVIII
C-print. 152 x 193 cm
Artist Collection

In *Schloss St. Emmeram Regensburg XXVIII*, 2003, Candida Höfer reproduces one of the halls from the grand St. Emmeram de Ratisbona palace. A showcase encloses a long, set table, and through a special play of reflections the artist makes it appear to be repeated infinitely. This photograph reveals an uncommon aspect of space, putting its very composition up for discussion. We find ourselves face to face with a synthesis of opposites: an attentive and meticulous gaze that allows every detail of the Chinese ceramics to be captured, and a metaphysical gaze that closes the composition. The artist's eye, placed at the height of that of a possible dinner guest, gives viewers the sensation that they are part of the group, as if the viewer him or herself was on exhibit, creating also a strong sense of disorientation while turning into one of the possible variants of our perception.

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Musée du Louvre Paris II, 2005

C-print. 200 x 262 cm

Artist Collection

In more recent years, Candida Höfer began to use a larger format (8x10) which allows her to condense the fundamental points of her search in a syntax constructed for more monumental images, with compositions that are mostly pictorial. In the image *Musée du Louvre, Paris II, 2005*, the artist photographs one of the sections of the Louvre that is dedicated to 17th century French sculpture. This place, without the public that invades the museum on a daily basis, becomes a proscenium where the sculptures become the protagonists, taking on a role within the architectural staging of the photograph. Every element is placed alongside the next, the monumental architecture of the Richelieu wing alongside the sinuous lines of equestrian statues, marble's purity alongside a plastic structure that was used to wrap a statue under restoration, everything converges in a single perfection and purity of vision.

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Teatro San Martín Buenos Aires I, 2006

San Martín Theatre Buenos Aires I

C-print. 200 x 269 cm

Artist Collection

Congreso Buenos Aires I, 2006

Congress Buenos Aires I

C-print. 200 x 251 cm

Artist Collection

Palacio del diario La Prensa Buenos Aires I, 2006

La Prensa Newspaper Palace Buenos Aires I

C-print. 200 x 248 cm

Artist Collection

Casa Rosada Buenos Aires II, 2006

Government House Buenos Aires II

C-print. 200 x 245 cm

Artist Collection

In 2006 Candida Höfer was invited to photograph the city of Buenos Aires. This exhibition has decided to devote a wider section to her work in this city.

As in many series by the artist, these works are not so much a mimetic portrayal of places or the urban structure but rather a vision of those spaces through the lights, the atmospheres and colors. In *Congreso Buenos Aires I, 2006*, Höfer leads us directly into the interior of one of the chambers of the legislative palace. The monumentality of the hall is evidenced by a baroque-style lamp placed at the centre; the diffuse light tends to mitigate the tones. The artist, taking the detail of the reproduction of the facade of the view positioned in the end of the chamber, creates a curious union game between interior and exterior.

In *Teatro San Martín Buenos Aires I*, Höfer presents the inside of the theatre using an axial view; from the centre of the theatre box her gaze follows the whole development of the chamber, putting that who watches in the double and ambiguous role of spectator and actor at the same time. The artificial light of the chamber distinguishes the electric blue of the rigorously empty armchairs; in addition, the

convergence of the airily perspective with the linear allows sensing both the atmosphere and the details of the architectural structure. As flamenco artists from the XVI century, Höfer offers us a broad view that at the same time focuses on every detail.

AXEL HÜTTE

Canterbury House, London, 1982-1984

Gelatin Silver Print. 66 x 80 cm

Artist Collection

Bankside Powerstation, London, 1982-1984

Gelatin Silver Print. 66 x 80 cm

Artist Collection

Nobel Court, London, 1982-1984

Gelatin Silver Print. 66 x 80 cm

Artist Collection

Mödling House, London, 1982-1984

Gelatin Silver Print. 66 x 80 cm

Artist Collection

These photographs by Axel Hütte emerged as part of a project that the artist began to work on in London during the early eighties. Although they do not disregard the descriptive analysis inherited from lessons learned from the Bechers, they distinguish themselves with a calibrated fusion of light and shadow, in addition to a curious graphic play that is created between different architectural elements.

In *Canterbury House*, light filters in between a series of pilasters along the left side of the photo, and the play of light marks the profile of a cement staircase in a clear-cut shadow, creating a labyrinthic sequence of structures. In *Nobel Court*, the artist fixes his gaze upon the subterranean landscape of a London palace. The contrast in chiaroscuro accentuated by fusion between artificial and natural light creates a subtle effect of encounter: on the left, the deep black of the transoms on the right side corresponds to the string of brightly lit openings on the left, just as the shadow created by the wall to the left corresponds to the tidy vision of pavement to the right. The perspective's composition is closed in by a series of closures in the background. In *Mödling House*, the artist finds himself inside the entryway of a palace; here, once again, the strong contrast between light coming from outside and the half-light of the central vestibule creates an interesting intersection of vertical and horizontal lines.

The artist employs a penetrating descriptive analysis amalgamated with a wise use of light to neutralize the language pertaining to the space photographed, thus highlighting a symbolic expressiveness that arises from this very particular synergy between different elements.

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Crucifix Lane-1, London, 1992

C-print. 162 x 205 cm

Artist Collection

Crucifix Lane-2, London, 1996

C-print. 162 x 205 cm

Artist Collection

At the outset of the nineties, Axel Hütte's focused his attention on subterranean landscapes, bridges and remote corners of the city. In these photographs, the artist's gaze hones in on the ramifications of the galleries that pass underneath the most important rail line in London, as Henry David Thoreau would say: "With eyes wide open in order to avoid finding human footprints along the way.". These images are constructed in such a way that one's gaze tends to remain in the shadowy areas, rather than in the sequence of architectural elements, and they become more abstract and mental.

In *Crucifix Lane-1*, all orientation in the photograph is given by darkness; only two lights, from which no reflections emanate, lead to daylight at the end of the tunnel. *Crucifix Lane-II* consists of a harmonious sequence of radiant light and shadow, created by artificial light fixtures that scan the route of the subterranean intersection.

In these works, the artist offers an unusual vision of London: by avoiding the middle distance through a lucid play of juxtapositions in chiaroscuro, he leads viewers to move away from a realistic observation of the subject represented, to fly over unknown spaces in their minds.

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Borzano/Citadella, Italy, 1996

C-print. 205 x 162 cm c/u

Artist Collection

The series of Italian landscapes of Axel Hütte belongs to the first half of the 90`s. The artist has often been focused in small centres of the emilian-toscan Apennine, trying to capture the irregularities of the nature and the urban landscape. This is the photograph of an old agricultural shed fallen into disuse in the region of Borzano, Reggio Emilia province. The intense effects of light irradiation, which is filtered through the holes of the net in the top of the construction, constitute the fundamental element of this image. It is interesting to note the contrast between the light's irregular movement, and the also irregular growth of vegetation on the walls, with a rigor determined by the succession of straight lines of the architectural structure and the proper use of diptych which scans the vision with some consistency. The strength of the image, due to the spatial and geometrical construction of the framing, seems to have roots in the former pictorial construction of Italian landscaping, with a division in colour spots, an obscure close-up and a sinking toward the horizon.

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Las Vegas, Caesars Palace, 2003

Duratrans with Mirogardglass. 157 x 207 cm

Waddington Galleries Collection. London, Great Britain

Minneapolis, Mississippi, 2006

Duratrans with Mirogardglass. 157 x 237 cm

Patricia Low Contemporary Collection. Gstaad, Switzerland

Since the mid 90´s onwards, the nightlife light becomes his territory of privileged inquiry. In extreme visual conditions, always pushed to the limit, the artist captures the myriad of aspects the city can assume at night: with very long exposure times, showing elements that the human eye would not be able to perceive. By printing the photograph on a special film and placing it against a reflective surface that intensifies the transforming power of the shadows, Hütte amplifies the effects provided by the nightlife light.

In the "black" waters of the Mississippi River (*Minneapolis, Mississippi*, 2006) the urban area lights are reflected, creating a twinkling game of colours as if it were a festive fireworks counterpoint. *Las Vegas, Caesars Palace*, 2003, shows the vision of the city, goal and dream of many tourists. In the foreground, on the right angle, the silhouette of the hotel with its golden buttresses becomes a frame against the black sky which occupies almost the entire image. The city lights constitute just the stage for the night, the actual protagonist of the entire photograph, turning the urban space intangible and insubstantial.

THOMAS RUFF

Interieur 7 D, 1982

Interior 7 D

C-print. 27.5 x 20.5 cm

Private Collection

Thomas Ruff's first works, influenced by the Bechers' teachings, have a powerful documentary character. Fascinated by Eugène Atget's and Walker Evans' photographs, the artist decides to create a kind of systematic photographic diary of all the petite bourgeois environments in which he has lived. At any rate, beginning with these early photos Ruff differentiates himself from his masters' teachings by using color, as the artist himself affirms: "after all, we don't see in black and white". In *Interieur 7 D* (Düsseldorf), 1982, he photographs the attic of an anonymous building in Düsseldorf during the early eighties. The natural light that filters in through the dormer is a murky, diffuse light, that turns the entire atmosphere almost monochrome. The artist crops the upper tip of the interior, focusing his attention on the diagonal row of pilasters, highlighting the peeling walls and thus closing off the sightline toward the vanishing points. The absolute absence of any human presence makes these images impenetrable, but at the same time the viewer's gaze is captured, allowing him or her to visualize and capture the most minute of details.

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Haus N° 7 1, 1988

House N° 7 1

C-print mounted on Diasec Face. 237 x 188 cm

Private Collection

Haus n° 7 1, 1988, belongs to Thomas Ruff's first series of photographs, of anonymous buildings built in Germany during the post-war period following the Second World War. Inspired by postcards from the fifties that reproduce details of urban contexts from that time, in these images the artist reveals the back side of two palaces, the principal access doors of which cannot be seen. The entire photographic composition becomes impersonalized by the muted crepuscular light, which annuls any possible accent that might fall on a particular detail. The vanishing point for these buildings, viewed from a diagonal, is truncated on the right side of the work; the same alleyway that divides the two constructions is cut off by the particular perspective employed. In addition to impeding the viewer's eye from resting on any point on the horizon, Ruff adds another construction above, in the right hand corner, obstructing that line of sight. Invalidating the traditional use of perspective, the image itself becomes ambiguous, leading the eye toward multiple lines of sight.

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Zeitungsphoto 039, 1990

Newspaper Photo 039

C-print. 13.6 x 36.1 cm
Courtesy Mai 36 Galerie. Zurich, Switzerland

The *Zeitungfoto* series (journalistic photographs) pertains to a topic that Thomas Ruff developed during the early nineties. Taking the recovery of 400 photographic illustrations from newspapers and rotogravures as a point of departure, the artist enlarged the photographic image to almost double its original size, completely extrapolating it from the text. Analyzing the photographic language and consequently, the tie between word and image, and as such, making the photograph's ambiguity manifest as an illustration of a journalistic text, the artist carries out an act of recuperation. This recuperation tends to confer its pictorial dignity to the image once again, but above all, its linguistic dignity. By isolating journalistic photos from any text or words that might define its context, Ruff exposes the image to any possible interpretation from the viewer. In *Zeitungfoto 039*, 1990, it is understood that it must be a photograph of the top of a building in the city of Essen on account of the large sign that shows this slogan: "Essen, the shopping city." Apart from the photo's geographic location, this work is open to multiple interpretations, and as such, it affirms the impossibility of a single unanimous interpretation of a photographic image.

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Plakat III, 1996-1997

Poster III

C-print. 256 x 183 cm
Courtesy Mai 36 Galerie. Zurich, Switzerland

The *Plakat* series produced by Thomas Ruff during the last half of the nineties includes nearly 9 works. Taking his inspiration from the Russian propaganda signs from the twenties and bringing old techniques used by pioneers such as Heartfield up to date, he re-elaborated already existing photographs using digital programs, inserting elements of writing. The artist does not wish to produce posters as a means of political propaganda, but to integrate himself into television language, ironically alluding to contemporary political-historical events. The texts inserted in the works have an almost pictorial function; in fact, the writing is not legible, it is often turned upside down or distorted. Ruff's posters are positioned precisely within the trend of industrial circulation of illustrations in the contemporary world, with the consequent loss of meaning and its rehabilitation as works of art.

In *Plakat III*, 1997, the artist ironically alludes to Foreign Minister Kohl's decision to move the capital from Bonn to Berlin, showing the following phrase with the letters turned around: "Helmut Kohl moves to the new capital city. Helmut Kohl moves". The Foreign Minister is inverted, with his head inserted into a conical building under construction, at the top of which the profile of the important buildings of the two world powers can be seen. Perhaps he alludes to the fact that it is only thanks to a consensus between the two powers that the construction of a new capital city might be achieved. At Kohl's feet lies the city of Berlin, future capital of a re-unified Germany, blurred and deliberately pushed to the background.

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Herzog & de Meuron Bibliothek, Eberswalde, 1999

Herzog & de Meuron Library, Eberswalde

C-print. 130 x 162 cm
Private Collection. Kuesnacht, Switzerland

Bibliothek Eberswalde, 1999, represents a unique case in Thomas Ruff's production; it is one of the few works that do not pertain to any particular series. It derives from a particular collaboration between the artist and architects Herzog and De Meuron, carried out on the occasion of the construction of the Eberswalde Library, to the north of Berlin. The library's exterior was studied by the artist in collaboration

with the two architects and turned into a screen for images. Those images were photographs from Ruff's archive that he obtained from newspapers and magazines, as well as fragments of his personal production, which were later printed on the glass and cement panels of the façade. The horizontal disposition of the images gives a special movement to the cube-shaped structure of the building and suggests a progressive reading of its exterior. This reading is immediate and has no explicative references, the aim is to be open to multiple interpretations from the viewer or reader. The particular, angular view in *Bibliothek Eberswalde*, 1999, exalts the longitudinal development of the image. The tram line cables are deliberately left in place, and seem to suggest a sequential reading of the reproductions that cover the library's façades.

In this work, Ruff superimposes the view of the building's exterior and an image of two boys on a motorcycle, which confers a certain ambiguity to the image as a whole. By inserting an element that is evidently unreal, the artist leaves space for a double reading, in this way creating confusion between the objective reality and that projected by the artist himself.

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m.d.p.n. 06, 2002

C-Print

186 x 270 cm

Collection Lia Rumma Gallery. Naples, Milan, Italy

m.d.p.n. 27, 2003

C-print

94 x 125 cm

Collection Lia Rumma Gallery. Naples, Milan, Italy

The Naples fish market series follows along the lines of the conjectures articulated by Ruff in the series of photographs dedicated to Mies Van der Rohe's architecture. In response to an invitation by Italian gallery owner Lia Rumma, he decides to undertake this project on the fish market by Luigi Cosenza, built in 1929-1934. He found the structure in a state of deterioration due to years of poor administration in a public building. Thomas Ruff gave it back new life. In *m.d.p.n. 27*, 2003, the artist takes up an antique black and white photograph from architect Cosenza's archive and adds color. In addition, he completely restores the exterior archway, in such a way that architectural characteristics not evident in its present state emerge. By evidencing the contrast between the sky, tinged with intense blue, and the building which conserves the antique photograph's scale of grays, he accentuates the building's modernist character, giving it a completely new image, with a new linguistic analysis.

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Jpeg se02, 2006

C-print con Diasec. 246 x 188 cm

Collection Lia Rumma Gallery. Naples, Milan, Italy

Fascinated by the immediacy and the infinite variety of images that can be recovered via Internet, Thomas Ruff has begun to appropriate and manipulate a vast series of images downloaded from the web. This series, to which he has attributed the name of the file extension for an image, positions itself within the artist's reflections on perception of visual language. These photographs, all large format, reproduce the effect of enlarging a digital image to a maximum, where it begins to lose its function as visual information. By reproducing the image structure like a large grid of optical information, the same mechanism is revealed as that seen when one is navigating on the web. The information is limitless, but we are not able to perceive any of it completely.

These photographs represent a large variety of topics, from tropical paradises to cities destroyed by war. In *Jpeg se02*, 2006, a corner of a garden in an anonymous city is portrayed. The urban fabric extends beyond the fence. But the viewer is not able to perceive the photograph's details, unable to fully comprehend it, because a true connection between the image and his or her reality is missing.

THOMAS STRUTH

Panorama 1, Paris, Beaugrenelle, 1979

Gelatin Silver Print. 40.3 x 57.7 cm

Private Collection

Thomas Struth had already begun to document urban landscapes during the late seventies, where he sought out places and atmospheres that might manifest a sense of the everyday and the collective. As the artist himself affirms, cities are “places of transformation, where history’s development and formal (aesthetic and cultural) as well as functional (social and economic) changes can be perceived immediately.” His documentary work on the modern neighborhood of Beaugrenelle, in Paris, dates back to that time. Inaugurated during the 1970s, it is an exclusively residential and administrative neighborhood, whose name comes from a project conceived of at the beginning of the 19th century. The main square becomes a central part of the photograph, captured in an unreal and suspended vacuum from which all urban space seems to coil away, and from which point the development of the entire neighborhood is restored. Composition reveals an attentive study of the neighborhood’s architecture and its social anthropology. Not a single element allows for a perception of the everyday; the fervent turmoil of working life remains shut up within the voids and abundance of skyscrapers that rise up within the boundaries of the photographic image.

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Shinjuku-ku (TDK), Tokyo, 1986

Gelatin Silver Print. 38 x 57.5 cm

Private Collection

Towards the mid-eighties, Thomas Struth moves away from the inheritance of the documentary specialist couple Bernd and Hilla Becher, in order to approach investigation of a more interpretative nature into our times.

In *Shinjuku-Ku (TDK), Tokyo, 1986*, the artist places himself in the middle of the intersection and moves the viewer’s eye away from the immediacy of the traffic, allowing the architectural silhouette of the city to be captured, so that particular elements can be studied only later. The magnitude of the area of the street in the foreground creates a hiatus that allows the viewer to remain at a distance in regard to the immediate developments of the city. Seen in contrast to the piece *Panorama I, Paris Beaugrenelle, 1979*, where the urban area lacks any element that might allow the viewer to intuit an everyday existence, what stands out here is that “life” is present, at any rate, in its particularities. His lens captures the city of Tokyo’s chaotic dispersion: from the pedestrians trying to cross the street to the speedy passing of the train, Struth allows the frenzied character that distinguishes the Japanese metropolis to emerge. For this reason, far from being a snapshot, one can sense his interest in letting the city speak, highlighting its contradictions and bringing out a social and historical analysis of contemporary culture.

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Vico dei Monti, Neapel, 1988

Vico dei Monti, Naples

Gelatin Silver Print. 23.03 x 16.33 cm

Private Collection

In the piece *Vico dei Monti, Naples*, 1988, Struth takes on an urban fabric that is rich in history and contradictions. The artist chooses clear morning light, thus avoiding strong contrasts of chiaroscuro and allowing for a more neutral representation of city life. Buildings, side by side follow along the rise of a hill, one after the other in a diagonal perspective: from the floor of a terrace in the foreground to the antennas that intersect in a tangle of vertical and horizontal lines in the upper left corner. This perspective allows the architectural stratification of the city to be captured, and makes the coincidental and chaotic growth of the urban plane visible. Although the human element is practically absent, signs of everyday activity are profusely evident in the space: from clothes hung out to dry to clothespins forgotten on the clotheslines, domestic traces that mark the city dweller's environment.

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Chiesa e Scuola di San Rocco, Venedig, 1990

Church and School of San Rocco, Venice

Gelatin Silver Print. 41 x 55 cm

Private Collection

In *Chiesa e Scuola di San Rocco, Venice*, 1990, we find ourselves in the presence of one of the zones in the city of Venice where a perfect synthesis can be found of the artistic and religious undertakings from the 16th and 18th centuries. In this photograph, Thomas Struth excludes the decadent contemporary city, the tourist's city, the city of souvenirs and restaurants, to capture a corner that has been left intact by the multitudes that invade the "backstreets" on a daily basis. From a slightly angled point of view, he records the string of gothic windows on the front of the 16th century Scuola, to then highlight the grandiloquent façade of the 18th century church. In addition, the complete absence of chiaroscuro contrasts accentuates even the most minimal moldings. The artist lets the ancient Marine Republic express itself, constructed throughout centuries of invasions, a crossroads of cultures from the Far East to Northern Europe.

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Las Vegas 1, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1999

C-print. 141.8 x 204.7 cm

Private Collection

In this photograph, Thomas Struth sets his gaze on Las Vegas, a city built up from nothing in the middle of the Nevada desert, a daily destination for gambling and entertainment enthusiasts. It is a city with dissonant aspects, where new construction begins every day, not of residential buildings, but of new hotels or renovations of old ones.

From a relatively low point of view, in *Las Vegas I, Las Vegas, Nevada*, 1999, the artist captures an angle of the Treasure Island Hotel: an artificial copy of a pirate port with its exuberant palms contrasting with the anonymous façade of the hotel. By way of an attentive crop, enclosing the perspective and accentuating the proportions of the "Caribbean Corner" in regard to the view of the otherwise imposing building, it ironically leads the viewer to reflect upon the cacophony of contemporary society.

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Pudong, Shanghai, 1999

C-print. 139.9 x 170.9 cm

Courtesy Galerie Max Hetzler
Private Collection

As years go by and globalization's impact is felt, Thomas Struth comes to use color as an indispensable instrument for narrating an advancing world. In *Pudong, Shanghai, 1999*, he explores the devastating phenomenon of urbanization during the past decade in China. Pudong, an almost completely rural location at the outset of the eighties, witnesses the sudden expropriation of its lands by the authorities on behalf of the private sector in order to redefine the area and create competition for modern Hong Kong. A group of ultramodern skyscrapers make up the background of this photograph. From an elevated point of view and using a wide angle lens, greater depth of field is obtained to portray every detail of modern man's urban frenzy in precise detail: the cranes and bulldozers alongside old peasant houses. A junction of paved roads serves the artist to frame the image as if it were a translation of the mark of the new regulatory plane.

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Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia, China, 2002

C-print. 142 x 181.3 cm
Private Collection

Thomas Struth's eye does not appear to undergo change with the onset of the new millennium, and it adapts to any place or culture in which he finds himself to produce a lucid analysis of the contemporary world. In *Manzhouli, Inner Mongolia, China, 2002*, the artist approaches a zone under expansion in the extreme North of China, close to the Russian border. In the foreground, a vividly colored building still under construction becomes the proscenium for the deserted expanse that staves in the image. Using the extensive blue of the sky, barely interrupted by a cloud here and there as a support, Struth compresses the image into two dimensions. By accentuating the surreal nature of the building, that seems to belong to a play construction set, he reveals contemporary China's urban disasters with certain bitterness.

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Cerro Morro Solar, Lima, Perú, 2003

C-print. 138 x 242.2 cm
Courtesy Gallery Greta Meert. Brussels, Belgium.

The Cerro Morro Solar is the protagonist of this photograph, located at the southern edge of Lima. It portrays a ragged desert hill in this zone of the Peruvian capital. It is no longer the unsettling urban works that predominate here, but the slums that extend as far as the eye can see. They seem to be built along a series of horizontal lines, provided by this precarious form of habitation, that also indicates the terrain and gives the image a sense of depth. The clear light accentuates the almost monochromatic character of the photograph, constituted by a single tone that mixes with the color of the earth. By putting the slum at the center, Thomas Struth restores a perception of the West's other side.

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Chanel Mobile Art 2, Hongkong, 2008

C-print. 172 x 216.5 cm
Private Collection

In this photograph, Thomas Struth reproduces the exterior view of the itinerant pavilion for contemporary art, a project by Anglo-Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid, inaugurated in the central zone of Hong Kong in February, 2008. In this esplanade, the city's skyscrapers provide protection in the background

and the artist focuses on the shining white surface of the large container, whose strange appearance is accentuated by a blue neon light that unfolds at its base. Struth generally avoids strong chiaroscuro contrasts in order to give a neutral vision of the whole; in this case he prefers afternoon light, that envelops the walls of the skyscrapers in grey tones, thus highlighting the strange nature of this Mobile Art. With this photograph, he seems to want to show us the advancing condition of art and its “containers” as an spectacular as well as humorous phenomenon, as though it had lost the ability to communicate emotions.