

Visual Browse

LA
Times

Q SEARCH

SUBSCRIBE | LOG IN

MEMBER CENTER

PLACE AN AD

LOCAL

CALIFORNIA

SPORTS

ENTERTAINMENT

BUSINESS

OPINION

NATION

WORLD

LIFESTYLE

TRAVEL

AUTOS

REAL ESTATE

JOBS

PHOTOS & VIDEO

CLASSIFIEDS

SHOP

Thomas Demand undercuts what we think photographs show us

Los Angeles Times

ARTS &
ENTERTAINMENT /
ARTS & CULTURE /
Culture Monster

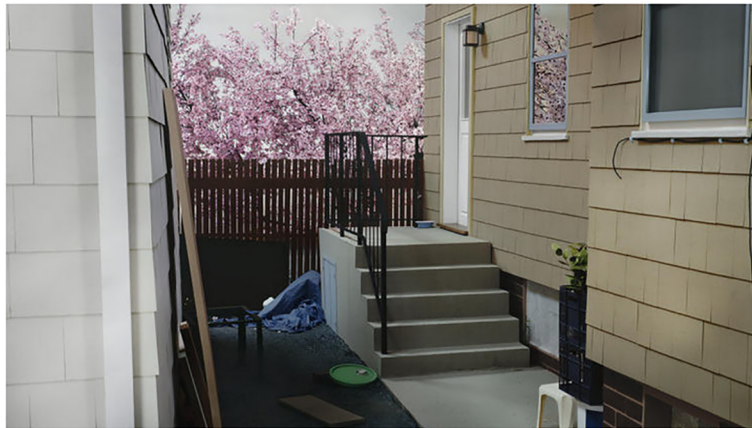


Christopher Knight

LOS ANGELES TIMES

christopher.knight@latimes.com

FOLLOW CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT



Thomas Demand, "Backyard," 2014, C-print mounted on Plexiglas. (Matthew Marks Gallery)

SHARELINES



German artist Thomas Demand's disarming imagery on view at Matthew Marks Gallery

FEBRUARY 20, 2015, 12:00 PM

For a dozen years, German artist Thomas Demand has been constructing elaborate sculptures of still lifes, landscapes and building interiors from colored paper and then photographing them. The sculptures are based on color photographs, so his process closes a disorienting loop.

At Matthew Marks Gallery, 11 recent C-prints are mounted on large Plexiglas sheets. Some depict paper copies of architectural models. Differences between the two are confounded: Is one model more authentic than the other? And photographs are proposed as constructed spaces in which we live.

Other pictures show places associated with murder and mayhem – the Santa Monica apartment patio of gangster Whitey Bulger, say, or the black gate to the Cerritos home of filmmaker Nakoula Basseley Nakoula. (He's the Coptic Christian whose anti-Muslim movie depicting the prophet Muhammad as a pedophile sparked deadly protests in the Middle East, including Benghazi, Libya.)

Knight, Christopher. "Thomas Demand undercuts what we think photographs show us." *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 2015.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Most disconcerting is "Backyard," a thoroughly mundane patch of grass flanked by a cheaply shingled garage and concrete steps leading up to a house. A blue tarp lies crumpled by a fence, a bright burst of pink flowers erupting above.

Paper lends uniformity to everything, matching the scene's banality to the blandness of the depicted surfaces. A white, plastic step-stool, a house plant on a crate, some litter – we are outside the unremarkable home of Tamerlan Tsarnaev, accused in the 2013 Boston marathon bombing.

Because so much of our worldly knowledge comes from looking at photographs, the image gets disarmingly creepy. An attractive, sometimes familiar scene slowly reveals itself to be unknowable.

"Backyard" originated as a news photograph (Demand erases people). Reconstructed, a casual fragment of journalistic information now seems visually irradiated. But so does "Atelier": Matisse's empty studio with colorful scraps of cut-paper strewn across the floor suggests a crime-scene. ("Pacific Sun," his short film of the interior of a storm-tossed cruise ship currently being shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, seems enchanted – until it starts to make you seasick. Demand will discuss his work at LACMA's

Bing Theater next Tuesday at 7:30 p.m.)

At his best, Demand manipulates photographic light, shadow and paper to undercut our blithe acceptance of what the picture purports to tell us. Even "Parkett/Parquetry," which shows nothing but a sun-dappled wood floor, begins to seem ominous, the spiky shadow of an unseen tree becoming downright spectral.

Matthew Marks Gallery, 1062 N. Orange Grove Ave., West Hollywood, (323) 654-1830, through April 4. Closed Sun. and Mon. www.matthewmarks.com