

Release Date: April 22, 2009

## National Gallery of Art Acquires *Presidency I–V* Photographs by Thomas Demand



Thomas Demand German, born 1964

*Presidency I*, 2008

chromogenic print 122 x 87.8 in.

National Gallery of Art, Washington

Gift from Agnes Gund and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder

The National Gallery of Art has acquired five chromogenic prints entitled *Presidency I–V* (2008) by German photographer Thomas Demand (b. 1964), thanks to a gift from Agnes Gund and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder.

"These timely and thought-provoking photographs are the first works by Demand to enter the Gallery's collection," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are very grateful to Agnes Gund and the Lauders for their generous gift."

Using images from newspapers and magazines as his guide, Demand makes three-dimensional models of scenes—often with political and cultural relevance—which he then photographs. In this circuitous way his photographs undercut the traditional idea of photography as a faithful record of reality; they explore the nature of perception and the ways in which mass-media images inform our understanding of the world.

The *Presidency* photographs are currently on view in the modern and contemporary galleries on the Concourse level of the Gallery's East Building. This is the first time they have been exhibited in the United States; they were previously shown in London.

### ***Presidency I–V***

Commissioned by *The New York Times*, Demand's *Presidency I–V* photographs explore one of the most prominent seats of power in the world: the Oval Office. Demand constructed a meticulous life-size model of the presidential office from paper, cardboard, and confetti. The resulting images accompanied a cover story for the November 9, 2008, issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, five days after last year's presidential election in the United States.

Close inspection of Demand's life-like images of the Oval Office reveals the omission of certain details, for example in the faceless figures in picture frames and the missing stars of the American flag, drawing attention to the artifice of his scenes. The absence of human attendance lends an emptiness and stillness to the photographs that are antithetical to our expectations of the Oval Office. The five photographs contain complex compositions and skewed perspectives that are also at odds with the ways in which this famous interior is so often depicted. Through these devices, Demand's deliberately staged re-creation calls into question the authenticity of ideas that are largely dictated by the media.

### **Thomas Demand**

Thomas Demand studied at the Düsseldorf Academy and Goldsmiths' College, London. Solo exhibitions include a show at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2005, followed by an exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery, London, in 2006. Recent exhibitions include the Fundación Telefónica, Madrid, and the Hamburger Kunsthalle,

Germany. Demand represented Germany at the 2004 São Paulo Biennale. He lives in Berlin, where a major exhibition of his work will open at the Neue Nationalgalerie in September 2009.

### **Collection of Photographs**

The National Gallery of Art's collection of approximately 10,000 photographs encompasses the history of the medium from its beginnings in 1839 to the present day. The collection began with a gift in 1949 of more than 1,200 photographs by Alfred Stieglitz from Georgia O'Keeffe and the Alfred Stieglitz Estate, augmented with a further gift from O'Keeffe of more than 300 portraits Stieglitz made of her. Since 1990, when the Gallery began actively to acquire photographs, the collection has expanded to include work representing the finest examples of the art of photography from the last 170 years. Highlights include a small but select group of photographs by the inventor of the medium, William Henry Fox Talbot, as well as works by the pioneering Scottish photographers David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, and such celebrated Victorian photographers as Julia Margaret Cameron and Lewis Carroll. French 19th-century photography is also well represented with work by Gustave Le Gray, Henri Le Secq, Charles Nègre, Édouard Baldus, and Nadar. Among the strengths of the collection are large and important groups of photographs by several major 20th-century American photographers, including Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, Walker Evans, Robert Frank, Frederick Sommer, Harry Callahan, and Lee Friedlander, in addition to the unparalleled Alfred Stieglitz Collection.

In 2004, the National Gallery of Art inaugurated a suite of five galleries in the West Building devoted to the exhibition of photographs. Photographs not on view may be seen by appointment only by calling the department of photographs at (202) 842-6144.

###

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov