

OCTOBER 30, 2020

Acquisition: Thomas Demand "Embassy I," from the series "Yellowcake"



Thomas Demand

Embassy I, from the series *Yellowcake*, 2007

chromogenic print

overall: 167.64 x 203.2 cm (66 x 80 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington

Gift of the Tony Podesta Collection in honor of Earl A.

Powell III, Director of the National Gallery of Art (1992–2019)

2019.1671

The Gallery has acquired nine chromogenic prints from the series *Yellowcake* (2007) by German photographer Thomas Demand (b. 1964). These photographs were given to the Gallery by Tony Podesta, who has donated numerous outstanding works over the years.

Demand focuses on global current events to question how visual images inform our perception of the world. Beginning with a preexisting picture often taken from the media, he translates the scene into a handcrafted, life-size model made of colored paper and cardboard. After carefully lighting and photographing it, the models are destroyed.

The series title *Yellowcake* refers to the technical term for a concentrated form of uranium that, when enriched, may be used to make nuclear weapons. After September 11, 2001, the Bush administration claimed they had evidence that Saddam Hussein had been seeking significant quantities of the material in Africa. This evidence, used to justify the invasion of Iraq by the United States, was allegedly stolen from the Nigerian embassy in Rome and provided to American and British intelligence agencies from an Italian source. As the events of this story unraveled, it became clear that the evidence was counterfeit.

Yellowcake depicts the place where the so-called evidence originated. Because there were no existing media images for Demand to use, he visited the Nigerian embassy in Rome, where he took a few cell phone pictures and then made sketches and constructed his models from memory. The scenes he produced progress cinematically: a nondescript building flying the flag of Niger, dull interior shots with doors closed, and finally a stream of light from a door left ajar revealing an office in disarray, as if a break in has just occurred.

A compelling work, *Yellowcake* is an important addition to the Gallery's holdings of Demand's photographs, which include *Presidency I-V* (2008), given to the Gallery by Agnes Gund and Jo Carole and Ronald S. Lauder in 2009, and *Clearing* (2003), which is a promised gift from the collection of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker.

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