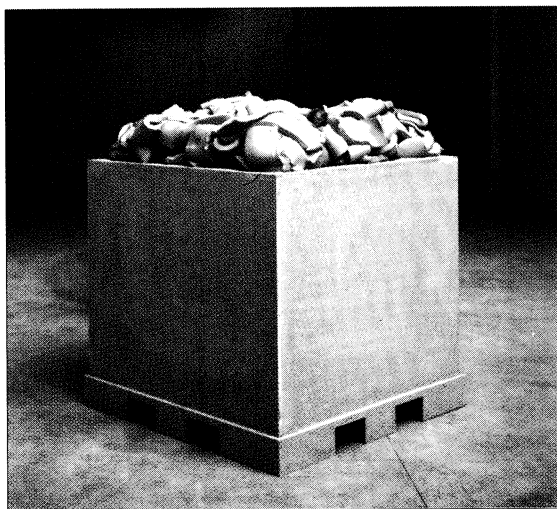


In the series "Solide plastique," Vermeiren evokes the materials of traditional sculpture and their passage from one state to another in the production process. Each piece consists of a wood pedestal supporting what looks like soft, earth-colored modeling clay. It turns out that the cube-shaped plinth on which the actual hardened mound stands is the molding armature for the sculpture. Two smaller versions of "Solide plastique" were also on view, these made of enameled porcelain. Here, as elsewhere, Vermeiren plays with the concept of transitional states, of raw material and finished form, of sketch and casting or molding.

—*Brigid Grauman*



Didier Vermeiren, *Solide plastique*, 1999, clay and painted wood, 55" x 47½" x 47½". Xavier Hufkens.

Thomas Demand

PETER KILCHMANN
Zurich

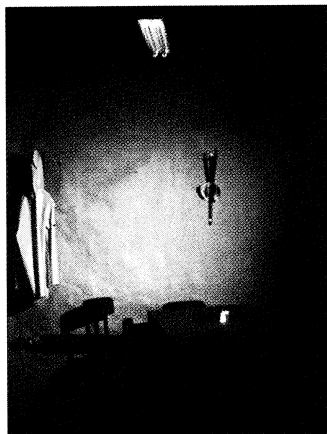
At first glance, Thomas Demand's photographs have an odd flatness about them. One might think that it's because the scenes depicted are devoid of people. A deserted office teems with photocopiers. A yellow raincoat hangs on a dark wall beside a canteen table. A pyramid stands in the desert, without tourists, guides, or camels.

On closer inspection, one sees the trick of this German artist's work: everything pictured—from the salt shakers to the photocopiers to the desert sand—is modeled from paper and cardboard. The details are stunningly well achieved. In the picture of the canteen, for example, Demand makes paper evoke the gleaming folds in a raincoat, the stiff roundness of a sponge set out to dry, the glow of the neon lights hung from the ceiling.

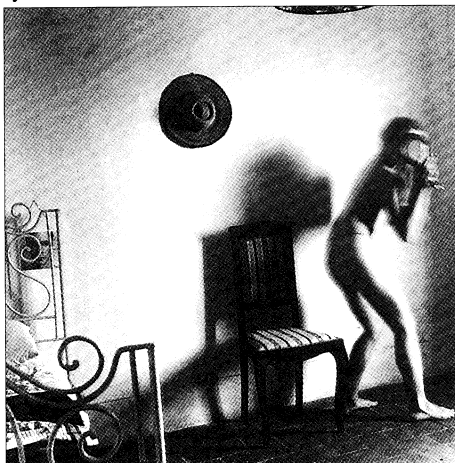
Here's conceit number two: Demand always bases his paper-maquette scenes on preexisting photographs—often a piece of pedestrian photojournalism (the canteen image is drawn from a photograph relating to an Austrian mining accident). Thus, Demand's large C-prints lie at three levels of remove from the scene someone else first photographed.

Still, Demand cannot perfectly replicate the real world with paper and trick lighting. Like even the best computer-aided design, the objects' surfaces lack grain and texture. This is a nonporous world, as ultimately unreal as an airbrushed *Playboy* model. No matter. The power of the work lies in its initial believability. Having been fooled, the viewer then ponders the nature of representation and reality. It takes only a moment's thought to realize that even the original photographs could themselves have been artful fabrications.

—*Marc Spiegler*



Thomas Demand, *Grube*, 1999, color-print/Diasec, 91½" x 66". Peter Kilchmann.



Francesca Woodman, *Untitled (Antella)*, 1977-78, gelatin silver print, 4½" x 4½". Palazzo delle Esposizioni.

Francesca Woodman

PALAZZO DELLE ESPOSIZIONI
Rome

Francesca Woodman is hardly the first artist to have experienced a Roman period. What, of course, makes the American photographer's case particular, and particularly sad, is that she committed suicide 18 months after her stay in the Italian city, at the age of 22.

At the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, seeing the original prints Woodman made while in Rome from 1977 to '78 as a visiting Rhode Island School of Design student helped complete the circle of a short but remarkably bold career. The show's more than 120 black-and-white images, along with selected letters, writings, and keepsakes, also included some photos she made both before and after her stint in Rome.

Woodman, who had spent childhood summers with her artist parents in Florence, seemed to see beautiful ruins everywhere. Prior to her Rome visit, she photographed herself in run-down environments—dried-out mud landscapes, crumbling asphalt sidewalks, peeling wallpapered rooms, abandoned houses. In these photos the artist almost always appears nude, her face turned, covered, blurred, or altogether cropped from the picture.

Once in Rome, Woodman began to fuse her trademark self-portraits with an extra charge of grandeur, symbolism, and even biblical themes. In the "Fish Calendar" series of 1977, cropped portions of her body appear standing over, lying with, and sitting beside either a scarce or plentiful supply of fish. In a rare glimpse of sensuality, the nude Woodman appears in a print, her face in full view, caressing one of the long, narrow fish alongside her breast.

In another affecting work, Woodman poses as a Christ figure. Arms extended, she holds on to the top of a door frame, her face hidden. Perhaps poking fun at her fellow students or teachers back in Providence, Woodman titled the photograph *RISD*, a play on the crucifix lettering INRI. Combining tragedy with a touch of humor here, the artist understood one of Rome's best lessons: when making a choice between irony and melodrama, err on the side of the latter.

With the subsequent "Eel" series, the artist returns to her disappearing act. In these blurred images, Woodman seems to dissolve into a cold linoleum floor as she curls around a simple white bowl that contains the glistening eel.

—*Jeff Israely*