

THOMAS DEMAND Rooms That Dream of Yesterday

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MAK – Press and PR
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Press Release

Vienna, 26.5.2026

Press Conference

Tuesday, 26.5.2026, 10 am

For the MAK exhibition *THOMAS DEMAND: Rooms That Dream of Yesterday*, the Berlin-based concept artist and photographer Thomas Demand has fused the visual power of theater and opera with his own artistic practice. Starting out from historical set designs—ranging from illusionist Baroque scenery to the densely atmospheric imagery of turn-of-the-century stage sets—Demand has developed for the MAK a unique work cycle that transposes the evocative visual world of the performing arts into the medium of photography.

The works seek answers to the question—resolutely explored by Demand—of how photography as a medium constructs reality. By photographing and processing images of paper and cardboard stage sets, the artist transposes these into new optical dimensions, inviting visitors to enter a world that does not simply depict visual reality but creates its own cognitive space.

Thomas Demand is well known for his studio replicas of articles, everyday objects, interiors, architectural models, and iconic media images using industrial materials such as paper and cardboard. These prototypes he photographs and then destroys. The photographs resulting from this reproduction process constitute the actual work of art. Paradoxically Demand imparts to his photographs—themselves reproductions—an aura of originality that according to Walter Benjamin should have been lost in the reproduction process.

Using displacements, cutouts, stratifications, enlargements, and a poetic use of color, in the MAK exhibition Demand fuses photography, painting, and the applied arts. He transposes selected models from the Theatermuseum Vienna, the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, and the German Theater Museum Munich into his primary medium of photography.

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The 25 or so photographs created for this exhibition, taken with the aid of a periscope, are the result of an intense engagement with the history of theatrical miniatures. They condense space, dramatic composition, and atmosphere. At the same time—through their subtle, occasionally almost abstract formal vocabulary—they entice us into the spatial dreamworld of the stage. Foreground and background enter into complex interaction; model and idyll, cultural history and the present, coalesce to create a performance of idiosyncratic ambiguity.

This world of images remains deliberately open-ended. Mountains, landscapes, trees, flowers, buildings, and ships appear as motifs in an unfinished narrative—one that is continually advancing. The focus of Demand's artistic practice is the model as ideal and material form: it is at one and the same time preliminary sketch, copy, abstraction, and cultural technique—conveyor of memory, reservoir of knowledge, and tool of the imagination. An expansive panorama in the exhibition evokes the monumental form of a rock face. It brings to mind the theatrical topos of the grotto, and at the same time those underground salt domes in which valuable photographic archives are stored. Lighting specially designed by the artist accentuates this space, enhancing the impression of a theatrical presentation that atmospherically embraces the newly created images.

Demand envisages Richard Wagner's Romantic opera *Tannhäuser* as a silhouette reminiscent of a landscape by Caspar David Friedrich—exemplifying nature as mirror. The brooding stage set of Gioachino Rossini's last opera *Guillaume Tell* is imagined as a fictional mountain range, and the *Reggia d'Apollo* by Lorenzo Sacchetti is located in a multifaceted setting, while Peter Ludwig Hertel's comic magic ballet affords an insight into a kingdom's artificial mysticism.

Scenographies originally created for the fleeting moment of a theatrical performance here appear in animated, almost enraptured form. The stage sets of Peter Ludwig Hertel, Gioachino Rossini, and Richard Wagner, freed from their historical context, open up like fragile palimpsests—like architectural constructs suspended between reality and fiction.

Thomas Demand is a major international artist whose works are represented in numerous collections, to include those of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Tate Modern, London. His solo exhibitions have been staged *inter alia* in the Kunsthau Bregenz (2004); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2005); the Serpentine Galleries, London (2006); the Fondazione Prada, Venice (2007); the Hamburger Kunsthalle (2008); the Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2009); the mumok, Vienna (2009); the Fondazione Prada, Venice (2017); the Jeu de Paume, Paris (2023); and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2024). In 2013 he co-curated the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Fondazione Prada, Venice, engaging with Harald Szeemann's exhibition of the same name. He represented Germany at the 26th Bienal de São Paulo and participated several times in the



Biennale di Venezia (2003, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2017). Since 2011 he has held a professorship at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts.

Concurrent with his MAK exhibition *THOMAS DEMAND: Rooms That Dream of Yesterday*, the artist is curating the group exhibition *Passants parmi les Pierres* in the fjk3–Contemporary Art Space (29.5.–13.9.2026). fjk3.com

Press photos are available for download at MAK.at/en/press.



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Opening

Tuesday, 26.5.2026, 7 pm

Free admission to exhibition opening

Artist Talk

Artist Thomas Demand in conversation with Curator Bärbel Vischer

Tuesday, 26.5.2026, 6 pm

MAK Columned Main Hall

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Exhibition Venue

MAK Contemporary

MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna

Exhibition Dates

27.5.2026–24.1.2027

Opening Hours

Tue 10 am–9 pm, Wed to Sun 10 am–6 pm

Curator

Bärbel Vischer, Curator, MAK Contemporary Art Collection

Supporting Program

Continually updated at [MAK.at/thomasdemand](https://mak.at/thomasdemand)

MAK Admission

€ 19/18*

Reduced € 15.50/14.50*

Every Tuesday 6–9 pm: admission € 9.50/8.50*

Free admission for children and teens under 19

*Online ticket price

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