

DAVID ZWIRNER GALLERY**ZWIRNER & WIRTH**

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EXHIBITION:

Thomas Ruff: Selected Photographs

Zwirner & Wirth, April 27 - June 24 2000

Thomas Ruff: Nudes

David Zwirner Gallery, April 28 – May 30, 2000

Zwirner & Wirth and David Zwirner Gallery are pleased to present a two-part exhibition of the work of German photographer Thomas Ruff, an occasion inaugurating the representation of this artist by Zwirner and Wirth. On view uptown at Zwirner & Wirth will be a collection of Ruff's earlier work from the 1980s and 1990s, including selections from his *Stars*, *Portraits*, *Houses*, *Newspapers*, and *Night* series. Downtown, David Zwirner Gallery will present Ruff's new series of photographs entitled *Nudes*.

Best known for his oversized, dead-pan portraits, his unmediated shots of commonplace interiors, and his seemingly straightforward photographs of architecture, Ruff has quietly approached many familiar genres, and proceeded to discreetly reinvent them. Ruff has an uncanny feel for the look of the ordinary – in people, places, and objects. However, his brand of photographic objectivity is not that purportedly practiced by photojournalists. Rather, it is elicited by scanning the mundane for the telling particulars of aggregated detail, and by a reserved and skeptical curiosity towards photography's ultimate truthfulness.

Paradoxically, it is the precision of his photographs, their patient, serial revelation of abundant visual facts, which allows the viewer a certain transcendence of mere information. The images freely absorb the multitudes of subjective visual assumptions, associations, and memories which the viewer brings to them. And yet they stand alone, without easy ironic distance or obvious meaning. Ruff's *Stars* photographs, in which the photographer literally appropriated whole swaths of the night sky (he bought the negatives from the European Southern Observatory), overlap several genres from landscape to scientific illustration to authorless, automatic abstraction.

Ruff is also attracted by photographic technology and new techniques for manipulating images. Aware of the potential power of these technologies to misinform and manipulate opinion, Ruff is conscious that such tools have the power to reveal as well as conceal. His *Night* series, begun in response to the high-tech, media-friendly Gulf War, applies the infrared night vision technologies used by the military (and made ubiquitous by CNN's 24-hour a day coverage) to the anonymously prosaic scenes of central European suburban nights. Similarly, Ruff has used computer imaging to erase random details from pictures, as well as to blend portraits of male and female subjects, creating composite unisexual beings.

Ruff's current series, *Nudes*, explores a genre new to the artist, while continuing many of his concerns. Ruff appropriates existing imagery (as he did in his *Stars* series), downloading generic photos from pornographic "thumbnail galleries" on the Internet, which he then proceeds to enlarge, distort, and transform. Significantly, Ruff uses no camera or traditional photographic device in the production of these images, a process in which every step, from sourcing through manipulation to printing, is purely digital. Both literally and figuratively blurring the distinctions between pornography and formalist nude photography, Ruff also enhances the artificial atmosphere of the tiny "originals" by boosting their image size exponentially. In the process, each image becomes disengaged from its source, forcing the subject into the background, and prioritizing its formal and aesthetic value. By altering these publicly accessible and starkly aggressive images as he does, Ruff simultaneously returns to them a sense of dignity and beauty, while heightening an awareness of representation's own manipulative promises and illusions.

For further information please contact Zwirner & Wirth at (212) 517.8677, or David Zwirner Gallery at (212) 966.9074.