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EXHIBITION:

THOMAS RUFF – *New Work*

DATES:

March 9 – April 2, 2005

Opening on Wednesday, March 9, 2005, the gallery will present new work by German artist Thomas Ruff. This will be the artist's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery.

Best known for his oversized, deadpan portraits, his unmediated shots of commonplace interiors, his colorful abstractions taken from the Internet of Japanese manga & anime, and his evocative nudes borrowed from pornographic websites, 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.

In this exhibition, the artist will premier a new body of work using JPEG images (the standard compression files used for Internet images) culled from the World Wide Web. Ruff decided to use these JPEG image sources to create a lexicon or encyclopedic compendium of contemporary history. Thus, starting with Aa=American architecture; Ab=Atomic bomb; Bo=Burning oil fields; and even, wi=war in Iraq, and so on, the images, enlarged by Ruff to gigantic scale, are nearly unrecognizable from close view. Much like impressionist paintings, these photographs require the viewer to stand at a distance in order to make a visual assessment of the image. A continuation of Ruff's interest in the mechanical production of images and their subsequent degeneration (as in his *nudes* and *substrat* series), these *JPEGs* draw attention to the abstraction that occurs when recognizable images are digitized and distributed via the Internet. How this degeneration affects our understanding of and reaction to images, whether benign or visceral, beautiful or repulsive, familiar or unrecognizable, is at the root of Ruff's exploration.

For example, in *jpeg msh01*, a digitized photograph of Mount St. Helens erupting is mechanized, and perhaps violated, by the overlaid grid of the file. Visible pixel lines are embedded in the image, creating a juxtaposition of biomorphic and geometric shapes, suggesting the imposition of technology on the natural world. Of course, it is this imposition itself that is visually alluring yet symptomatic of our dependence on computers as an inferior source for acquiring and viewing images. In other works from the series, pastoral landscapes, church interiors, atomic bomb explosions, park views, and the World Trade Center towers also succumb to digitization, becoming testaments to the effects of computers on the medium of photography, and, more importantly, on our collective memory.

The *JPEGs* series further illustrates the artist's insistence that photographs capture merely "the surface of things." These works' conceptual premise lies in the production of each image rather than a specific subject matter – Ruff thereby focuses on the process of abstraction using a photographic document and leaves the final interpretation to the viewer, one which ultimately comes closer to painting than to photography.

For further information, please contact the gallery at 212-727-2070, or visit www.davidzwirner.com