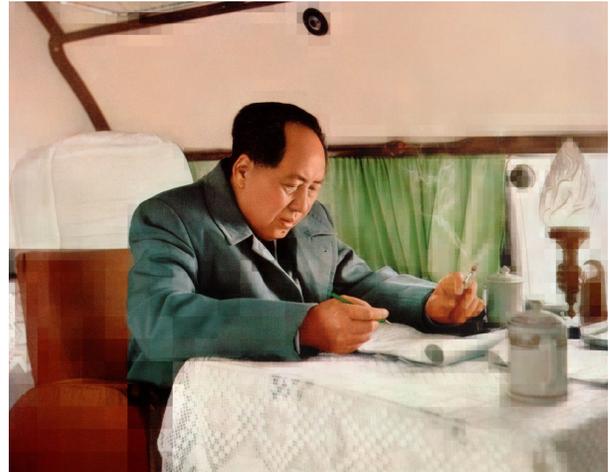


Thomas Ruff *tableaux chinois*

14 January–6 March 2021
108, rue Vieille du Temple
75003 Paris



Thomas Ruff, *tableau chinois_06*, 2019 © Thomas Ruff/VG Bild Kunst, Bonn/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present recent photographs by the German artist Thomas Ruff at the gallery's Paris location. The exhibition will feature works from Ruff's *tableaux chinois* series (2019–), which debuted in fall 2020 as a part of his solo exhibition at K20 - Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, on view through February 7, 2021. Works from *tableaux chinois*, alongside fifteen other series dating back to 1989, will be included in *after.images*, a major solo exhibition of the artist's work curated by Martin Germann at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, opening in March 2021.

Ruff rose to international prominence in the late 1980s as a member of the Düsseldorf School, a group of young photographers who had studied under Bernd and Hilla Becher at the renowned Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and became known for their experimental approach to the medium and its evolving technological capabilities. Working in discrete series, Ruff has since conducted an in-depth examination of various photographic genres, including portraiture, the nude, landscape, and architectural photography. The artist's overarching inquiry into the "grammar of photography" accounts for not only his heterogeneous subject matter but also the extreme variation of technical means used to produce his series, ranging from anachronistic devices to the most advanced computer simulators and covering nearly all ground in between.

Ruff's *tableaux chinois* arose out of his long-standing interest in the genre of propaganda photography—inherently at conflict with the medium's mimetic capability as it presents an ideologically inflected version of reality. The artist previously explored this chasm between representation and reality in series such as *Zeitungsfotos* (1990–1991) and *Plakate* (1996–1999), however here he widens his scope to simultaneously encompass both the analog and the digital, as well as the cultural and the political.

In the early 2000s, Ruff came across a coffee table book on Mao Zedong that grandly valorized the Chinese leader's life and achievements, and became interested in Mao not only as a political figure but

also as a cultural reference point, depicted by a range of Western artists—most notably, Andy Warhol. Ruff subsequently purchased a group of *La Chine* magazines—the French iteration of a periodical that the Chinese Communist Party produced specifically for Europe and distributed in several Western languages from the late 1950s through the 1970s as a means of demonstrating the advantages of Communism. Ruminating over this material for several years, the artist considered China's unique position in relationship to the West as a country that is technologically advanced but simultaneously ideologically regressive, and began to devise a way to embody this dichotomy within a single image.

To create the resulting works, Ruff begins with imagery scanned from these publications depicting smiling soldiers, scenic views, ceremonial gatherings, and Chairman Mao himself, among other subjects, enlarging them considerably to reveal the halftone dots created by the offset printing process. He then duplicates the image and converts the offset halftone of the duplicates into a large pixel structure. As a next step he places the new images, which have a digital image structure, as a second or third layer over the original scan, and then selectively removes parts of the second or third level. The resulting new image thus has both the halftone of the "analog" offset printing and the "digital" structure of the pixel image—at once laying bare both twentieth- and twenty-first-century techniques for the creation of propaganda images. As Susanne Holschbach observes, "Ruff has visually merged the technological process of preparing photographs for their mass distribution from the two photographic eras on one pictorial plane."

The title of the series is a tribute to the French Icelandic painter Erró (b. 1932), whose *Tableaux Chinois* paintings from the 1970s utilized a Pop art idiom to depict figures from Communist China visiting global landmarks, combining propaganda imagery with everyday imagery.

Concurrently on view on davidzwirner.com will be *Studio: Thomas Ruff*.

Born in 1958 in Zell am Harmersbach, Germany, Thomas Ruff attended the Staatlichen Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf from 1977 to 1985. A solo presentation of the artist's work is currently on view at K20 - Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, until February 7, 2021. In 2018, Ruff's work was featured in *Photography Spotlight*, an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London that celebrated the opening of the museum's new Photography Centre. The artist created a new body of work titled *Tripe* as a special commission to inaugurate the space.

Other solo exhibitions include those organized by Whitechapel Gallery, London (2017); The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2016), which traveled to 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2016–2017); Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2016); The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); Stedelijk Museum (2014), which traveled to Kunsthalle Düsseldorf (2014); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2012); LWL-Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster (2011); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Spain (2011); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (2009); Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg, Germany (2009); Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (2009); Múcsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest (2008); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2007); Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany (2007); Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva (2004); and Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2002).

In 2001–2002, *Thomas Ruff: Photographs 1979 to Present* opened at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Germany. This major solo exhibition of the artist's work traveled through 2004 to Museet for Samtidskunst, Oslo; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Artium Centro-Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria Gasteiz, Spain; Museu Serralves, Porto, Portugal; Tate Liverpool, England; and Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw.

Work by the artist is held in museum collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Dallas Museum of Art; Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, Austria; Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; K20 - Kunstsammlung

Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; National Museum of Photography, Copenhagen; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent.

Ruff's work has been represented by David Zwirner since 2000. This is the artist's first exhibition at David Zwirner Paris and his eleventh with the gallery. Previous solo exhibitions at the gallery in New York include *press++* (2016), photograms and *ma.r.s.* (2013), *Thomas Ruff* (2010 and 2007), *New Work* (2005 and 2003), *l.m.v.d.r.* (2001), and *nudes* (2000). In 2016, *New Works* was Ruff's first solo show at the London gallery, and in 2019, the exhibition *Transforming Photography*, was presented at the gallery's Hong Kong location. Ruff lives and works in Düsseldorf.

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