



Photograph of Thomas Struth © Vanessa Enders

Thomas Struth
October 16, 2016
2:00 pm
East Building Auditorium
National Gallery of Art

Thomas Struth, artist, in conversation with Sarah Greenough, senior curator and head, department of photographs, National Gallery of Art

This lecture is free and open to the public. Seating is available on a first-come, first-seated basis. The East Building of the National Gallery of Art is located at Fourth Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW.

The Diamonstein-Spielvogel Lecture Series provides a forum for distinguished artists to discuss the genesis and evolution of their work in their own words. Dr. Barbaralee Diamonstein-Spielvogel and Ambassador Carl Spielvogel generously endowed this series to make such conversations available to the public.

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Thomas Struth was born in Geldern, Germany, in 1954. He first studied painting with Gerhard Richter at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf before turning to photography in 1976 and becoming one of Bernd and Hilla Becher's earliest students. In the late 1970s he began to make a series of black-and-white photographs of empty urban environments that established his international reputation. Taken from a slightly elevated vantage point in the middle of the street, these pictures reveal the culture and character of cities around the world. In the late 1980s he conceived another series, the *Museum Photographs*, where he photographed in some of the world's most celebrated museums (the Louvre, the National Gallery, London, and the Prado, among others). These large color pictures, often depicting crowds of people, explore the different functions that art fulfills in our modern, secularized world and the ways in which people experience paintings today, including the notion of the museum as a sacred pilgrimage site.

As his interest in the idea of worship and pilgrimage expanded, Struth launched a series titled *Places of Worship* in 1995. While working on *Museum Photographs* he had become fascinated with both true believers and cultural tourists who looked at paintings in their original settings — in other words, within the milieu of the belief systems for which they had been made, not taken out of context and isolated in museums. For *Places of Worship* Struth sought sites that offered, as he said, "monumental emotional packages of overwhelming experience," such as Christian and Buddhist sites as well as

places of powerful secular significance. In his *Family Portraits* series, which includes photographs of Struth's friends as well as of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, all the works are infused with a sense of the forces that inform his subjects' lives. As he has done throughout his career, Struth exploits the gap between what was planned and what actually transpired — something that is fundamental to the art of photography.

Struth's awards and residencies include the Werner Mantz Prize for Photography, Maastricht, the Netherlands (1992); the SPECTRUM International Prize for Photography, Stiftung Niedersachsen, Germany (1997); an honorary residency at Villa Aurora in Los Angeles/Pacific Palisades (2014); and an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Institute of British Architects (Hon FRIBA) for contribution to architecture (2014). Struth was elected Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2016). His traveling exhibition *Nature & Politics* was on view at the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, June 11 – September 18, 2016, and is scheduled for the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, October 16, 2016 – January 8, 2017.

Struth has eight prints on view in the exhibition *Photography Reinvented: The Collection of Robert E. Meyerhoff and Rheda Becker* at the National Gallery of Art through March 5, 2017, including several from his *Museum Photographs*, *Places of Worship*, and *Family Portraits*.