

# CUT! PAPER PLAY

## IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

*Cut! Paper Play in Contemporary Photography* features the work of six contemporary photographers whose interaction with paper is an integral part of their practice. Thomas Demand, Daniel Gordon, and Matt Lipps create paper models with images gleaned from current events, the internet, or popular publications for the express purpose of photographing them. The models are then disassembled or destroyed, though individual elements may be incorporated into other works. Christiane Feser, Soo Kim, and Christopher Russell cut, incise, layer, or fold representational photographs to introduce tactile, three-dimensional elements into what we generally think of as a two-dimensional art form. References to sculpture, literature, psychological states, or the passage of time add layers of meaning.

Many of the works in this exhibition have been borrowed from Los Angeles-based collectors, institutions, or galleries that have demonstrated an appreciation for an approach to photography that privileges the materiality of the medium. Others derive from the Getty Museum's collection, including a



selection of works that serve as historical precedents. Against the backdrop of the concurrent exhibition, *Paper Promises: Early American Photography*, this exhibition demonstrates the inventive results produced by artists who not only embrace photography as a paper-based medium but also push the boundaries of the role paper plays.



# Paper Play

Selected from the Getty Museum's permanent collection, the five works displayed on these walls reveal artists' long-standing interest in the way that paper—cut into shapes or assembled into models, carefully lit, and photographed—can convey something beyond its physical characteristics. This may be a strong narrative, an abstract tendency, or a sculptural form.

For a photograph that he titled *Paper Play*, Manuel Álvarez Bravo moved in close and used a low vantage point to lend architectural presence to a coil of paper. Similarly playful are the tableaux of figures modeled from paper that Alexander Rodchenko created to illustrate a book of children's poems titled *Samozveri* (Auto-animals). A proponent of Surrealist techniques such as the photogram and multiple exposures, Ei-Q often used cutouts to mask the area of photographic paper that was to remain unexposed. Depending on whether one focuses on the negative or positive shapes, a profile and hand are visible in the work on view here. Using dramatic lighting, Francis Bruguière and Frederick Sommer transformed their cut-paper abstractions—of which they both made many—into sculptural compositions.



# Daniel Gordon

Daniel Gordon is interested in the transformation that occurs between two and three dimensions and between thinking about photography as a device with which to record and as a tool with which to create. His practice blends photography, sculpture, and collage, as well as analog and digital technologies. After culling images from the internet, Gordon cuts, tears, pastes, and assembles the printouts into three-dimensional sculptures that he sets on a table top, often against patterned backdrops also sourced from the internet. After photographing the tableaux with an 8-by-10-inch view camera, he dismantles them, although individual components may be recycled for use in future works. While the fractured forms and deeply saturated colors of Gordon's still-life and portrait compositions may bring to mind the early twentieth-century movements of Cubism and Fauvism, the seamless integration of handcrafted and computer-generated elements sets them squarely in the present.

Born in 1980, Gordon received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Bard College in 2004 and his Master of Fine Arts from the Yale School of Art in 2006. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



# Matt Lipps

For the past decade, Matt Lipps has been appropriating photographs reproduced in publications associated with both high and low culture to comment on how images simultaneously reflect and shape our knowledge and experience. His source materials have included a monograph of Ansel Adams's iconic landscape photographs, the arts and culture magazine *Horizon* published in the United States from 1958 to 1989, the Time-Life *Library of Photography* issued in seventeen volumes between 1970 and 1972, and manuals on how to photograph the human figure. After carefully cutting out individual elements from these publications and affixing them to cardboard supports, Lipps arranges them into layered collages or models. Borrowing lighting and filtering techniques from theater, he incorporates the play of shadow and color to transform flat images into sculptural tableaux that he then photographs. Printed at a scale much larger than the original reproductions, his photographs insert existing images into new contexts that extend their potential meaning.

Lipps, born in 1975, received his Bachelor of Fine Art in photography from California State University, Long Beach, in 1998, and his Master of Fine Art from the University of California, Irvine, in 2004. He is currently based in Los Angeles.



# Thomas Demand

Thomas Demand's work strikes a balance between reality and artifice that challenges viewers to consider how photographs can be used to construct the real, and how they prompt us to complete every image with personal memory or narrative. The artist is best known for his large-scale photographs of meticulously constructed, life-size re-creations of architectural spaces and natural environments that resonate in our collective memory because of their association with historical or current events. Rendered unsettlingly schematic by the uniform texture of the colored papers he uses and the absence of people, the images nonetheless suggest, through their careful emulation of natural or artificial light, that these sites could be inhabited. Once the sculpture has been photographed with a large-format camera, it is destroyed. *Landscape*, on the opposite wall, was inspired by the banal landscaping surrounding a building that Demand passed every day and associated with the patch of grass featured in the foreground of many medieval and early Renaissance paintings.

Born in Germany in 1964, Demand initially trained as a sculptor, studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, from which he graduated in 1992, and Goldsmiths College in London, from which he received his Master of Arts degree in 1994. He lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles and teaches at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg.



# Soo Kim

Soo Kim's work addresses the issues of photographic transparency and the immediate consumption of images. She employs the techniques of cutting and layering to create areas of absence or disruption that imbue her images with dimensionality (shadows are cast onto the wall through the Plexiglas backing), as well as with the passage of time (the time that has elapsed between two exposures and the time required to cut away areas). Travel to distant locations has resulted in discrete bodies of work that reveal her deep interest in architectural structure. The cities of Reykjavík, Taipei, and Panama City are featured in the works on view here, which do more than merely document the places she has visited. By excerpting titles from literature, she introduces yet another dimension, inviting viewers to invest the time to inhabit—and read—her photographs.

Born in South Korea in 1969, Kim immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California, Riverside, in 1991 and her Master of Fine Arts from California Institute of the Arts in 1995. She lives and works in Los Angeles and is a professor at Otis College of Art and Design.



# Christiane Feser

Starting with simple materials and rules, Christiane Feser creates “photo objects” that operate in a middle-ground between photography and sculpture. Her work derives complexity from the relationship that she intentionally sets up between the illusionistic space of the photograph and the actual space in which it is exhibited. After cutting, folding, and layering paper into abstract compositions, Feser carefully lights each construction, often using flash, photographs it with a high-resolution digital camera, and makes a print on paper similar to that used in the construction. She then subjects the print to further manual intervention, transforming it into a sculptural relief that incorporates illusionistic and actual three-dimensional passages, variations in focus and tonality, and shadows that are both captured in the photograph and cast by the gallery lighting. This process may be repeated multiple times until object and image are inextricably intertwined. Careful scrutiny is required to determine if what we are looking at is real or representational.

Born in Würzburg, Germany, in 1977, Feser studied visual communications at the University of Art and Design, Offenbach, and received a degree in fine art photography in 2006. She lives and works in Frankfurt.



# Christopher Russell

Christopher Russell's work confronts photomechanical reproduction with imperfect handwork. Often using cheap lenses, he creates enigmatic photographs that are intentionally out-of-focus or shot directly into the sun. With razor blades, Xacto knives, or even a meat cleaver, he disrupts the pristine surface of the print by scratching, scraping, or gouging to reveal the white core of the paper. The destructive or violent impulse that seems to compel Russell to alter the original image is balanced by a controlled, methodical process that results in intricate patterns resembling halftone dots, nineteenth-century wallpapers, or drawings with dreamlike narratives of plants, animals, mountains, and ships. Patterns etched into the Plexiglas glazing add yet another layer of information that casts shadows onto the image. Russell's drawings are simultaneously tied to the physicality of the photographic print and exist in a space of their own.

Born in 1974, Russell received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco and his Master of Fine Arts from Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. He currently lives and works in Portland, Oregon.



This material was published in 2018 to coincide with the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibition *Cut! Paper Play*, February 27–May 27, 2018, at the Getty Center.

To cite these texts, we suggest using: *Cut! Paper Play*, published online 2018, the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, [www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/cut\\_paper](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/cut_paper)

