

Thomas Demand, Alexander Kluge

Le sable et le temps

Curated by Douglas Fogle

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*I met a traveler from an antique land,
Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal, these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away."*

—"Ozymandias," Percy Bysshe Shelley

In Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet "Ozymandias," the English poet offers us a melancholic warning about the dangers of hubris. Published in 1818 on the occasion of the arrival in London of a monumental statue fragment of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II called the Younger Memnon which had been "acquired" by the Italian archaeologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni, Shelley's poem warns us that, in the end, power is but a mirage and that the even the most powerful turn to dust and are lost to the sands of time.

In their collaborative work *Le sable et le temps* (2025), the visual artist Thomas Demand and the eminent filmmaker and author Alexander Kluge explore a common concern with hubris, the passage of time, and powerful interplay of remembrance and forgetting when confronted with the traumas of history. Organized by independent curator Douglas Fogle, this exhibition marks an ongoing intellectual engagement by the two artists who previously collaborated on the exhibition *The Boat is Leaking. The captain lied.* at Fondazione Prada in Venice, Italy, in 2017.

For MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique, Demand has created a viewing device for the films of Alexander Kluge with one of his signature wallpapers. With *Fels / Rock* (2025), Demand has created what appears to be the face of crumbling rock wall which he constructed out of crumpled paper and then photographed. As with all of his works, Demand

gleans a source image from the stream of photographs that flow around us every day and then recreates what he sees in his studio out of paper and cardboard. After photographing his model, the sculptural work is destroyed leaving behind a ghostly photographic doppelganger that creates a doubletake or a visual stutter as the viewer is confronted with his paper reconstructions of seemingly unidentifiable images that often depict visual eddies in the image currents of history. In this collaborative installation, the rock-like wallpaper becomes a home for a series of screens projecting seven short experimental films by the Alexander Kluge which are installed in holes in Demand's wall. Brought together under the admonitory rubric of Shelley's "Ozymandias," these cinematic poems traverse a haunted historical landscape littered with the deteriorating relics of past wars and the brutal effects of recent conflicts. While considering the absurdity of humanity's warlike hubris, Kluge's films delve into a wide range of concerns including a scientific and poetic meditation on the nature of sand, a consideration of the ghosts of past attempts at conquest of the Middle East by the West, and references to Hannibal's use of elephants to cross the Alps in Carthage's battles with the Roman Empire. In Kluge's image-based poetic universe, the ubiquity and durability of grains of sand which are polished by friction and maintain their form over millennia come to stand in for the profusion of images throughout the march of history. Kluge points out that only the violent acts of modern technological warfare can destroy the shape of grains of sand while images of war in the form of a single frame of film – 1/24 of a second long – can easily be lost "in the abyss of the millennia."

Bringing their voices together in this collaboration, Demand and Kluge ask us to take note of both the form as well as the content of their works. In the end, the ephemeral qualities of paper and the entropic erosion of monuments into grains of sand become tokens of a kind of visual humility that asks us to not forget the importance of remembrance when considering the flow of historical images across the sands of time.

Thomas Demand (b. 1964) lives and works in Berlin and Los Angeles. He has had one-person exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. He represented Germany at the 2004 São Paulo Biennial. The retrospective *A Stutter of History* was recently presented at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, and was previously presented at the UCCA Edge in Shanghai, Jeu de Paume in Paris, Israel Museum in Jerusalem, and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston.

Alexander Kluge (b.1932) is a writer, filmmaker, philosopher, and lawyer. He studied History, Law, and Music in Marburg and Frankfurt am Main and received his doctorate in law in 1956. Kluge became known in the 1960s and 1970s as one of the most influential representatives of New German Cinema. In 1987, he founded the television production company Development Company for Television Program mbH (DCTP) and produced many interviews with German entertainer Helge Schneider. Also a decorated author, he has written highly acclaimed novels and short stories as well as scientific and philosophical publications.

Douglas Fogle (b. 1964) is a curator and writer based in Los Angeles. Fogle has nearly thirty years of experience as a museum curator focusing on exhibitions and publications devoted to contemporary art, film, architecture, fashion, and design. He recently curated the traveling retrospective *Thomas Demand: The Stutter of History* and will open the exhibition *Marlene Dumas: Cycladic Blues* at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens in June 2025.