

Thomas Struth

(Geldern, Germany, 1954)

According to Thomas Struth, “making a photograph is mostly an intellectual process of understanding people or cities and their historical or phenomenological connections. At that point the photo is almost made, and all that remains is the mechanical process. I could also write a text, but as I don’t write, I use the language of photographs. Seeing the circumstances, understanding, and interpreting them is the interesting part for me.” (“Interview between Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Thomas Struth”, in *Thomas Struth. Portraits*, exhibition catalogue, New York: Marian Goodman Gallery, 1990). Considered as a whole, Struth’s works convey an image of the present, not only recording history at the moment it takes place, but also offering an interpretation of it.

Struth organizes his work in thematic series, which, to date, have included numerous images of cities, portraits of people and family groups, as well as images of flowers, jungles, and photographs shot in art museums. The series on museums – perhaps among his most well-known works – presents an analysis of the complex dynamics through which masterpieces from the past become part of today’s vision. Concentrating on the relationship between people and works in public contexts, and intentionally focusing on museums in large cities, the series originated with a portrait taken by Struth of the art historian Giles Robertson.

Audience 11, Florence, 2004, is part of a group of photographs taken of people visiting the Galleria dell’Accademia at the moment when they encounter Michelangelo’s *David*. Unlike his other photographs in the museums series, in this case Struth chooses not to include the artwork that the visitors are observing, but instead, to dwell on the specific postures, gestures and facial expressions its presence provokes. The variety of reactions and the specificity of the clothing people wear consign each of the individuals portrayed in the photograph to different categories of informed visitors, passionate travelers, or members of tour groups. Brought together, however, by their presence in the museum and participants in a sort of collective rite that defines the way in which western culture is passed down, the people depicted also become protagonists in a fresco of the present, of an almost epic monumentality. (MB)