discrepancies; there are no tags, fixtures or fittings, and it looks brand new, except for a smattering of perfectly crafted and inexplicable coffee stains. Matt Johnson is the master trickster of the show, however. Two Orange Peels (2003) is a beguiling piece—on first glance it appears to be a found object, somehow preserved, as if coated in resin. Only by consulting the title and description can one fathom its true bronze and paint nature. His objects convey an air of Tom Friedman’s quiet minimalism, with some of the childlike naiveté of David Shrigley, exemplified by the show’s figurehead, Breadface (2004).

There is a different strand of work running through ‘Thing’ which employs the art of assemblage and construction, clustering objects together to form contrasting juxtapositions and curious resonances. Renee Lotenicker’s beautiful collage, La Piazza Tenera (2005), includes photographs of materials that are also being used (ceramic tiles, grape vines, Plexiglas, steel, paper), cut up and flowing across the floor. From one angle, the work shows its mundane construction, like Okhrvo and Margin, and from another it looks like a sticky, gluey mess of architectural matter spewered across the floor. Taft Green’s Reaction Facets: International Seaport: Part 1 of 2 (2005), an energy distribution, folding light, memory of Vermeer (2005) is a world only familiar to the artist. Like some kind of warped architectural rendering, a model of a seaport interpreted through varying viewpoints is combined with a construction containing an outline of Vermeer’s View of Delft (c. 1660–11). In Chuck Moffitt’s eros bruises thanatos (2005), he has created an exquisitely constructed, self-referential universe. Pastel-coloured metallic lambakin emerges from a disembodied car engine, covered in white foam spheres, mesh, iron, steel and aluminium forms. It feels somehow cosmic, otherworldly, special.

Such works as Mindy Shapero’s The smoke bomb (2003) conveys primal cosmic forces, star clusters and explosions. Krysten Cunningham’s woven forms remind me of some Jim Lambie’s works: the psychedelic colours, hippie totems and mimas of indigenous crafts. References to the 1960s and Minimalism recur in Arianna Ker’s Sunburst (2004), with brightly coloured, diamond-shaped pieces arranged in an abstract pattern directly on the floor. ‘Thing’ encompasses references to the history of sculpture and installation, painting, architecture and figuration, as well as displaying strikingly fresh work that combines complex histories with a playful and sometimes feather-light touch.

ROSE SPENCER

NEW YORK: CRG GALLERY

SANDRA SCOLNIK

12 February – 26 March 2005

www.crggallery.com

With the renewed interest in figurative painting since the 1990s, certain interrelated strategies that first appeared in surrealist painting in the 1920s and 30s have become more prominent as well. These strategies, which were combined so brilliantly in the work of Salvador Dali, for example, include illusionism, kitsch, academicism, the representation of sexuality and violence and anti-historical citation. Recently, we have seen a return to these in the work of a number of figurative painters who have become well known over the last few years, for example, John Currin, Lisa Yuskavage and, more recently, Hillary Harniss.

Sandra Scolnik also falls into this more general category of contemporary, neo-surrealist figurative painting. However, her exhibition of small- and medium-sized oil-and-wax paintings proves her to be an artist who must be understood in terms of her own considerable merits as well. Breakfast in Bed (2004) is typical of the works in the show in that it presents a figurative group made up entirely of self-portraits. Here we see an older Scolnik, nude from the waist up, being served wine in bed by six younger ghostly doubles in a curiously abstract bedroom. The family intimacy and sense of subterranean sexuality evoked by the scene contrasts with the ominous nature of the stage set-like bedroom as well as the prominent shadows, falling rays and menacing tree in the background. In addition, Scolnik’s evocation of the romantic theme...
of the doppelgänger – the 19th-century concept of a person’s uncanny double, whose sighting often presaged a terrible event – adds a sense of impending disaster or doom.

By bringing self-portraiture together with a focus on doppelgängers, Scolnik borrows one of the classic obsessions of surrealistic painting – the bodies of women – and turns it inside out. Her paintings do not represent women as objects of either male desire or male fear (as do Dalí’s, for example), but rather they examine women as primary sources of both family and community.

None of this would matter, of course, were Scolnik not a good painter. But she is, and because of this, her families and communities of doubles take on a hypnotic intensity. There is a painstaking and obsessive quality to Scolnik’s compositions and technique that seems intended to evoke the first hundred years of oil painting during the northern Renaissance, the religious and sometimes supernatural art of Hieronymus Bosch, Matthias Grünewald and Lucas Cranach the Elder. Scolnik’s House III (2003–4) and House IV (2004–5) are beautifully painted panels that reveal more complex visions of Scolnik’s matriarchies. They both present cutaway views of a house with many rooms in which a multigenerational family of Scolniks – mothers, sisters, daughters and grandmothers – play out a set of repeating scenarios in a dollhouse-like space containing an overabundance of Christmas trees, birds, handbags and bottles of wine. Reciprocal and gift-giving scenarios are enacted as well as those involving intoxication, domination and submission.

Landscape I (2004–5) is the show’s masterpiece. Shown most clearly Scolnik’s evocation of the supercharged realism of northern Renaissance art, Landscape depicts a garden of earthly delights inhabited by a single family. Here we see a stillmore variegated organization of Scolnik doppelgängers and perhaps fewer signs of domination and submission. The image, however, is still uncanny and slightly menacing. The family histories it imagines seem transfixed through a painterly technique that evokes a lost artificed and religious past – a world that seems completely antithetical to the world of today.

Matthew Bro.

NEW YORK: THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
THOMAS DEMAND
4 March – 30 May 2005
www.moma.org

Organized by MoMA curator Roxana Marcoci, this mid-career retrospective of Thomas Demand is at once an investigation of the art of making and a significant milestone in assessing the confluence of multiple contemporary approaches to photographic theory. Demand’s work is an interesting examination of photography as subject and subject as photograph. The works require very little of the viewer to respond to their immediate modernist elegance, and yet quickly belie that one is not merely looking at representation but rather an elegant ontological debate. In a curious alteration of Barthes’s notion that the photograph authenticates the existence of what it represents, Demand has made the authenticity obvious. We are always aware of the sculpted device, while at the same time cognizant of the historical verity of the fabricated original. Demand’s methodical recreation of scenes in coloured cardboard and paper divest them of any implied inherent quality as potential carriers of objective information and results in a simulation of reality that relies as much on memory of the original as it does on an examination of the accuracy of recreation.

Demand’s sculpted recreations of photographs depict places and things devoid of particularizing details. There are no labels on the objects, as though they are some manner of anonymous stand-in, an inanimate doppelgänger. This ghostlike quality is especially haunting given the subject of several of the works, such as a destroyed office, the site of the attempted assassination of Hitler, or Kitchen (2004), which refers to the photograph of Saddam Hussein’s hideout in Tikrit. Archive (1995) alludes to the personal film archive of Leni Riefenstahl, the director of the infamous Triumph of the Will. Evoking the glaringly ironic use of a modernist cinematic vocabulary in the Nazi propaganda film, the imitation archive reads as a stark series of ordered geometries. There is no explanation, but rather a mere false-indexing which both references and denudes the tangible collection, while subtly reminding the viewer of the filmmaker’s past. Poll (2001) depicts the emergency office in West Palm