

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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INSIDE ART

The Ocean Blue as Art Abstract

By CAROL VOGEL
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Andreas Gursky/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn
"Ocean I" (2010), an image by Andreas Gursky.

This spring the Gagosian Gallery celebrated the opening of its expanded Los Angeles space with a new series of work by the German artist Andreas Gursky. Filling the walls of the white-walled room were five photographs of the ocean, measuring about 8 feet by 11 feet apiece. Each is an image of endless rich, blue water edged by coastlines and punctuated with islands.

The works are a departure for Mr. Gursky, who used available satellite photographs and then manipulated those to create his own, more dramatic work.

"They were as sublime as the Rothko Chapel," Michael Govan, director of the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#), said, referring to the Houston landmark. "They are also satellite photography, which is a breakthrough for the artist."

Mr. Govan was so taken with the suite of works that he persuaded two trustees — Steven F. Roth, executive vice president of the World Oil Corporation, a family-owned company in Los Angeles, and another trustee who wants to remain anonymous — to buy four of them for the museum. Mr. Govan declined to say what they paid. The gallery was asking \$680,000 each.

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Although this series was created before the Gulf of Mexico oil spill this spring, Mr. Govan said he considered the subject of oceans “a total obsession of our age,” adding, “It’s so urgent, yet there is a timelessness to these photographs.”

He also said that he was reminded of a historical precedent. Just as 19th-century museums often had a globe of the world and a map of the stars as the linchpin of their displays, these photographs, he said, are the 21st-century equivalent. “This is our globe,” Mr. Govan said.

The museum does not have a specific space to show the Gursky images at the moment. However, Mr. Govan said he planned to have a space designed for them in the middle of its historical collection.

“They will be the centerpiece of our global museum,” Mr. Govan explained. And though the works show only tiny bits of continents and coastline, he added, to him, anyway, “the museum itself becomes the rest of the picture.”