ERIETA ATTALI

Architectural Photographer   ha2122@columbia.edu

Course Title:

**"*Building images: Architectural photography vs Photography of Architecture"*

Bernard Tschumi Architects, New Acropolis museum. Athens, GREECE, Erieta Attali ©

Course Description

Since its infancy, photography has proven to be not only an unparalleled means of –seemingly– objective documentation, but also a fertile field of aesthetic experimentation. Urban photography pioneers such as Alfred Stieglitz and his peers were key in the development of a technical and aesthetic photographic language that influenced their followers, the design community and the public. By defying mere representation, photographers such as Berenice Abbot –i.e. in her *Changing NY* series– embraced the technical limitations of the medium to produce images of striking aesthetic and cultural impact. The pioneers used architectural and ambient city lighting to change our perception of the modern cityscape and offer highly subjective readings of the urban experience.

This course will give participants the opportunity to engage in a similar quest and discuss photography as a medium to interpret aesthetic intent, express subjective understanding of urban space and reveal the circadian rhythms of the city; to this

end, the students will be exposed to works of seminal photographers such as Ernst Haas, William Klein and Olivo Barbieri. Students will explore the expressive limits of the photographic medium through the production of a series of transitional sequences that cover a range of architectural binary themes: urban/natural, formal/material, reflection/transparency, dusk/artificial light etc.

The course primarily investigates visual perception; therefore, the camera is regarded as a tool through which to build a deeper understanding of space. Architecture/design students will explore both urban and natural environments, in order to develop sensitivity to the specific atmospheric qualities of each space, translate it visually and finally communicate it through the photographic medium.

Technical, historical and aesthetic aspects of photography will also be covered in order to enrich the creative process and provide with an early basis for discussion. Students will learn how to employ the medium of architectural photography as a critical tool for analyzing and representing buildings. Having completed the course, they will recognize photography not only as a documentary device, but also as a stimulant for the critical mind: photography facilitates the understanding of the intent behind design processes, by contextualizing and framing the relationship between an architect and his/her work.

Overview of Learning Activities

Assessment tasks will form the 'scaffold' of the learning process, whereby the use of the camera is not only developed as a technical skill set but also as a discourse tool, raising discussions about the fundamentals of built space: light, time, material and form. These are architectural qualities to be explored through the visual language of photography; therefore, students are encouraged to use any type of camera that might be suitable to their individual practice needs.

Case studies and broad reaching exemplars (both in physical books and online) enable students to consider how to 'situate' their work globally in the realm of both architecture and photography. Early prints encourage them to be conscious of the material quality of their work as well, i.e. the choice of paper, the type of printer and how this supports and facilitates the overall communication power of the photograph.

Collaborative workshops culminate in the production of a publication that allows students to consider book making as a craft that develops both a critical eye and self-appraisal of their work, while at the same time developing skills of professional collaboration. The book is a tangible artifact documenting the processes and outcomes their research and learning.

Finally, students are empowered and build confidence through peer-to-peer learning, discussion and critique; they will converse about architectural ideas through their images, which is often much easier than formal analysis within the design studio. Through this process, they develop a language grounded in built form but easily accessible through their own photography. This is a critique-based class, tailored to individual strengths and interests:

- A particular area of research will be identified and explored for each student.
- Individual instruction will be provided and personalized to each student's area of interest, often in the context of a group discussion where commentary is encouraged.
- The research will be accompanied by a short written contribution that explains the choice of project(s) and discusses the co-relation between building and the student's visual interpretation of it.
- Participants are expected to produce work for every class
- Field trips will serve as an essential part of the learning process, in order to examine and interpret work outside of the classroom environment.
- Finally, by the end of the course, students will be asked to compile a cohesive body of work culminating in a small exhibition and a publication.

Overview of Learning Resources

Students need to provide their own photographic equipment, but they are free in their choice of technology and format: pinhole/digital/manual, large/medium/small. The use of a digital camera is by no means required, but recommended, as everyone will be expected to present a body of work during each session. Using a tripod is highly encouraged.