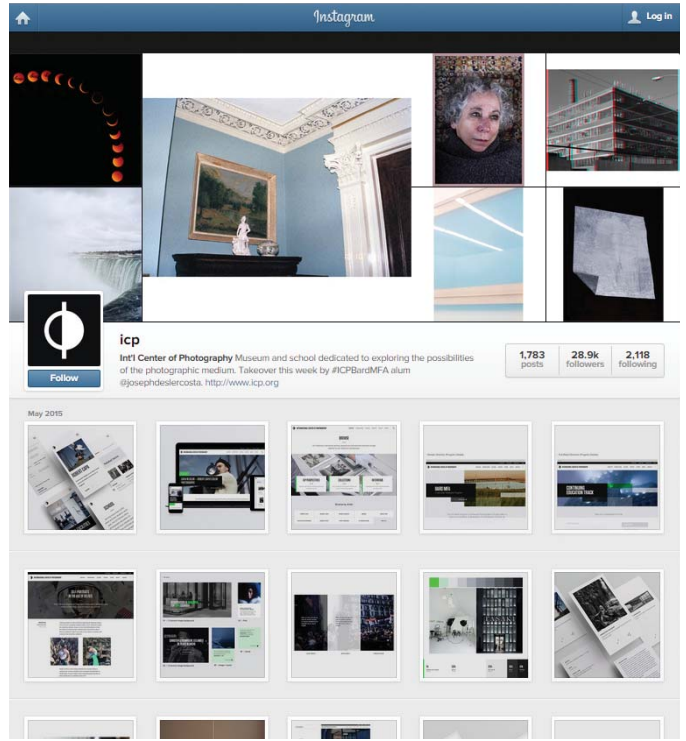
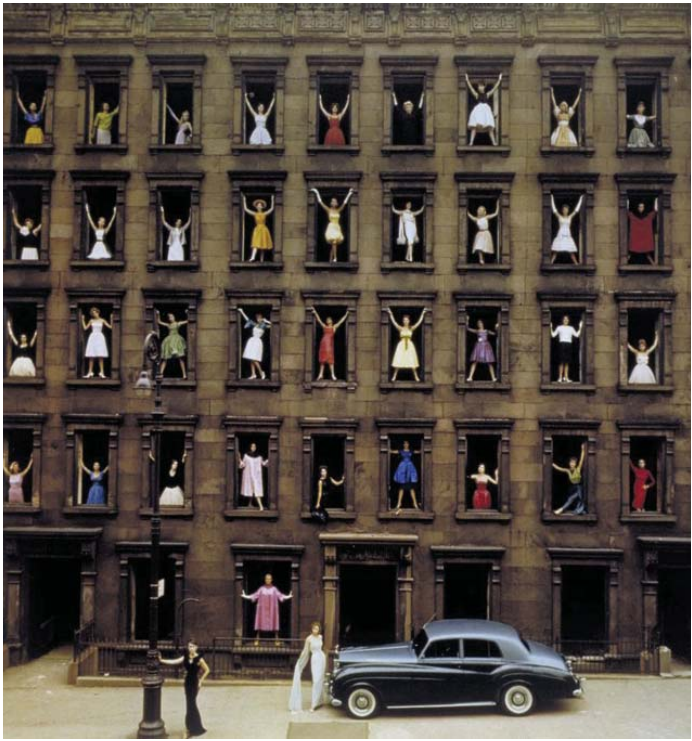


Curatorial Architecture: Digital Media and the Post-Digital Museum



The revolution in photography—caused by the advent of digital cameras and then camera phones—has created an extraordinary moment for images and how they are used. The statistics are staggering. More photos were taken in the last two minutes than in the whole of photography’s first century. Each day, more than 70 million images and videos are shared on Instagram, but that pales in comparison to the 300 million uploaded to Facebook.

- The International Center of Photography website

What is the future of museum and exhibition architecture given the explosive image circulation generated by digital media? The networking of images — from Facebook to selfies to Snapchat to Instagram to Pinterest to Google Images — has become one of the most predominate mode of our time. While it might have seemed that photography, originating as a pre-digital media, would fade in relevance in the digital world, this circulation of photo-images becomes more important than ever before. With all things online, works of art are now posted by individuals as well as general information sites like Wikipedia, specialty art websites, and museums themselves, so what extra experience can a visit to the actual museum offer?



Your design for a new building for the International Center of Photography — “the world’s leading institution dedicated to the practice and understanding of photography and the reproduced image in all its forms” — can engage this new exuberant phenomenon. Museums and other centers of cultural exhibition, still operating in pre-digital modes, have been very slow to address this radical paradigm shift of access, particularly within the museum itself, with rather tentative attempts in most cases to just add a screen or two with a brief “interactive” feature. Now that we are already past the pre-digital moment in history, this studio will explore the role architecture can play in making spatial new cultural modes of artistic production and exhibition.

Utopia of Access or Image-Information Overload? What are the problems and the possibilities for architecture with this technological and cultural achievement? As mobile and fixed digital windows become more intelligent with smart technology, does that necessarily mean our walls have to become dumber? If smart windows are able to demonstrate multi-layered knowledge of human relations and capacities can our spaces and walls and building envelopes become wiser in their own demonstration of that knowledge? How can they co-evolve together into the future?

We live in a society in which images—the looking at and exchanging of images, as much as the making of them—are among the principal ways we communicate with each other, and make sense of the world around us. The Institute of Contemporary Photography’s new exhibitions will demonstrate our recognition of the role played by digital media in furthering social awareness, empathy, and engagement while exemplifying our approach to critical social issues.

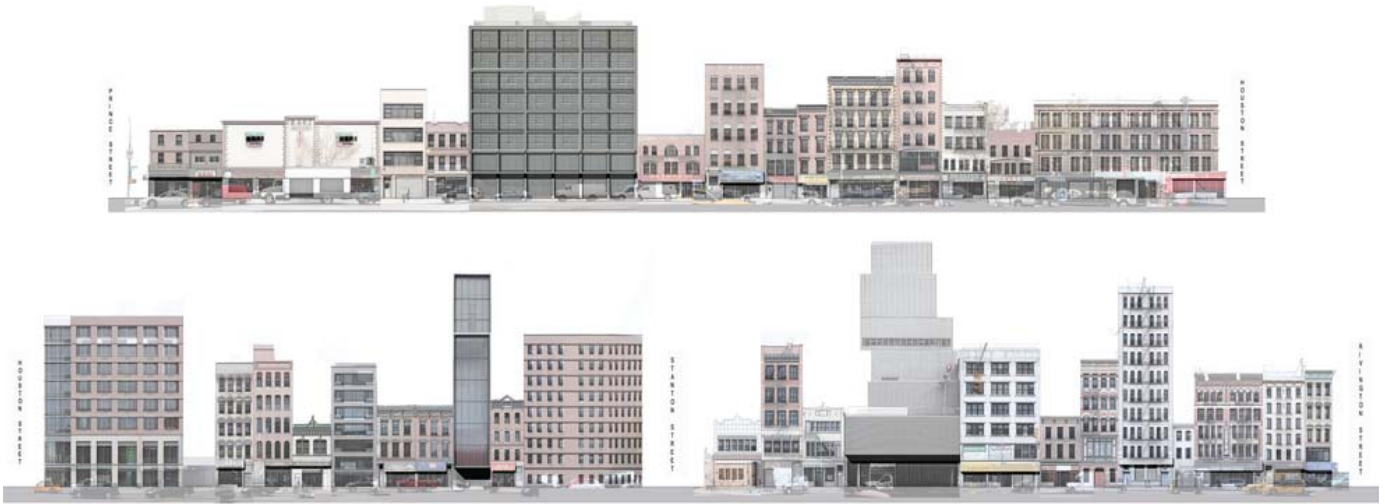
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The International Center of Photography is a world-renowned cultural institution involved in innovative exhibitions, education, and publication. Their exceptional archive includes more than 135,000 prints and related material from the beginning to the present moment of photography, with collections including: “City of Abstractions,” “New Photography from China,” “The Future of America: New Deal Photographs,” “Hiroshima: Ground Zero 1945,” “JFK for President,” “This is War!,” “Paris Fashion 1945,” and “Reflections in a Glass Eye.” Every year more than 5000 adult and teenage students are engaged in their educational programs that range from short-term workshops to Master Degree programs in Documentary Photography & Photojournalism, General Studies in Photography, and New Media Narratives.

Previously their exhibition gallery, classrooms, library, and curatorial offices have been housed in separate facilities, so you will be designing a 50,000 square foot facility to bring these programs together and into relation with each other. The building will include gallery space for selections from their archive as well as for their own curated exhibitions and Biennales, their extensive library, a café/bar, a bookshop, an auditorium, digital classrooms, darkrooms, production facilities, student gallery/lounge, media lab, and curatorial offices — all spaces that need to evolve in new ways in relation to new digital modalities.

The goal is to transform the International Center of Photography into a multi-media and multi-use visualization lab and workspace. Each of these galleries and programs pose distinct opportunities to configure and evolve smarter uses of both technologies and tectonics — as curatorial membranes and display systems within and between the diverse exhibition areas, the education labs, the curatorial offices, and the public spaces of the museum (the lobby, cafe, bookshop, and circulation space), but also as interface membranes between the interior and the outer face to the city and the urban life of the sidewalk.





The site of urban life the ICP is moving to is the famous and infamous area of Manhattan known as the Bowery. In the early eighteenth-century this area was among the most well-to-do high cultured neighborhoods in the city. But by the mid-eighteenth century until the last decades of the twentieth-century, the Bowery became a symbol for low culture and a decayed urban life of the poor, the homeless, and the addicted, but also a refuge for outlier social and artistic cultures. Artists Mark Rothko and Eve Hesse had their studios there, musicians Béla Bartók and Joey Ramone lived there, and the club CBGB was the epicenter for the birth of the American punk and new wave music scene. But today the Bowery is rapidly becoming a new cultural district, with the advent of the New Museum, designed by SANAA, which opened in 2007, and the Norman Forster designed Sperone Westwater Gallery, which opened in 2010, and New Inc, the creative incubator workspace space launched last year by the New Museum in association with GSAPP's own Studio-X New York. This cultural development now cohabits with the still active homeless missions and the influx of businesses coming from the surrounding neighborhoods of Chinatown, the East Village, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, and Soho, a mix in keeping with the long-standing social engagements of the International Center of Photography. Within close proximity to the New Museum, you will be able to select from a number of mid-block and corner sites.





Semester Sequence:

We will begin the semester by visiting the cultural facilities at the site (the New Museum, New Inc, and the Sperone Westwater Gallery) as well as the newly revitalized design museum Cooper-Hewitt to view some recent attempts to incorporate digital media into exhibition space. For the first phase of the semester, utilizing the Center’s collections, we will experiment with the ways digital visualization in museum settings may provide groundbreaking opportunities to expand the application and accessibility of new informational systems. At the scale of display architecture, the museum environment is particularly geared to evolve ways that these technologies can provide interpretative information and multi-media visualization.

Focusing on your selection and research of the Center’s collections will foster the discovery of what for you are some of the pointed and poignant spatial and pictorial techniques in photography that may inform not only your own architectural design of the Center but also transform how architecture can think about its own forms of representation. Particularly in need of experimentation is the by now inevitable photo-realistic architectural rendering, that can be rethought through photographic techniques of framing, depth of field, atmospheres, and relational dynamics—with regard to singular imagery as well as to the montage techniques of El Lizzisky or Hannah Hoch, the serial imagery of Ed Ruscha or David Hockney, or the environmental projection and flyposting of Krzysztof Wodiczko and JR, indeed any past or contemporary photographic techniques that engage you. And just as photography may provide architecture with some transformative techniques, the spatial play of architecture and its other non-photographic representational techniques may suggest new hybrid modes for both artistic practices.

These mutual organizational techniques of spatial depth, sequence, and interrelation can be used to develop new architectural plays of surface and depth, moment and sequence, isolation and interrelation as you curate the programmatic exchanges of your building design for the second phase of the semester leading up to the midterm — to be further developed for the final review as you utilize and refine these techniques to articulate in architectural form your innovative ideas on this post-digital Center of cultural imaging and exchange.