

"Landscape into Architecture: the inversion of content and context in architectural photography"

Course Description

The aim of this course is to examine the various ways in which photography has served as an active tool for understanding the relationship between architectural works and their respective environments, either natural or man-made. The lectures will place particular emphasis on the degree to which human intervention has incised natural landscapes, and, at the same time, how elements of pure or derived nature have penetrated into the human realm.

Photography -being an active interpretative tool instead of a passive representational one- can be employed in such a way, that the separation between the content (man-made structure) and context (natural or urban) is blurred, and the relationship between the two inverted. This treatment of the photographic medium can provide students of architecture not only with a visual analysis toolset but also with a methodology that can feed back into architectural composition: architecture interpreted as an element of the

environment. At the same time, the context is absorbed by and filtered through architecture. This interpretation is related to that of architect Bruno Taut, who understood architecture as the act of 'designing relationships' instead of arranging 'forms in light' or merely configuring geometrical space. Therefore, the guiding research question for the students is formulated as follows:

How can the act of photography of architecture (not necessarily architectural photography), uncover and intensify such relationships, thereby transcending the utilitarian-documentational aspect of the medium?

Thematically, the proposed course will be accompanied by an overview of the oeuvre of photographers who have worked with the subject matter of architecture, landscape or industrial landscapes, spanning a range from the beginning of the 19th until the end of the 20th century. The investigation encompasses both photographers who focused on documentation, and also ones who had a more artistic output: what unifies the diverse selection is the structure of relations between content and context in their work: for example Josef Sudek's panoramas of Prague, Gabriele Basilico's cityscapes, Brassai's night images of 1930's Paris and Ezra Stoller's depictions of the built environment.

Overview of Learning Activities:

The course aims to investigate architecture photography as a means to analyze and communicate novel spatial interrelationships between architecture and its natural or man-made context. This investigation will be enhanced by a historical overview of this dynamic through recognized masters' works: from pioneering 18th century archaeological photography to emblematic architectural photographs that defined the visual vocabulary of mid-20th century modernism. It will rely heavily on case studies, while thematically the course is based on three axes:

1. The Archaeological Paradigm

The roots of architectural photography can be traced back to 19th century archaeology, which predominantly dealt with the reconstruction of fragments. The condition of fragmentation does not only suggest a missing whole awaiting excavation, but also implies that even a small detail is sufficient to reconstruct a complete figure. Just like in the case of the archaeologist whose job is to interpret and restore, a photographer can either piece elements together into a meaningful whole, or do the exact opposite: accentuate the fragmentation, take a singular object and let it dissolve into its context.

2. Texture and Stratification

Landscape is a repository of time within space, which is crystalized in the form of a physical or constructed environment: its surface becomes a narrative, composed of geological and biological processes. These processes can be detected by studying texture and stratification of both natural and urban settings. Texture infers a material discourse on the surface of things but also a measure of decay in which time plays an important role. Stratification, or layering, implies a hierarchy in the sequential process termed as “life” in a landscape, be it urban or natural.

3. Continuity and Transition

The processes that shape natural and man-made landscapes are constantly fluctuating within a homeostatic balance. Therefore, the aim is to internalize the behavior of a manmade object -which is architecture- within a continually shifting landscape and express both this relation and the change that underlies it. Photographic instants are invariably situated within a continuous experience of architecture in context, so that they are suggestive of a transformation, which can be manifested within seconds, throughout the day, or throughout the seasons.

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.