



IMAGE BUILDING

How Photography Transforms Architecture

July 20–October 28, 2018



Image Building: How Photography Transforms Architecture features artistic and documentary images of iconic modern architecture and vernacular buildings by photographers from the United States and Europe. These photographs convey how symbolic and cultural readings of the built environment have changed from the 1930s to the present.

The exhibition begins with stunning bird's-eye views of Manhattan taken by Berenice Abbott and Samuel H. Gottscho. Although they were made during the Great Depression, these photographs show no hint of the poverty or struggles that many people were experiencing at ground level. Instead, they document a metropolis packed with skyscrapers and shimmering lights, helping shape the perception of New York City as the symbol of American ascendance in the twentieth century. Contrasting with this message of overwhelming power and confidence, Iwan Baan's *The City and the Storm* (2012) portrays New York after it was hit by Hurricane Sandy. Instead of a sweeping tapestry of lights, we see vulnerability in the



Figure 1

Figure 2



Figure 3

vast swaths of darkness from lower Manhattan to Midtown, areas afflicted by electrical outages and flooding.

This juxtaposition shows that while buildings may seem permanent, the way we perceive them can be fluid. This idea is introduced in the first section of the exhibition, "Cityscapes," through direct comparisons of works from different eras. Images emphasizing the dramatic geometry of modernist icons, by mid-century photographers

such as Samuel Gottscho, Julius Shulman, and Ezra Stoller, are placed next to photographs of the same buildings by the contemporary Japanese artist and architect Hiroshi Sugimoto. Gottscho's 1933 view of the 512-foot tower of New York's Rockefeller Center (also known as the International Building) emphasizes this awe-inspiring art deco masterpiece's domination of its urban surrounding. By comparison, Sugimoto's 2001 photograph transforms the building's vertical grid of windows and telescoped

Figure 4

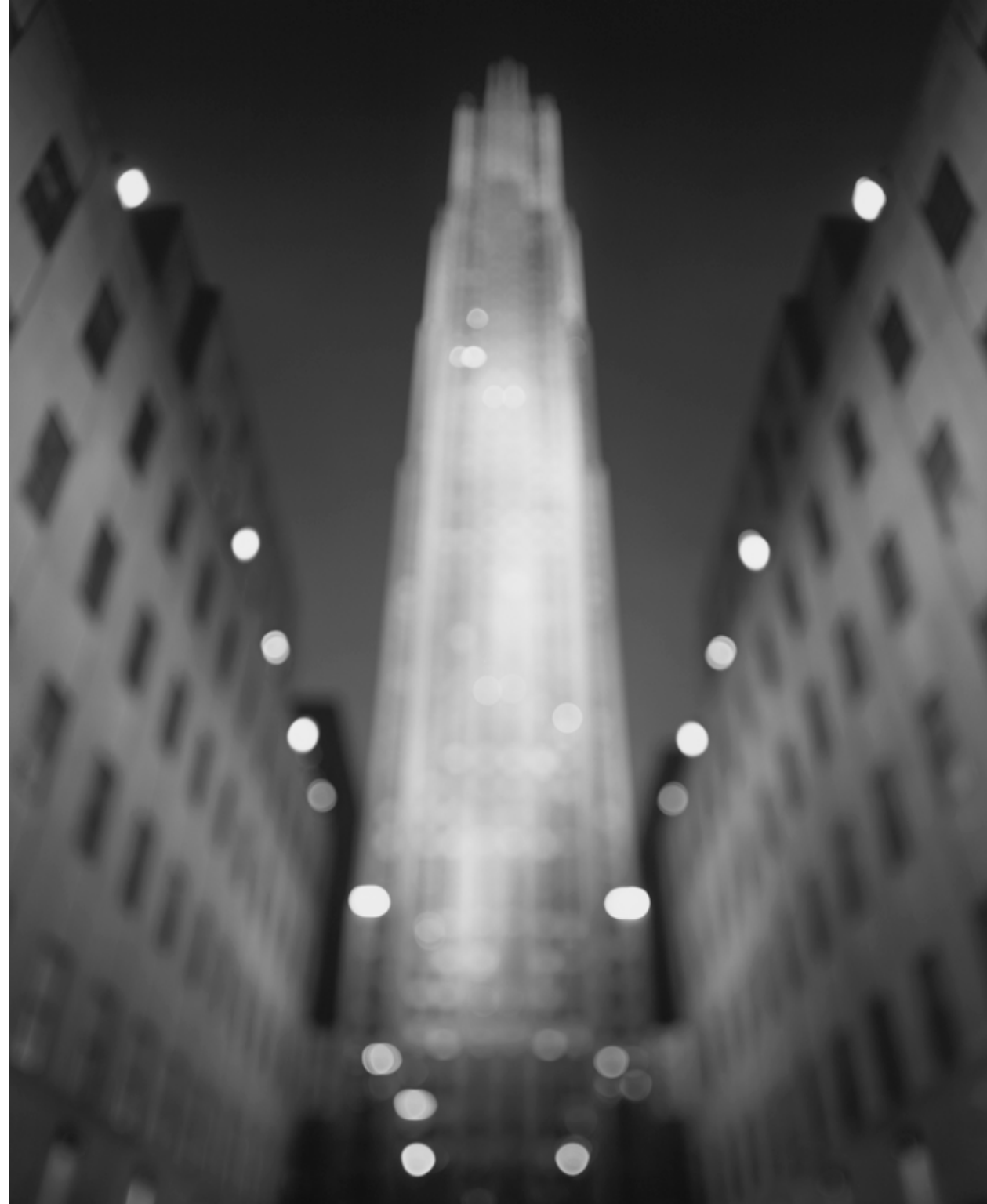




Figure 5



Figure 6

or stepped elevation into a veil of sheer luminescence, desolidifying the building's projection of modernist authority. The image is a reminder of time's capacity to wear away not just architecture but its intended messages.

The second section, "Domestic Spaces," includes photographs of buildings meant for the practical use of individuals and families, while also reflecting class differentiation. Julius Shulman's Case Study photographs of show-homes convey the idealism of some of the post-World War II era's most significant architects, who were invited to explore the potential of the private residence as a site of sophistication and good

living. In contrast, images by Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz provide a grittier view of vernacular postwar American housing. Interestingly, in both approaches, people are rarely included in the shot. Shulman's elegant depictions suggest that modern architecture is very much like formalist sculpture—to be looked at in terms of angles, light, planes, and volumes, but not to be touched, entered, or used. In less glamorous slices of Americana, such as Baltz's images of tract homes outside of Los Angeles, the absence of people provokes feelings of alienation, a condition that runs counter to the mainstream narrative of a happy consumerism tied to the mid to late century economic recovery.

In more urban environments, affordable housing took the form of multifamily dwellings rather than single family units. These often expressed the communal ideals of modernism. Thomas Ruff's *w.h.s. 10* (short for Weissenhofsiedlung Stuttgart) shows an International Style building that Ludwig Mies van der Rohe created for the 1927 Deutscher Werkbund Exhibition, a showcase for affordable housing during a time of austerity in Weimar Germany. Instead of photographing the building, Ruff has rephotographed an archival image of it. He added artificial colors and digitally manipulated its clean lines, transforming this modernist structure into a chimera as fleeting as the utopian ideals of van der Rohe, who was to become director of the influential Bauhaus architecture school, which taught that architecture could be an agent of social progress.

The artists featured in the final section create digital photographs to interpret buildings and sites meant for public

use. Monumental works by Andreas Gursky, Candida Höfer, and Thomas Struth show that at their most effective, public places can signify cultural aspirations and identity. This extends to architecture that does not actually exist, as seen in the works of James Casebere and Thomas Demand, who photograph models of building types to focus more fully on their symbolic meaning, which is as often unsettling as it is positive. Casebere portrays a hand-built replica of an upscale American suburb seen from above, illuminated by studio lights to make the familiar into something fantastical. Demand's *Car Park* simulates the brutalist architecture that was in vogue in Germany during the postwar years. While the architecture evoked by each image could not be further apart stylistically or in terms of historic purpose, both dreamlike scenes blur the border between the physical and virtual, yielding a feeling of psychological uncertainty that is reflective of our time.

Many architects hope that their conceptual intentions will last as long as the buildings themselves, but their visions can be filtered, altered, and even contradicted by the lenses of a changing society. Presenting fascinating photographic conversations between architect and artist, past and present, and facts, dreams, and illusions, *Image Building* inspires us to consider Nashville's own evolving cityscape in terms of its symbolic resonance, for us and future generations.

This exhibition was organized by Therese Lichtenstein for the Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York.

Illustrations

Cover: Ezra Stoller (American, 1915–2004). *TWA Terminal at Idlewild, now JFK Airport, Eero Saarinen, New York, New York, 1962*. Chromogenic print, 20 1/4 x 24 1/4 in. Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York. © 2018 Estate of Ezra Stoller/ Esto

Fig. 1: Berenice Abbott (American, 1898–1991). *The Night View, 1934* (printed 1974). Gelatin silver print, 16 3/4 x 14 3/4 in. Museum of the City of New York, 79.147.2. Image courtesy Philadelphia Museum of Art. © 2018 Estate of Berenice Abbott/ Getty Images

Fig. 2: Iwan Baan (Dutch, b. 1975). *The City and the Storm, 2012*. Chromogenic print, 73 x 49 1/8 in. Courtesy the artist and Moskowitz Bayse, Los Angeles. © 2018 Iwan Baan

Fig. 3: Samuel H. Gottscho (American, 1875–1971). *New York City views, RCA Building floodlighted, 1933*. Gelatin silver print, 10 3/4 x 8 3/4 in. The Gottscho-Schleisner Collection, Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Samuel H. Gottscho/ Gottscho-Schleisner, 88.1.2.2267. © 2018 Estate of Samuel H. Gottscho/ Museum of the City of New York

Fig. 4: Hiroshi Sugimoto (Japanese, b. 1948). *Rockefeller Center, 2001*. Gelatin silver print, 71 7/8 x 60 1/8 in. Courtesy the artist. Image courtesy Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco/ Marian Goodman Gallery, New York. © 2018 Hiroshi Sugimoto

Fig. 5: Julius Shulman (American, 1910–2009). *Chuey House (Los Angeles, Calif.), 1956*. Gelatin silver print, 15 x 11 7/8 in. Julius Shulman Photography Archive, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2004.R.10. © 2018 Estate of Julius Shulman/ J. Paul Getty Trust, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

Fig. 6: Thomas Ruff (German, b. 1958). *w.h.s. 10, 2001*. Chromogenic print, 73 1/2 x 98 in. Collection of George Yabu and Glenn Pushelberg, image courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York/London/Hong Kong. © 2018 Thomas Ruff/ Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

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