PRESS COVERAGE

Building Pictures

April 4 — May 31, 2008

1. Chicago Tribune, 4.10.2008
2. Time Out, 4.3.2008
Building photos construct their own internal realism

By Alan G. Artner

Tribune critic

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Images of architecture often are a species of advertising, but images about architecture usually are something more, as in "Building Pictures," the atypical and absorbing exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Photography.

Eight international artists, ages 30 to 50, have taken aspects of the constructed landscape as the subject of photographic prints, a video and an installation. Not one is concerned with the time-honored aim of the architectural photographer, which is to show buildings in their best light. All see architecture as raw material for speculations on 20th Century history, abstract picture making and, least expected, current politics.

More than half the artists are concerned with the history of modernism, from Thomas Ruff's attempt to revivify monuments by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to Chris Mottalini's recording of the death knell of homes by Paul Rudolph. Along the way, the sensuousness of Luis Barragan's home inspires two-dimensional equivalents from both Terence Gower and Luisa Lambri, and the rationalism of buildings in Alexander Apostol's Venezuela comes upon hard times. These all comment on the legacy of the Modern Movement, equally celebrating it as well as showing it deserted and in heart-rending decline.

Apostol's pictures seal windows and doors while adding names to the buildings. Such alterations do not change our belief that the structures are real. But the opposite occurs in images by Bas Prinzen and Josef Schulz, where alterations in form and color virtually recast buildings and landscapes into pure inventions. The influence of modern photographs also transforms Lambri and Schulz's walls into minimal studies that look more like abstract drawings than real sites.

Princen's interventions give his scenes an eerie quiet that is deepest in "Outskirts (Findeq)," a 2007 C-Print of the rear of a hulking structure that is as mysterious as any building painted by Giorgio de Chirico. Gower shifts back and forth from architecture as a setting for a campy 1960s film to unpopulated photographs and rudimentary drawings of the same sites. And Dionisio Gonzalez makes the greatest alterations of all, reconstructing the shanty towns of Sao Paulo, Brazil, to incorporate bits of high-toned contemporary architecture.
Gonzalez's immense panoramas recall the format of widescreen movies, though their purpose is not to entertain. Instead, the chockablock nature of the buildings reflects the chaos of the shanty towns as opposed to the artificial order of a recent government re-urbanization project. So invented architecture here challenges what already exists, dazzling the eye but also raising issues for serious discussion.

"Building Pictures" continues at the Museum of Contemporary Photography, 600 S. Michigan Ave., through May 31. 312-663-5554.

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Chicago Art

Museum of Contemporary Art

Museum of Contemporary Photography

National Museum of Mexican Art
FREE 1852 W 19th St between Wentworth Ave and Wood St (312-928-3900, nmamca.org). El: Blue (lilac), Pink to 18th. Bus: 8, Ashland (24hrs). Tues-Sun 10am-5pm. "Con Sapos (With Respect)." These selections from the nation’s largest private collection of contemporary Chicano art include paintings, sculptures, photographs, and other work created since the 1960s. Through Jun 15.

Smart Museum of Art

Sputerus Museum

Galleries

North Side
Audible at ESS
5652 S Ravenswood Ave between Armitage and Western Ave (773-227-6522, audibleshoot.org). Mon-Wed, Sat 10am-6pm, Thurs 10am-5pm. "Re-envisioning Difference: Notes from the Forefront of Culturally Specific Museums."

South Side
Kirtsen Leonards and Angel Otero
A piece of paper airplane accompanies Lemoine’s video "The Stationary Dreamer." Otero also shows his "Cooking Boogalo" abstract landscape paintings. Fri and Sat 12-7pm. Through May 20.

Thomas Masters Gallery