

WALL LABEL

COURTHOUSE EXHIBITION
April 12 - July 10, 1977

In photography's earliest days it was allegedly said that photographs did not lie. Somewhat later it was discovered, or admitted, that they could indeed lie. More recently still, it has come to seem that photographs should be judged not as truths or falsehoods, but as opinions (perceptions) that are more or less intelligent, cogent, coherent, and beautiful.

Nevertheless, the notion survives that a photograph and the subject matter it describes are more or less equatable. It survives because it is a useful fiction.

In architectural scholarship (as in police work, advertising, journalism, etc.) it is useful to assume that a photograph can stand as a surrogate for its nominal subject. This allows architects and historians to assume real knowledge of buildings that they have never seen in the flesh. This professional convenience is predicated on the idea that some architectural photographs are objective, or true, while others are subjective, or false. In practice, the photograph judged most objective is the one most closely resembling the drawing made by the architect before construction was begun.

Photographers who have photographed architecture with serious attention know that there is no system or philosophy that will make their pictures objective, since the pictures can describe only aspects of buildings--aspects determined within pictorial, not architectural, disciplines. The photographer must work with pattern, illusion, and fixity; the architect with space, substance, and time. Thus a photograph of a building is neither a replica nor a model, but the translation of an idea from an architectural to a pictorial form. It is, inevitably, a critical act, recording not only the building

(more)

Nicholas Nixon, Tod Papageorge, Stephen Shore, and Geoff Winningham, among others. The only restriction on the photographers was that all work be done with a view camera to ensure high-quality, finely detailed images. For some of the photographers this assignment provided the first occasion to use the view camera. The photographers travelled the nation between September 1974 and April 1975 along designated routes, photographing certain assigned courthouses as well as any others that caught their interest. Speaking of the artistic issues that faced them, and, indeed, the problem that arises in architectural photography in general Mr. Szarkowski notes: "A photograph of a building is neither a replica nor a model, but the translation of an idea from an architectural to a pictorial form. It is, inevitably, a critical act, recording not only the building itself, but the photographer's understanding of it, and of his own medium's capacity to describe it. Like other varieties of photographs, it is made, not born."

"The highly selective fragment of the total Seagram's project that is shown here can only suggest the scope of the total archive as a resource for the study of American building and social values. It can perhaps indicate something of the intelligence, skill, sensibility, and independence with which a group of superior photographers, mostly young, used their own art to describe in translation the radically different arts of architecture, building, and government."

Later this year an expanded version of the exhibition will tour nationally, under the auspices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS IN THE MUSEUM EXHIBITION ARE:

Doug Baz	Pirkle Jones	Tod Papageorge
Caldecotte Chubb	Lewis Kostiner	Stephen Shore
William Clift	Nicholas Nixon	Bob Thall
Jim Dow	Richard Pare	Geoff Winningham
Frank Gohlke		

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