

DANZIGERPROJECTS

EZRA STOLLER – Buildings of New York

June 6 – July 15, 2007.

“Buildings of New York” presents a selection of 20 photographs by the renowned architectural photographer Ezra Stoller - all taken in the city he was drawn to both personally and professionally. From the rectangular lines of Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram Building to the swoops and curves of Saarinen’s TWA Terminal, New York was to Stoller the epicenter of modernism and thus his greatest inspiration.

Stoller, was born in Chicago in 1915 and died in 2004. He began taking photographs of buildings to support himself while studying architecture at New York University and quickly established himself as the leading architectural photographer of the 20th century. He photographed the works of most of the architectural giants of his time: Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Alvar Aalto, Eero Saarinen, Marcel Breuer, and Paul Rudolph. His photographs helped establish the hegemony of the modern movement. In fact so influential was Stoller's work that many architects didn't feel a building was complete until it had been "Stollerized."

He brought to his work a rigorous intellectual curiosity along with a depth and commitment not then found in the field. Stoller's usual procedure was to walk the structure to be photographed with a rough floor plan in hand. He would mark on the plan the best vantage points, and note the moment of the day when light would be optimal for each shot. He could be tyrannical. Once, photographing a house, he demanded that the owner move out while he did his work, which took three days.

"Photography is space, light, texture, of course," Stoller once said, "but the really important element is time.." He would wait for days, if necessary, for the instant when light and form were momentarily perfect. Stoller also sought to place each building in its own historical moment. An example is Stoller’s famous shot of Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York. A pale Buick fills the lower foreground, its body shape and sharp fins making visual rhymes with the building beyond. But the car reminds us that even this masterpiece is a product of the taste of its era. (Deeper in the picture, we also notice two black-clad nuns hurrying along the sidewalk. Their tiny, dark forms bring out, by contrast, the pale cloudlike volumes of the museum.)

While Stoller was not averse to color photography, his genius was for black and white. He was a master of chiaroscuro, the abstract patterning of shadow and light, in a manner that sometimes evokes Hollywood film noir. He loved to shoot a building by day and night, and almost always worked in very deep focus, with every detail pin-sharp. Coming from the pre-digital era, Stoller’s straight perspective lines are a wonder! He also delighted in seeing buildings as complex, abstract sculpture, and finding a view that had not occurred to anyone else.

Stoller’s career as an active photographer lasted nearly four decades. However, it was not until his relationship with the Danziger Gallery that his work was first shown as fine art in its own right. “Buildings of New York” is our third show of Stoller’s work, following a 1996 retrospective and a 1999 exhibition of the complete TWA terminal series .