

THE IMAGE AND THE IMAGINED

A NEW BOOK PRESENTS CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON HOW VISUAL CULTURE AND ARCHITECTURE INFLUENCE EACH OTHER.

TEXT » GWEN LEE
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Architects have always been inspired by artists. Frank Lloyd Wright's obsession with Utagawa Hiroshige's *ukiyo-e* woodcuts was well known, as was their influence on his spatial composition. Then there is Frank Gehry, whose deconstructed buildings often reference his love for sculptures. Similarly, artists have long drawn inspiration from buildings. From Paul Cézanne to Diego Rivera, painters have incorporated scenes of houses and cities into their works.

In the twenty-first-century art world, the continued interest in all things architectural has seen a wave of bold new interpretations via various media such as photography, digital art, sculpture and installation. *Imagine Architecture: Artistic Visions of the Urban Realm* attempts to present a survey of such artistic works. Edited by Lukas Feireiss and Robert Klanten, the book explores the different ways in which art and urban spaces shape each other, pursuing the themes from the duo's earlier publication *Beyond Architecture*.

The artworks are categorised loosely into four sections according to the archetypes they examine: The House, The Tower, The City and The Ruin. In a short introduction at the start of the book, Feireiss talks about the blurring of the “image and the imagined” in popular culture and how *Imagine Architecture* aims “to engage in, and encourage, the exploration of the speculative power of these imaginary architectures and architectural fantasies”.



His introduction is accessible enough to those who do not possess an architectural education. (Feireiss himself has a background in comparative religious studies, philosophy and ethnology.) Familiar architectural texts such as Kevin Lynch's theory of imageability and Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* are referenced in an earnest attempt to bring some sort of theoretical and philosophical weight to the image-heavy publication. While one may doubt whether these decades-old works are truly significant to the projects being catalogued, the editors' keen curatorial skills more than make up for the lack in theoretical rigour.

A smorgasbord of artwork is presented in this book. From the humorous (Frank Halmans's *Apartment Building as a Vacuum Cleaner*) to the surreal (Rik Smits's atmospheric drawings of art deco skyscrapers and temples), there is something for everyone. A young artist seeking to use the urban landscape as a creative catalyst would do well to peruse this 240-page volume for both precedents and inspiration. An architect jaded by years of producing picture-perfect computer renderings would, on the other hand, benefit from the subversive and raw interpretations of physical space.

Of these, Chinese artist Liu Wei's *Library II-II* sculptures of skyscrapers carved from piles of recycled books and Matias Bechtold's corrugated cardboard cities remind us once again

of the paramount role of physical models in the conception of architecture. Ironically, one cannot help but note that physical models feature more prominently in this art book than in an architect's monograph these days.

Would it then be fair to say that with the construction industry's increasing reliance on Building Information Modelling (BIM) and prefabrication, artists have surreptitiously taken over the role of the hands-on builder? From the numerous examples cited, there seems to be no shortage of artists who are challenging the conventional doctrines about the built environment through their haptic experiments. For instance, the *Urban Sprawl Project* by Los-Angeles-based artist Kiel Johnson has grown from clusters of small street scenes constructed for video shoots to a sprawling metropolis involving professional architects and planners – giving us food for thought as to what city planning processes may entail in the future.

All in all, *Imagine Architecture* acts as an interdisciplinary bridge for those who wish to seek inspiration beyond their field of architecture, photography or modern art. While it is true that the latest research recommends triggering creativity via boredom, being bombarded by page after page of delightful images may yet do the trick.

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