

Summary

Architectural photography assumes a substantively as well as qualitatively preeminent position in the multifaceted oeuvre of photographer Lucca Chmel (1911 – 1999). Beginning in 1933 in Vienna, she was active in numerous fields including landscape, portrait and theatrical photography, but over the course of Austrian reconstruction following World War II, she came to specialize in capturing contemporary architecture with her camera. Between 1948 and 1972, she worked for architects and designers who were among those who played key roles in determining what was being built in Austria-and especially Vienna-during that period: Oswald Haerdtl, Erich Boltenstern, Roland Rainer, Max Fellerer & Eugen Wörle, Theiss & Jaksch, Anton Potyka and Georg Lipfert. In light of the size and significance of the architects that commissioned her work as well as the tremendous number and diversity of the buildings, interiors and architectural models she photographed, Lucca Chmel was an important chronicler and interpreter of the development of Austrian architecture during the 1950s and '60s.

This dissertation has been conceived as a work of critical appreciation of a photographic oeuvre that has received absolutely no scholarly consideration until now; its primary objective is to evaluate the aesthetic positions adopted by Lucca Chmel as she went about capturing contemporary architecture in photographs. To achieve this aim, the author first deals with the issue of how visible reality is represented in the medium of photography-i.e. with the problem of realism in photography and its theoretical reflection-which is meant as the basis of an investigation of photography as a graphic means of expression. Since every photographer's subjective "eye" and graphic vocabulary are conditioned by cultural and historical parameters, this dissertation investigates Lucca Chmel's family background, biography, artistic training and career path. It also treats questions related to the aesthetic concepts generally prevailing during the '50s and '60s as well as the functional interrelationship between the way in which applied architectural photography was produced and the uses to which it was put. Moreover, an analysis of the circle of-mostly Viennese-architects who commissioned her work serves to contextualize the photography of Lucca Chmel. Since photographs are always causally and inseparably connected with the external objects they depict, this dissertation elaborates on the predominant tendencies in Austrian architectural development and classifies the buildings and interiors that Lucca Chmel photographed within this context.

Summary

On the basis of the results and findings that have emerged from the scholarly analysis of Lucca Chmel's estate now housed in the Picture Archive of the Austrian National Library, the author has come to the following conclusions in this dissertation:

Lucca Chmel's post-1945 work in architectural photography is clearly within the technical and aesthetic tradition of the 1930s. This is evident above all from the photographer's utilization of lighting effects to visually stage three-dimensional spaces in ways that transfigure them or aim to create dramatic moods. Lucca Chmel received her training from 1931 to 1933 at Vienna's Graphische Lehr- und Versuchsanstalt, where her instructor, the Late Pictorialist Rudolf Koppitz (1884 – 1936), strongly influenced her aesthetic approach. During the interwar period, a time when the Neues Sehen and the Neue Sachlichkeit had long since been blazing innovative trails in Germany, conventional motifs were being maintained in Austria and especially at the Graphische, where emphasis was still being placed on well-composed photographic imagery and atmospheric values continued to be the determinative creative model. Nevertheless, during the '30s, formal-aesthetic aspects of these new tendencies in photography belatedly established themselves in Austria too and also became evident in Lucca Chmel's work—for example, in radically composed close-up shots or extreme shooting angles from above or below producing spatial distortions.

In her pictorial conceptions, the photographer repeatedly came up with graphic correspondences to formal and/or material-aesthetic aspects of the architecture she was commissioned to depict. In numerous instances, Lucca Chmel's pictorial solutions seem like visual dialogs with the architectural-artistic intentions of her day. The increasingly factual style that architectural photography again generally evoked during the '50s and '60s in German-speaking Europe and the point of view that accentuated the clearly structuring, geometric aspects of buildings and interiors are distinctly present in Lucca Chmel's oeuvre. In this respect, her work is in accordance with general tendencies in architectural photography of the '50s and '60s.

Nevertheless, combined with Lucca Chmel's use of lighting, this factual style is ingeniously undermined and juxtaposed to a counterpoint in the form of dramatically effective graphic expression. This is exactly what engenders the distinctive element of tension that pervades her creative work in the field of architectural photography, and it is also in precisely this respect that her graphic vocabulary is congruent with the topos of moderated modernism that was typical of post-1945 Austria. The aesthetic continuity that links Lucca Chmel's architectural photography of the '50s and '60s with that of the 1930s ultimately finds its correspondence in the architecture itself as well.