

PHOTOGRAPHY: A MEDIUM OF PERSUASION

Introduction and Overview

Few people are unaware of the power of photographs, but many are perhaps unaware of how central photography was in promoting post-World War II architecture. As Robert Elwall observes in his landmark work *Building With Light*, there was a post-war boom in architectural journalism alongside a growing consumer demand for new housing: “[I]n an increasingly competitive market, striking photographs could be crucial to the maintenance of circulation figures... Perhaps most importantly, photographs rather than arcane drawings were seen as the best way to interpret architecture to a wider public” (Elwall 126). Compelling images, with what Julius Shulman called “graphic impact,” were crucial in publicizing architecture as a lifestyle and consumer product.

The materials displayed here were taken from four collections in the International Archive of Women in Architecture: the Lois Gottlieb, Rebecca Wood Watkin, Han Schroeder, and Liane Zimbler collections. The selected photographs were chosen to demonstrate variety and range, but also to showcase aesthetic patterns through repetition. Some items were chosen for their novelty (“photographica,” collectible equipment that connotes a bygone material culture, as with the stereo-viewer from the Zimbler collection) or their affective and personal qualities (snapshots from the Han Schroeder and Lois Gottlieb collections), but the majority demonstrate the influence of black-and-white photography in communicating and popularizing a modern architectural aesthetic.

While some of the photographers featured here are unknown, others were quite prominent in their field, including Julius Shulman, Morley Baer, Jan Versnel, Ernest Bauer, and George de Gennaro.