

# Room for the Imagination

The Room for the Imagination is an installation of 24 architectural photo collages with contrasting images meant to create a space for the viewer's imagination. To do this, we have installed each collage against a contrasting image, either installed above, behind or to the side of it. Doing that helps create a sense of depth for the viewer, much as multiple layers of scenery do on a stage. It might also create space for the viewers to build something of their own in their imagination. That is why this exhibit is called "Room for the Imagination."

These collages were made from digital photos that can be taken by almost any digital camera available off the shelf. The jpeg files are downloaded to a computer from a camera and laid out in a Microsoft Powerpoint file, depending on the composition and subject matter. Doing photo collages this way is an easy way to create a work of art out of photography. You don't have to know how to draw or capture the perfect moment. Technically, it's very forgiving. You can expand and crop photos to fit a space (although I don't alter them). And the geometry that architects bring to their buildings provides plenty of material for endless possibilities for organizing them. I think doing this can be called art, because I think art is anything that represents something experienced in a physical medium for its own sake-whether the medium is color, sound, language, or building materials.

These photo collages can be called "architectural" because they are about extending spaces architects have designed on the picture plane. As such, they depend on the work of the architects, whose buildings are their original creation.

Art is composition, according to the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. And composition is key to understanding these collages. It will guide you as to what experience or idea the piece is trying to convey. The compositions are often very simple, consisting of a main image or images surrounded by others that elaborate on them. The choice of main images always depends on something that I felt was decisive about my experience with a building or landscape, perhaps from the building's history, history in general, or the form of the building. Many of the pictures chosen were put into the composition just because they were ones I thought were beautiful in some way. As I have learned at St. Luke, taste can serve as a trustworthy guide, and it can make things work together. The images that have been installed above or around the existing collages in this show attempt to extend the form, the content or both of what is being depicted. They are meant to add an extra dimension to the viewing experience.

I've found that experience is foundational in making art. The better an experience is depicted, the better the work of art, in my opinion.

The collages in the main gallery follow a trajectory in thinking about space: first about sacred space, in the piece featuring LeCorbusier's Notre Dame du Haut and the Isenheim Altarpiece, then about philosophical space, in putting spaces into dialogue, about natural space and space as created by the buildings of Mies van der Rohe, then about cultural space and the landscape, and then finally asking whether material itself can create space.

There are at least three series in the gallery—series in the sense of a group of works exploring a common or related theme. The largest series in the main gallery is about the buildings of Mies van der Rohe and nature. This famous architect, who practiced in Chicago in the mid-twentieth century was criticized infamously for designing buildings that were thought to be pure volumes not related to anything around them. I hope I have presented another vision, one in line with the architect's intentions. As I hope you'll see, there can be great fluidity between inside and outside in his buildings, between nature and the what is constructed in it. A smaller series of two installations deals with building, architecture and landscape in the American Southwest. It was done in the interest of seeing how architecture responds to needs for shelter from the sun and light, an idea not very imaginable from a Midwestern perspective! The series on the bookstore wall depicts seven traditional songs in the Christian church (Sanctus, Benedictus, Magnificat, Gloria, Dimittis, Miserere and Alleluia). The collages take imagery from them and find it again in the architecture of the St Luke church building which is upstairs from the gallery. With a digital camera that can see more than the eye, it is a building that seems to be always changing. Those collages were part of a show by members of the St. Luke Artist's Guild on that theme. They were shown in Doederlein Gallery in Spring 2016 (where you are standing now), already a summer ago.

The stylistic strategy used in making these photo collages takes a page from the Cubists. They were interested in the fact that the same objects can take on new qualities when viewed from different angles at different times. They did this so that the sense of reality one gets from everyday objects can be enhanced by ways only art can. This sense of reality can be said to be philosophically grounded, if time and space are foundational to perception. Buildings are also viewed always from a particular angle at a particular time. That might be how it could be said that architecture gives us a view of reality- whether it's seen through a glass house in the woods on a summer day or in a church in Chicago or at night in Paris. Realty is indeed a good thing!

There's also a small dash of surrealism thrown into the compositions for good measure. Figures and symbols help move the narrative of the compositions along and help relieve some of the tension created by the sharp diagonals and strongly oblique perspectives. For example, the figures in the Farnsworth House collage are shown doing just what they want to be doing. They aren't manipulated by the pure volume of the building —as if modern architecture had the power to do that.

It seems that surrealism has had a resurgence in the last decade or so. It might have crept in my own thinking because I suspect that virtual reality has given us a larger picture of reality than has usually been experienced through popular media like television, which often scripts it too tightly. In my work, sometimes figures and symbols in the collages are closely related to the content, but sometimes not as closely as one might expect. So, this artwork is not very literal at times, and sometimes it opts to be more playful than not.

So, I hope you enjoy this exhibit. And that it takes you to good places.

TMD  
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