



ART REVIEW: Jade Doskow Photographs Explore Architecture Left Behind at World's Fair Sites, Revealing a Future That Never Arrived

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by Peter Malone

Photographer Jade Doskow offers a compelling selection of photographs from her ongoing “Lost Utopias” project in the intimate Lower East Side space of [Front Room Gallery](#) in New York City. This expansive series centers on the surviving futuristic and ceremonial structures left on the sites of world expositions. For the exhibition, which remains on view through May 20, 2018, the artist and gallery staff presents an abridged version and focuses on some of the stranger ways the architectural relics continue in modern day life. The full photography project includes success stories like the Eiffel Tower, which has continued to become an international icon. The exhibition at Front Room Gallery accentuates the white elephant variety, a characterization that perhaps warrants a brief etymological detour.

Siamese kings once gave healthy white elephants to visitors, who soon realized that to accept the care of a beast known for its longevity and appetite was to be bound to a possession. Centuries later, the sovereigns surrendered all but their ceremonial status to a 1932 constitution (and at least one Broadway musical) and the pale pachyderm population was demoted to euphemism, a polite acknowledgement of an unwanted gift, a mixed blessing, a thing of fading or no value that can neither be easily maintained nor justifiably dispatched.

What [Jade Doskow](#)’s work in “Lost Utopias” reveals is the unplanned awkwardness that often haunts these buildings, and more specifically how local administrators apparently struggle as the years pass to adapt the oddball appearance of their charge to surroundings that have invariably been developed along conventional patterns.



“Montreal 1967 World’s Fair, ‘Man and His World,’ Buckminster Fuller’s Geodesic Dome With Solar Experimental House” by Jade Doskow. © 2018 Jade Doskow / Front Room Gallery.

The photographs are shot on film with a large format 4×5 camera, then transferred to digital media. The prints in the exhibition measure approximately 30 by 40 inches. *New York 1964 World's Fair, "Peace Through Understanding," Philip Johnson's New York State Pavilion (fresh paint)*, creates what seems at first a postcard-perfect view of Johnson's outdoor theater, with an upward perspective reaching toward its open circular roof. On close inspection, the high-resolution print allows the viewer to notice abandoned safety nets and dangling tarpaulins drooping precariously from spokes radiating from the structure's central ring. With its haphazard maintenance thus exposed, the building's eerie emptiness encroaches on a viewer's perspective, its former grandeur giving way to the image of a casually maintained ruin.



"New York 1964 World's Fair, 'Peace Through Understanding,' Philip Johnson's New York State Pavilion (fresh paint)" by Jade Duskow. © 2018 Jade Duskow / Front Room Gallery.

Though every site implies a unique narrative, not every narrative is revealed by such details. A shrewd vantage point can give a viewer a fresh perspective on a familiar structure. For instance, the Space Needle of Seattle's 1962 World's Fair has earned iconic status in its home town. In response, Duskow's journalist instincts led her away from the long-lens shots made popular by the city's boosters to the discovery of a low-rise residential neighborhood from which its futuristic neighbor stands in odd contrast to both the domesticity of private balconies and to the distant and equally mismatched skyline.



"Seattle 1962 World's Fair, 'The Century 21 Exposition,' Space Needle" by Jade Duskow. © 2018 Jade Duskow / Front Room Gallery.

Office towers appear in the photograph to stand back, as if trying to avoid getting too close. In placing the camera on this remote bluff, she realigns its flying saucer campiness to the daily routine of the city. The mild irreverence of the shot bears comparison to how [Francois Truffaut](#) framed the Eiffel Tower from a Paris bus window in the opening scenes of his seminal film, *The 400 Blows*.

The stranger the structure, the more dramatic the comparison. In *Brussels 1958 World's Fair, "A World View: A New Humanism," Atomium*, Duskow takes viewers to a small Belgian café sharing space with an oversized chromium plated atom, originally put there for the 1958 New Humanism event. One assumes atoms at that time were in need of a makeover to quell the fear of nuclear

annihilation. In Duskow's photo, the opposite seems to happen. The incongruity of the establishment's festive yellow umbrellas with this monstrous thing looming behind them resembles a scene from the 1950s space alien movies that, ironically, had inflamed and capitalized on the very fears the structure was designed to ease.



"Brussels 1958 World's Fair, 'A World View: A New Humanism,' Atomium" by Jade Duskow. © 2018 Jade Duskow / Front Room Gallery.

Duskow's thesis—how these buildings, for better or worse, declare themselves to their evolving surroundings—makes for a potent commentary on cultural prediction. With variety and nuance, they illustrate the futility of getting ahead of one's skis in an art form as grounded as architecture. It's not an easy balance to strike, as architecture and photography have traditionally been mutually supportive, as demonstrated in the "[Image Building](#)" exhibition currently at the Parrish Museum. In this sense, "Lost Utopias" is a valuable historical document.

Even in the edited version on view in Front Room Gallery, the series celebrates the organic and imperfect nature of the urban environment by means of a consistently objective critical attitude. And it also serves as a reminder—in a media environment of image saturation and digital sleight-of-hand—that photojournalism is a discipline, and that the well-constructed photo essay stands vigilant as a form of thoughtful discourse.

BASIC FACTS: "Jade Duskow: 'Lost Utopias'" is on view April 20 through May 20, 2018 at Front Room Gallery, 48 Hester Street, New York, NY 10002. The gallery is open Wednesdays through Sundays. www.frontroomles.com.

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