

Irmel Kamp - Moderne in Europa
9 September - 28 October 2023

Irmel Kamp created her series *Modernism in Europe* between 1995 and 2006 like a strolling researcher. Inspired by examples of striking modernist architecture in guide books, she travelled to the relevant locations in the Czech Republic, Poland, Belgium, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands and walked about to have a look around. The building chosen beforehand served as an occasion to seek out a certain region, but Irmel Kamp usually took pictures of other, less well-known buildings, whose characteristics seemed more striking to her. These included gas stations, cinemas, factories, sanatoriums, and fair pavilions. Unlike her older series, in these pictures Irmel Kamp worked more loosely and less based in research. Instead of striving for a survey that was as structured as possible as in the earlier series *Tel Aviv* and *Zinc, Modernism in Europe* attests to a powerful visual curiosity.

“Every building is a personality,” says Irmel Kamp about the buildings she photographs. Once she selected a building, she walked around it and looked for potential perspectives for the picture. With the careful selection of camera placement, light situation, and the subsequent treatment of the exposure in black and white in the dark room, she underscores in a sensitive way the characteristics of the architectural utopias from the 1920s and 1930s become stone. The photographs thus not only allow us to observe the architectural design, but also to immerse ourselves in the characteristics of the structures and to imagine their personalities. In the following, several descriptions attempt to pick up the characteristics she captures in her photographs.

Purcina Gas Station in Arnhem peeks at us, still somewhat sleepy, as if it has just woken up with its bull’s eye windows in the gentle morning sun. In the picture, the building appears white and still, almost as if freshly showered, and with a glass corner provides a view of its interior. The roof resembles flowing hair and, if we look with squinting eyes, the small pavement stones of its location could be finely grained sand. In the background, the leaves in the tall trees rustle quietly. In contrast, *Cinema Puccini* in Florence navigates its way confidently through a sea of shrubs and bushes, like a submarine that has just surfaced. The contours of the building are rounded out in a streamlined way, and the high tower with its completely glazed façade promises a good view of the distance. On top, a lightning rod thrones like an exclamation point, while three antennas in the rear appear as if they were rendered in pencil. Time has left its mark on the façade. The plaster is crumbling away and tells stories of harsh encounters with the seasons.

Koffie-Thee-Tabak-Fabriek and *Maison Atelier Guierre* seem at first quite rectangularly tidy. Right angles and regularly structured windows determine their façades. But we are given little to see. At the factory in Arnhem, blinds block the view inside. The pulled down blinds in Irmel Kamp’s print have such lovely grades of gray, that they appear as an ensemble to be a poetic composition in black and white. The irregularly stacked floors of the factory, due to the framing of the photograph, raise questions of geometric line experiments: where do the lines that run diagonal to one another touch? Do not the parallel lines actually meet somewhere at an infinite distance? *Maison Atelier Guierette* in Antwerp is structured by vertical and horizontal surfaces that are proportioned with the clarity of a constructivist painting. In the frontal

view, it seems to breathe in deeply and to stretch upward tensely. The view from the side shows the relaxation and expanse after exhaling. In a humorous way, a circular opening in the wall loosens up the side façade. *Auto Palace Gas Station* in Nijmegen reveals a more eclectic variety of forms. A rectangular structure docks onto a glass rotunda with a plate-shaped intervening roof. On top, an extended glass cylinder with a metal rod attached to it dreams of becoming a skyscraper. Irmel Kamp photographed the gas station from a vacant parking lot. The vertical lines of the structure continue in the fence, while a leafless tree with his organic proliferation counters the geometric rigor of the architecture and a car parked under the roof evokes the building's earlier function.

To read Irmel Kamp's photographs as classical architectural photography would fall short in purely formal terms. With the compositional inclusion of perspective, light, and shadow, she distills the special aspects of the building and examines the mutual influences between the buildings and their surroundings. In Irmel Kamp's photographs, the architectural visions appear like the characters in good portraits, which we interpret as we view them.

Christin Müller

Translation: Brian Currid

Irmel Kamp (born in Düsseldorf in 1937) lives in Aachen.

The photography of Irmel Kamp was recently been shown in two major solo exhibitions at Museum für Photographie Braunschweig (2022) and Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Düren (2023) as well as at Ikob - Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Eupen (2020).

Her work has recently been featured in numerous group shows, for example at Kolumba, Cologne, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, and Produzentengalerie Hamburg.

Irmel Kamp's works are featured in several prominent collections, including Kunstsammlung der Stadtsparkasse Düsseldorf im Kunstpalast, Kolumba - Kunstmuseum des Erzbistums Köln, Ludwig Forum Aachen, Ikob - Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Eupen, Belgium, the Paul Sack Collection, San Francisco, and the J.P. Morgan Collection, New York.

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