



# FRAMING ARCHITECTURE

**INSTRUCTOR**  
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## ISSUE

In the age of ubiquitous digital media, architectural photography has become a powerful tool for representation and dissemination. However, is it merely a passive medium for documentation, or can it be leveraged as an active instrument of inquiry and design? This course challenges the notion that architectural photography is a neutral, objective recording of the built environment. Instead, it posits that the act of framing, selecting, and sequencing images is a deeply subjective process that can profoundly shape our understanding and perception of architecture. By critically examining the photographer's role as an interpreter and storyteller, students will develop a nuanced perspective on the potential of architectural photography to drive the design process itself.

## DESCRIPTION

Over the past two decades, there has been a surge in publishing architectural projects on digital media as design studios recognise the efficiency of information dissemination and the opportunity to reach a wider global audience. Visual communication through photography has become a preferred mode of representation. However, the challenge lies in curating and sequencing project photographs effectively. Architects must not only select appealing views but also ensure that the chosen images collectively capture the different aspects of a design, guiding the viewer's perception and interpretation. This elective course seeks to address the challenges and opportunities presented by this shift in the architectural representation landscape.

This elective course explores the relationship between architecture, visual perception, and representation. It focuses on the study of photography and other tools for representing virtual reality. Architectural photography has often been viewed primarily as a representational tool for documentation. This course, however, takes the stance that it involves a more nuanced process of investigation and analysis. By focusing on how we see and perceive the built environment, the course aims to equip students with the skills to create, select, and organise visual materials to communicate design ideas and navigate spatial cognition more effectively.

Students should have already developed a fluent competence in using Rhino, the primary digital modelling software used in this elective.

This course on architectural photography and representation has strong synergies with the core design studio courses in architectural programs. While design studios focus on the primary act of conceptualising and generating architectural proposals, this elective course provides students with crucial skills and perspectives to document, communicate, and ultimately drive the design process.

## IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

1. **Expanding the Architect's Toolkit:** By positioning architectural photography as an "active instrument of inquiry and design," this course empowers students to see visual representation as an integral part of the design process, not just a means of documentation. This can help expand the architect's creative toolkit and encourage more experimental, conceptual approaches to visualization.
2. **Developing Critical Visual Literacy:** The emphasis on the "photographer's role as an interpreter and storyteller" speaks to the importance of developing critical visual literacy among students. This can help them become more discerning and intentional in how they use photography and other media to communicate their design ideas, rather than relying on standard tropes or clichés.

3. **Bridging Design and Communication:** By highlighting the "strong synergies with the core design studio courses," the course positions architectural photography and representation as a vital bridge between the conceptual, spatial aspects of design and the communicative, narrative aspects. This can help students better integrate these two crucial dimensions of architectural practice.
4. **Embracing Subjectivity in Representation:** The course's willingness to challenge the notion of architectural photography as a "neutral, objective recording" opens up important conversations about the inherent subjectivity of visual representation. This can encourage students to be more self-reflective and critical about their own biases and choices when creating and curating visual materials.

## **COURSE SYLLABUS**

### **TOPIC 1: THE INTERPRETIVE POWER OF ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY**

The course aims to explore how photographic representation shapes our perception and understanding of the built environment, examine the subjective, narrative-driven nature of architectural photography beyond mere documentation, and investigate the role of composition, framing, lighting, and other photographic techniques in constructing architectural meaning.

### **TOPIC 2: PHOTOGRAPHY AS A DESIGN INQUIRY PROCESS**

This course explores how photography can be used to investigate, analyse, and challenge the development of design. It aims to reveal hidden aspects, spatial relationships, and experiential qualities of architectural spaces. The goal is to help students develop a critical photographic eye to inform the design process.

### **TOPIC 3: NARRATIVE AND STORYTELLING IN ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION**

The course aims to help students understand how photographic sequences, juxtapositions, and editing can be used to craft compelling narratives about buildings and their contexts. It explores the role of architectural photography in communicating design intent, user experience, and broader social and cultural meanings. Importantly, it invites students to consider the ethical implications of photographic narratives and their potential to shape public perceptions of architecture.

### **TOPIC 4: DIGITAL TOOLS AND VIRTUAL REPRESENTATION**

The course aims to explore how photographic representation shapes our perception and understanding of the built environment, examine the subjective, narrative-driven nature of architectural photography beyond mere documentation, and investigate the role of composition, framing, lighting, and other photographic techniques in constructing architectural meaning.

## **METHODS**

This elective includes lectures, workshops, in-class discussions, tutorials and exhibition curating. There are three interrelated tasks, designed to address specific issues and competencies related to architectural design and photography.

### **1. Light, Shadow, and Form (individual)**

In this first task, students will explore the interplay of light, shadow, and built form. Beginning with an in-class workshop, students will construct a wall assembly by stacking paper bowls. By projecting an artificial spotlight onto this wall, they will observe how light and shadow enhance the reading and perception of the surface. Each student will then capture a series of black and white photos, ranging from macro to micro scales, to document their wall structure and the effects of illumination.

## **2. Navigating through Photographs (individual)**

The second task invites students to read and understand architectural design through a package of photographs. The photos are collected from the design report of built housing projects. Each student will work to piece together the spatial relationships of the project by sketching the plan drawing(s). This exercise focuses on two key aspects: the process of translating photographic information into an abstract configuration and a reflective comparison between the student's inferred plan(s) and the actual design drawing(s). By navigating the visual information, students will gain deeper insight into how photographic framing, composition, and sequencing can shape our perception and understanding of architectural design.

## **3. Inquiry, Interpretation, and Narrative (group)**

In the final task, each group of students will leverage digital modelling and rendering tools to study and re-present the design of a house by renowned architect Kazuo Shinohara. Beginning with a rendering exercise that reproduces published project photographs, students will analyse the camera settings, view directions, and atmospheric qualities of each view. They will then expand upon this initial inquiry to develop their own interpretive narrative of the design through a series of photorealistic renderings. This exercise positions photography as a mode of design research and communication, challenging students to translate their spatial understanding into compelling visual stories.

By the end of the course, students will have the opportunity to curate an exhibition that showcases the work they have developed in each phase, allowing them to share their insights and photographic explorations with their peers at the school.

## **DELIVERABLES**

Students will be required to submit a process book for each task, documenting their study process. This document will help students reflect on and communicate the steps they took, the decisions they made, and the insights they gained during the learning journey. The course will provide a basic format guideline for the process book to ensure consistent and organized presentation. A detailed list of deliverables will be provided to students for each assigned task.

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Develop fundamental skills and techniques in architectural photography, including the effective use of light, shadow, and composition.
2. Gain an in-depth understanding of digital design publication workflows and the role of photography in architectural documentation and communication.
3. Cultivate the ability to use photography as an efficient tool for exploring and interpreting architectural design concepts and spatial narratives.

4. Develop the capacity to analyse and interpret photographic and photorealistic rendering information, translating visual cues into an understanding of architectural form, function, and design intent.
5. Demonstrate the ability to strategically create, select, and organise photographic views to creatively explore design ideas and navigate spatial cognition.
6. Foster the skills to present creative photographic works through the curation of an exhibition.
7. Enhance the capacity for cooperative teamwork and collaborative problem-solving.

## ASSESSMENT SCHEME

### SPECIFIC ASSESSMENT

#### 00\_Attendance and participation (10%)

#### 01\_Task 1 (15%)

#### 02\_Task 2 (25%)

#### 03\_Task 3 (50%)

**Total: 100%**

## COURSE FORMAT

### 1\_Teaching Days

1. Students must attend for F2F teaching during these teaching hours.  
Teaching Day:9:30-12:15 am, Tuesday
2. Field trips, lectures, and other learning activities may be scheduled outside of teaching days.

### 2\_Student Study Effort (Total: 140 hrs)

1. Class Contact: 39 hrs (Lecture, Tutorial, Critique, Field Trip)
2. Other Student Study Effort: 100 hrs (Studio / Self Study)

## REQUIRED READINGS

Berger, John, ed. *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series with John Berger*. Repr. London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1990.

Psarra, Sophia. *Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

Redstone, Elias. *Shooting Space: Architecture in Contemporary Photography*. London: Phaidon Press, 2014.

Valero Ramos, Elisa. *Light in Architecture: The Intangible Material*. London: Riba Publishing, 2015.

## OTHER REFERENCES

Christenson, Mike. "Critical Dimensions in Architectural Photography: Contributions to Architectural Knowledge." *Architecture\_MPS*, February 1, 2017.

Janser, Daniela, Eva Kurz, and Fotomuseum Winterthur, eds. *Concrete: Fotografie und Architektur ; photography and architecture*. Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2013.

Plummer, Henry. *Masters of Light. 1: Twentieth-Century Pioneers*. Kenchiku-to-Toshi / Rinji- Zōkan; 2003,11. Tokyo: a+u Publ, 2003.

Tsukamoto, Yoshiharu, Fuminori Nōsaku, and Chie Konno. *WindowScape: mado no furumaigaku. WindowScape I*. Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: Verlag nicht ermittelbar, 2010.

Yot, Richard. *Light for Visual Artists: Understanding & Using Light in Art & Design*. London: Laurence King, 2011.

## IMPORTANT NOTE TO STUDENTS

### Expectations for Professional Conduct

The motto of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is “Through learning and temperance to virtue”. This motto places equal emphasis on the intellectual and moral education of students. In addition to pursuing academic excellence, students of CUHK are expected to maintain and uphold the highest standard of integrity and honesty in their academic and personal lives, respect the rights of others and abide by the law. More information on Postgraduate studies can be found in the PG Student Handbook. <https://www.gs.cuhk.edu.hk/>

### Attendance

Class attendance is required in all courses. For an excused absence, the instructor must be notified and presented with documentation of illness or personal matter. Please note: **Three (3)** or more unexcused absences may result in a failing grade for the course.

### Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on academic dishonesty

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>.

With each assignment, students may be required to submit a statement that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures.

### Third-Party Assistance

All intellectual work essential to the design project must be completed by the student and cannot, under any circumstance, be outsourced to a third party (including, but not limited to a company, consultant, alumni, and/or friend).

In the design studio context, students may utilize external resources, such as printing services for presentation materials, and/or laser cutting and 3D printing services for prototyping purposes. Use of such third-party services constitutes non-intellectual work done by others. It is only permitted with prior written consent from the studio tutor and acknowledgment of such work done by the third party.

Assistance from other students or friends for aspects of project production also constitutes non-intellectual work done by others; this is allowed only if declared and acknowledged in a written statement attached to any such work that has received assistance.

Under all circumstances, students must declare all work done by others by completing the school's designated form before assessment. This form must include a detailed explanation of the third party's identity (name and relationship to the student), when and how they were utilized, and the specific tasks they performed in the project. The completed form, signed by the student, must be endorsed by the tutor

and presented during the final review. The school will collect and retain this form for record-keeping purposes.

Failure to follow this code of conduct may be considered a case of academic dishonesty, to be reviewed by a disciplinary board, and possible failure of the course.

### **Artificial Intelligence**

Unless approved by the Programme or School Director, any use of AI tools such as ChatGPT or image generation tools (Midjourney) etc. is strictly prohibited and may result in disciplinary action in accordance with university policy on academic honesty. Students may refer to the CUHK 'Use of Artificial Intelligence tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessments' – A Guide for Students.

### **Student Work**

Submission of studio documentation must be complete and correctly formatted. Missing or incomplete submission of the documentation folder will result in the grade for the course being withheld. This will prevent registration for the following term or delay graduation. In addition, a grade deduction of *one letter grade* will be made.

**Term 1: 2 September 2024 (Monday) – 30 November 2024 (Saturday)**

<b>WEEK 01</b>		
03.09	<b>INTRODUCTION + TALK 1</b>	
<b>WEEK 02</b>		
10.09	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Task 1
<b>WEEK 03</b>		
17.09	<b>TALK 2</b>	Task 1
<b>WEEK 04</b>		
24.09	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Task 2
<b>WEEK 05</b>		
01.10	<b>HOLIDAY NO CLASS</b>	
<b>WEEK 06</b>		
08.10	<b>TALK 3</b>	Task 2 (Presentation and Submission)
<b>WEEK 07</b>		
15.10	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Task 3 (Task Briefing, Case Selection and Material Collection)
<b>WEEK 08</b>		
22.10	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	Task 3 (Presentation and Digital Modelling)
<b>WEEK 09</b>		
29.10	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Task 3 (View Selection and Package Composing)
<b>WEEK 10</b>		
05.11	<b>TUTORIAL</b>	Task 3 (View Selection and Package Composing – cont.)
<b>WEEK 11</b>		
12.11	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Task 3 + Exhibition Preparation (Curation and Dry-test)
<b>WEEK 12</b>		
19.11	<b>WORKSHOP</b>	Exhibition Set-up
<b>WEEK 13</b>		
26.11	<b>NO CLASS FOR REVIEW WEEK</b>	
<b>WEEK 14</b>		
03.12	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	Reflection



Grade	Descriptor	Criteria	Points
A	Excellent	Comprehensively excellent performance on all aspects of the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes with distinction.	4
A-	Very Good	Generally outstanding performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes with merit.	3.7
B+	Good	Substantial performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes satisfactorily.	3.3
B			3
B-			2.7
C+	Fair	Fair performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes at a passing standard.	2.3
C			2
C-			1.7
D+	Pass	Barely satisfactory performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Achieving all learning outcomes at a barely satisfactory standard.	1.3
D			1
F	Failure	Unsatisfactory performance on the design intention, development, technical resolution and presentation. Not achieving all learning outcomes.	0