



Richard Ross: Architecture of Authority

By John R. MacArthur

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For the past several years--and with seemingly limitless access--photographer Richard Ross has been making unsettling and thought-provoking pictures of architectural spaces that exert power over the individuals within them. From a Montessori preschool to churches, mosques and diverse civic spaces including a Swedish courtroom, the Iraqi National Assembly hall and the United Nations, the images in "Architecture of Authority" build to ever harsher manifestations of power: an interrogation room at Guantánamo, segregation cells at Abu Ghraib, and finally, a capital punishment death chamber.

Though visually cool, this work deals with hot-button issues--from the surveillance that increasingly intrudes on post-9/11 life to the abuse of power and the erosion of individual liberty. The connections among the various architectures are striking, as Ross points out: "The Santa Barbara Mission confessional and the LAPD robbery homicide interrogation rooms are the same intimate proportions. Both are made to solicit a confession in exchange for some form of redemption." Essay by "Harper's Magazine" publisher, John R. MacArthur, also a columnist for the Toronto "Globe and Mail."

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Editorial Review

Review

"There are images in 'Architecture of Authority: Photographs by Richard Ross' that will make your heart race, your palms sweat and your blood pressure spike." -- Philip Kennicott --Washington Post

"Though visually cool, this book deals with hot-button issues-- the surveillance that increasingly intrudes on post-9/11 life, the abuse of power and the erosion of individual civil liberty." --Photo District News

"By connecting so many different places, Architecture of Authority asks us to think about what society we want to live in and how we want to define - and live with - power and authority. Given the developments of the past few years, this is quite an important issue." -- Jörg Colberg --Conscientious blog

"Ross has burrowed his way into some of the world's most sequestered quarters, but equally striking is the work drawn from the everyday world of soft power, from the Tensabarrier enclosures of airports to the 'interdependence of freedom and discipline' embodied by the circle on Montessori-school floors." -- Tom Vanderblit --ArtForum

"A powerful and often sinister photographic record of the way space is used in maintaining terror and fear. From the bleak interiors of execution rooms and holding cells to border crossings and empty waiting rooms, this is the perfect document of the strange common language of everyday bureaucracy and extraordinary terror." -- Edwin Heathcote --Financial Times Magazine

"Architecture of Authority wraps compelling, confronting photographs by Richard Ross in a pair of rousing essays condemning coercive, generally American authoritarianism." -- Sally Dominguez --Monument: Architecture and Design

About the Author

Richard Ross has taught at the University of California, Santa Barbara, since 1977. He has photographed for the New York Times Magazine, Discover, Vogue, and Frankfurter Allgemeine and is represented by ACME Gallery in Los Angeles. His work is in the collections of the Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; British Museum, London; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; and Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal.

John R. MacArthur, president and publisher of Harper's Magazine, is an award-winning journalist and author. He is the author of two books: The Selling of "Free Trade": NAFTA, Washington, and the Subversion of American Democracy; and Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War.

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