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EZRA STOLLER *Buildings of New York* *Danziger Projects* *521 West 26th Street, Chelsea* *Through July 20*

Photography, perhaps more than any other modern medium, has been subject to the whims of context. Consider Ezra Stoller (1915-2004), who photographed 20th-century architecture. “While I cannot make a bad building good,” Mr. Stoller once said, “I can draw out the strengths in a work that has strength. But I never claimed my work is art. The art is the architecture.”

You feel inclined to disagree when faced with Mr. Stoller’s stunning, high-contrast black-and-white photographs of mid-20th-century buildings. They fit nicely into a trajectory of architecturally centered photography that wasn’t always considered “art” and includes Eugène Atget, Berenice Abbott, Margaret Bourke-White and Julius Shulman. Arranged serially, his work also calls to mind that of Bernd and Hilla Becher.

Formalist concerns reign over conceptual ones. Mr. Stoller highlighted the good bones of great buildings by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Marcel Breuer, Eero Saarinen and others. Embedded in these sleek, elegant images, however, are sly narratives. A photograph taken from the roof of Mies’s Seagram Building in 1958 includes the tops of the Chrysler and Empire State Buildings, as well as the spire of a Gothic Revival church. A pair of nuns stroll by the [Guggenheim Museum](#); a classically inspired sculpture nods reverently to Edward Durrell Stone’s building at 2 Columbus Circle.

There is a sense of teleology, the inevitable trudge of history, the modern overtaking the traditional and antique. Like Atget photographing Paris for various clients, Mr. Stoller worked for others — architects or institutions like [MoMA](#), which commissioned him to photograph Le Corbusier’s Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp, France — but also in the service of modernism. He may have seen himself as a bystander to art, but the photographs here prove that he was a vital, active participant. MARTHA SCHWENDENER