

Las Vegas - Where does reality reside?

Written by Pedro Meyer



Why am I so fascinated by this city? Probably because it is the only place where I can make a photograph in which the outcome is an unaltered image which looks like a text book rendition of a layered digital fabrication created on a computer. A picture that is, to use a term very much appreciated by documentary photographers: a strictly "straight image." However this photograph is a deception in that it appears to be like a composite of several ones. Essentially it looks "fake." However, what do you call an image in which the subject matter to begin with is what is fake? So we go back to those basic dilemmas about photography, wherein does the deception lie? In the original or the reproduction? Or is it maybe our interpretation of it all?

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It was 25 years ago that a little known professor, Robert Venturi, dared in to Las Vegas with two dozen of his students from Yale, and stayed at the Stardust. The result of that trip would become his influential 1972 book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, which would introduce the world of high culture to the notion of what in time, became known as Post-Modernist architecture.

Today every big-city downtown has new skyscrapers that attempt to look like old skyscrapers. Almost every suburb has a shopping center decorated with phony arches, fake pediments, and imitation columns. Venturi's manifesto stating that Las Vegas could become a beacon for the architecture of the future, in particular in the United States, transformed such esthetic thinking through out the world. Today we can see such buildings from Mexico City to London aside from major metropolitan cities all over the US landscape.

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Being so close to the Strip, it's hard to believe that this is not a Las Vegas project. The building is located in the heart of the city, and the construction is well-advanced. The sign on the building is a clear indication of its identity. The crane is a testament to the scale of the project. The overall scene is one of intense activity and development.

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