

## Introduction

Philipp Schaerer: *Bildbauten* - Standpunkte Publikation (2010), ISBN 978-3-9523540-4-9  
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When El Lissitzky (1890–1941) credited himself as “book engineer” in Vladimir Majakovskij’s 1923 *Dlia Gólosa (For the Voice)*, the Russian artist expressed his hope that the disciplines of art, architecture, typography, and engineering would merge into an inseparable yet distinctive field. Similarly, we could call Philipp Scharer, initially trained as an architect, an “image engineer.” His digitally conceived works, among them those presented in this small volume, are the outcome of a skillful amalgamation of photographic knowledge, compositional skills, the specificities of architectural practice, and digital craftsmanship.

Over the past decades, visual literacy has turned out to be a vital element of any ambitious architectural practice. While the daily flood of images became an integral part of our lives, the capacity to express ourselves within this sphere is still rather underdeveloped. While there are plenty of professionals who have the skills to produce imaginary depictions of three-dimensional artifacts, few master the differentiated cohesion between space, light, and texture. Through his architectural imagery, Philipp Schaerer significantly contributes to this visual world and positions himself as an inherent part of it. The collection of selected fragments extracted from this information waterfall is the starting point of his visual journey. The creation, classification, and organization of visual resources are the foundation of Schaerer’s work. Over the last few years, he has gathered a massive pool of photographic resources, which is growing daily. Traveling the world with his camera at hand, the architect is constantly hunting for new visual inspirations, for endless varieties of weather conditions, surface textures, or sceneries that he will eventually merge into one cohesive image.

As opposed to the typical rendering, numerically mapping patterns, material qualities, and light effects onto the surface of an abstract construction composed of points, lines, and surfaces, Schaerer’s collages achieve a seamless textural and material reality based on the compilation of individual photographs. Like a plastic surgeon, the architect eliminates the scars caused by the collapse of fragments, creating a visual appearance that barely allows us to determine if we are looking at representations of built works or purely imaginative creations. With the rise of photography, we began to accept pictures as true representations of reality without much hesitation or doubt about their validity. In his *Bildbauten* series, Schaerer is cunningly taking advantage of this condition. Negotiating the fields of architecture, landscape, and photography, he operates without the typical limitations of physical reality. As the architect of his imaginary buildings, he has the ability to overcome the laws of gravity, structural necessities, and very basic functional needs of architecture. By precisely positioning architectural indicators of scale, such as openings or textures covering his designs, however, Schaerer suggests the reality of these constructs, blurring the boundaries between authenticity and manipulation.

This volume is the first comprehensive presentation of Philipp Schaerer’s work. Nathalie Herschdorfer, curator at the Musée de l’Elysée at Lausanne, contextualizes the architect’s oeuvre in the history of photography and contemporary visual practice. Martino Stierli, an architectural historian engaged in the National Centre of Competence in Research’s project on Iconic Criticism (*eikones*) at the University of Basel, sheds light on Schaerer’s practice with a special focus on the interrelation between architecture and visual representation. Philip Ursprung, professor of art history at the University of Zurich and initiator of a master’s degree program in the history of art and photography, has kindly contributed a foreword. Philipp

Schaerer's *Bildbauten*, assembled here in 24 plates, speaks a powerful visual language that transcends the barriers of any written text.

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