

DW artscape

Portrait of a Building

*Jenny Okun
Reinterprets
Architecture in
Two Dimensions*

CALIFORNIA IS THE most rewarding place for photographing architecture because the light and shadow are so pronounced, says former art teacher Jenny Okun. Equipped with her pencil and sketchpad, her Hasselblad, her unflappable determination and her sculptor's sense of positive

and negative space, she has set about singlehandedly to capture the essence of some of the great architecture of the West.

Overlapping the various planes, tangents, textures and shapes of various buildings on rolls of 2¼-inch color film, Okun deliberately runs the exposures atop each other. Though this is a process she discovered by accident, she has honed it over the years until the results have become increasingly calculable. In these photo constructions, Okun manages to frame in some of her own photographic perceptions: Arata Isozaki's Museum of Contemporary Art she deems "kite-like," Eric Owen Moss' 708 House is "sturdy, block-like, propped-up," while Frank Gehry's buildings contain "strong, simple shadows and shapes, and he is always moving the axes around."

If photographing some of today's most noteworthy—and often egocentric—architects' work in a reinterpetive way seems ambitious for a relatively young, relatively unknown photographer, it is. In fact, one prominent Los Angeles architect told Okun: "The creative process has already occurred. Why are you trying to reinvent it?" Her layered, built montages are, she admits, just her way of looking at the buildings. Yet Okun remains undaunted, for her fascination with capturing the essence of architecture in two-dimensional art has served her well. "My photos make me think very hard about the architecture—what it means, how a person will move through the space, and what is it that is pleasurable and not just functional in a building," she explains. After all, she notes matter-of-factly, "My photography is more about the spirit of the buildings than it is about the buildings themselves."

—Marie Wingeier Payzant

Jenny Okun has exhibited her photography in England, Germany, France, and the United States. She is represented by Jan Turner Gallery in Los Angeles.

Jenny Okun's photo montages are comprised of shapes drawn from buildings by eminent architects.

Right: The 708 House in Santa Monica, by Eric Owen Moss. *Far right:* The 2,4,6,8 House in Venice, by Morphosis. *Below:* The San Juan Capistrano Regional Library, by Michael Graves.

