

JEWGENI ROPPEL · ELPHOS

What is the effect of a building like Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie when the music is out of tune, the festive lights have gone out and the rooms are deserted? In the state of emergency of the pandemic, photographer Jewgeni Roppel has tracked down the genius loci of the concert hall. Abstract images emerge whose lighting design stands out from the physical architecture of Herzog & de Meuron. Going even beyond the atmosphere - as a symbiosis of construction, memory, perception and interpretation - a psychedelic, active spirit is conveyed here, which detaches itself from the music-soaked interior and becomes visible as an echo of the music played and felt in the form of light phenomena in the photographic medium. Coloured mists, prismatic refractions, reflections and transparencies are caused by the local use of colour filters, mirrors and crystals in interaction with the characteristic features of the architecture. In upward, downward and oblique views, the organic and crystalline forms and elements, the smooth and rough surfaces of glass, concrete and plaster shine out as abstract compositions with vibrating, wave-like structures. Light, connoted as an immaterial material, forms the link here between the factual building, the recording and designing photography and the perceiving and creating spirit.

The cosmos of Roppel's works thus touches on cultural phenomena of early modernity. In the course of scientific and technological developments of the 19th century such as telegraphy and the X-ray apparatus, people in the spheres of occultism and futurism wanted to believe in the visualisation and materialisation of the invisible, of waves, thoughts and spirits in, among other things, photography. The Futurist painter František Kupka, in turn, described the artist's mind as an "extremely sensitive film that can also sense (see) those unknown worlds whose rhythms seem incomprehensible to us". The abstract photographs of the first half of the 20th century are different from the light phenomena of the spirit photographs, which supposedly reproduce the colourful, luminous forms and structures floating in space during mediumistic seances. According to the spiritualists and theosophists, light connects the earthly world with the world of spirits, like the "apparent magical transport that takes place in every photographic process" (Andreas Fischer). Abstract photographs such as those by Alvin Langdon Coburn and the Bauhaus artists, on the other hand, are explicit experiments with light, mirrors and crystals that should correspond to a photography of essence - a photography as light design (László Moholy-Nagy).

About Roppel's photographs and his way of working one could ask here if an artist in the year 2021 with experimental photographic means is holding an actual spiritualistic session in a high-tech building or staging a production? That this does not have to be determined. In any case, more than just atmospheric images have been created. Jewgeni Roppel, who, as he says, is influenced by the vernacular spiritualism of his Russian family, allows the genius loci to become visible in his light-shaped photography as a spirit that makes the sound of the concert hall, which is frozen in the architecture, vibrate again.

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