

Los Angeles Times

Pedro E. Guerrero: Frank Lloyd Wright's photographer, in focus

March 29, 2012



Pedro E. Guerrero left Arizona in the 1930s to escape bigotry and to become an artist in Los Angeles. But years later, upon seeing photography of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, he headed back to Arizona. His destination: Taliesin West, Wright's school near Scottsdale, where he sought to meet the master. He did more than meet Wright. He began a relationship that would last until Wright's death in 1959.

With no formal training, Guerrero went on to serve as Wright's primary photographer, documenting not only the architecture but also the architect. That body of work forms the backbone of "Pedro E. Guerrero: Photographs of Modern Life," billed as the first in-depth retrospective for a man who also captured the designs of Alexander Calder, Marcel Breuer and Philip Johnson.

Emily Bills, director of the Julius Shulman Institute at Woodbury University and co-curator of the exhibit, said the goal was to show how Guerrero, right, built a career in parallel to photographers such as Shulman but with less fame.

"He was similarly prolific, influencing how midcentury architecture was represented and understood," Bills said.

We asked the curator to elaborate on Guerrero's significance and talk about some of her favorite photos in the show.

Question: What was your goal in curating the show? What points were you hoping to convey?

Answer: Guerrero was Frank Lloyd Wright's main photographer for many years and is thus well known to those who orbit in Wright circles. The exhibition strives in part to introduce Guerrero's work to a broader public (including architects) but to also show the breadth of his subject matter to those who only associate him with Wright. Guerrero lived in Connecticut for most of his professional life and worked for many lifestyle and architecture journals photographing key contributions to modern architecture in the United States. He photographed the work of the Harvard Five, which included Marcel Breuer and Philip Johnson, as well as those known in a more regional context, such as Joseph Salerno.

Do you have a favorite shot in the show?

In one of my favorite photographs in the exhibition, Guerrero dramatizes the dynamic folds and twists in the roofline of Salerno's Rowayton Church, while simultaneously depicting its everyday function as a neighborhood place of worship by capturing the casual arrival of the congregation. The photograph reflects his ability to masterfully interpret a building's innovations, much like his contemporaries Julius Shulman and Ezra Stoller, while also allowing people to move in a space without their bodies becoming a controlled part of the environment, something rarely seen in work by his contemporaries.



United Church of Rowayton, Rowayton, Conn. Designed in 1962 by architect Joseph P. Salerno, photographed in 1962. Credit: Pedro E. Guerrero

Another favorite photograph is the Diamond service station by Thomas Little in Macon, Ga. Now unfortunately destroyed, the station is a reminder of the many forms modern architecture took in the United States and how some of our less known examples -- tucked away in small towns or manifested in

humble typologies -- may be some of our most fantastic.



Diamond Service Station, Macon, Ga., designed circa 1960 by architect Thomas Little and photographed in 1961. Credit: Pedro E. Guerrero

The exhibit runs April 5 to 25 at [Woodbury University Hollywood Gallery](#), 6518 Hollywood Blvd., L.A. The artist, in his 90s, is scheduled to talk at 6:30 p.m. April 5 next door at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, 6522 Hollywood Blvd.; (323) 957-1777.