

Art of the Airport Tower

Carolyn Russo

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Devotees of art photography and aviation history alike will savor this unusual and well-researched book.

A striking photo of Edinburgh Airport's iconic traffic control tower, with its sweeping lines and skin of diamond-shaped tiles, marks the grand entrance of Carolyn J. Russo's *Art of the Airport Tower*. The book is published in conjunction with a Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (NASM) exhibition opening this November of Russo's photographs of over eighty examples from around the world. The project took nine years, involving a great deal of globe-trotting and permissions from security-conscious airport managers, not normally asked to provide access to civilians scurrying around their control centers and tarmacs.

Russo leads off with images of contemporary towers and notes in her preface that she intended to make a portrait of each structure; sometimes leaning towards abstractions of shape and the interplay of lights, shadows, and textures; and other times capturing the anthropomorphism or cultural symbolism of each subject. There is the dynamism of Abu Dhabi's graceful tower, like "a flowing robe rising up from the desert," and the elegance of London Heathrow Airport's tower capped with "an English gentleman's black top hat." The artistic photographs are shot from bold vantage points and angles, and against dramatic backgrounds of cloud and sky. Russo imbues each with a grandeur appropriate to their roles as guardians of public safety and choreographers of the daily airborne movements of some six hundred thousand people.

Russo takes a more documentary approach in the second part of the book, where she records images of historic airport towers no longer in active use. As with the preceding photographs, each tower is simply identified by its airport code, name, and geographic location, so that the visual presentation is fittingly clean and uncluttered. However, snappy, informative descriptions of the historical, architectural, and technological significance of each tower, written by Caroline Ausel and Ramsey Gorchev, are easily found at the rear. Graphic artist Mina Sude overlays the whole package with a sleek and modern book design. Devotees of art photography and aviation history alike will savor this unusual and well-researched look at these important airport sentinels.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (Winter 2016)

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