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Encounters between built objects and critical judgment are rare today. It is equally rare to see the work of practitioners who are independent of the media, and to be able to appreciate the achievements of *free thinking*. In a sleek, jaded cultural and editorial scene weary of the ubiquitous presence of the same signature projects throughout the world, *Le Visiteur* aims to promote exemplary projects that take our customs into account and shape our cities. To do justice to those projects is to encourage an effort of thought that nothing fosters today, with the exception of the notion of professional action conceived as a statement of faith.

In the world to which this journal is opening up once again, after a five-year interruption, general interest in architecture has been steadily declining under the combined effects of a cult of the image, hysteria over regulations, and the administrative partitioning of responsibilities in the operations of construction and regional land planning. And yet there are still some architects who think and act in favor of an architecture that is more committed to *convincing* than to seducing.

On the occasion of its rebirth, *Le Visiteur* wishes to provide an arena for critical discourse and for true debate, where the issue, so often skirted, of architectural success can be discussed. This journal will attempt to create an alliance between a taste for literature and the culture of the project.

Founded by the French Society of Architects in 1995 at the initiative of Sébastien Marot, *Le Visiteur* fostered a critical perspective on architecture, landscape, infrastructures and city planning. We will keep this stance, by focusing on the architectural field that has been challenged by practices that call for reflection and interrogation. Why should the science of plan and section, the measurement of expanse and movement, be neglected in favor of the fashioning of the object? Couldn't we rather envisage a work on form that immediately raises the question of space instead of jettisoning it? What has the status of the envelope become in the

essential relation between the interior and the exterior, whereby architecture is no longer a mere object that is gazed at, but becomes itself a *gazing device*? Why should the scale quality of buildings be nearly forgotten when it is the most important of them all? Today, the desire for "self-expression" prevails over the creation of place.

On today's architectural scene, there is no *difference*, but only *variety*, and it would be a mistake to conclude otherwise. A variety of conceptual and formal moves designed to entertain citizens reduced to the status of spectators through repeated stagings, a falsely transgressive variety that in fact betrays a production subservient to the media that broadcast its image, almost contemptuous of the values of the discipline.

Invention, this tour de force that succeeds in marshalling our ability to forget while paying tribute to the past, the wager that what is singular and what is obvious can be wedded, has been replaced by the *whim*. The freedom still available to the project is often wasted in useless gestures.

Paradoxically, what is missing is audacity, the genuine audacity that uses the program and the knowledge of construction to free architectural design from reflexes and strictly deterministic lines of reasoning, so as to lead it towards the pleasures of space: the pleasure of seeing, of setting out to explore, and of pausing to appreciate.

An architectural work may occasionally retain our attention, amuse us, or even entice us. Some buildings go further: they move us. The monastery of the Santísima Trinidad de Las Condes is one of the edifices whose history we wish to share with our readers. This Benedictine church, nestling on a mountain slope, in the arid heights of the Chilean sky, has stood for fifty years opposite the Andes Cordillera. Andres Tellez devotes a monograph to it, to which we have appended the observations of Fernando Perez.¹ It relates the history of the monastery, with a particular focus on the

1. These passages by Fernando Perez accompany some illustrations, but they have not been translated. We refer the reader to the main (French) section of the journal.

space of the church. Hopefully, this article will become a major source of information on this masterpiece, which, strangely enough, is little known outside of Chile.

Luigi Manzzone's contribution deals with the crisis of contemporary criticism, which he explains by numerous factors, including the history of the doctrines of the second half of the twentieth century, the reckless use of philosophical notions unsuitable for shoring up the theoretical weaknesses of the discipline, the waning of the political sphere and the uncontrolled mutations of the contemporary city.

Unlike the press snapshot, which yields only visual information, photographic prints can bear witness to an exploration of the visible realm. We all think we are familiar with Ronchamp, yet the eye of Nathalie Savy enters the hollows and the folds of the building to reveal unsuspected aspects of it. Benoît Peaucelle undertakes a meticulous analysis of these photographs, comparing them with previous photographic shots, to highlight the fundamental differences in the art of looking at and interpreting the place.

Olivier Gahinet explains the common theme linking Le Corbusier's work from the church in Ronchamp to the one in Firminy, and turns the most enigmatic edifice into an open book on the art of the project. Immediately, form departs from its silence and allows itself to be *understood*, speaking to us of program, light and path. Form is no longer just the representation of an idea. It also displays a method.

The books of the series "Architecture Universelle", which feature a medley of plans, images and texts, represent the multiple aspects of the career of their founder Henri Stierlin, a historian specialized in comparative studies, as well as a photographer and editor. In an interview with Gérard Monnier, he traces the history of this unequalled series, and reflects on the signification of the photographic process and its gestures.

The work of Jean Prouvé demands, more than any other, perhaps, the investigation of the historian, for it does not consist so much in constructed works as in multiple dispersed devices, most of which are representations. Raphaël Labrunye's article gives us

the means to apprehend not only the ambition of this lonely builder aspiring to prompt industry to invent procedures and to combine the economies of project and construction, but also the terrible stumbling blocks he met all along the way.

There is in the architecture of Sanaa a freshness that is due not only to its physical whiteness, but also to the numerous perspectives on matter and space that the works of Kazuyo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa have endeavored to open up. Emmanuel Doutriaux presents a view on the singularity of the Louvre project in Lens, through the reinvention of the relationship to construction, program, landscape and art works.