Architecture with and without Le Corbusier documents two architectural masterpieces, both from the hands of the architect José Oubrerie: the parish church of Saint-Pierre and the Miller House. The church, one of the last projects of Le Corbusier, was born on the drafting board of the Studio Rue de Savoie and took nearly 50 years to be completed. José Oubrerie, his assistant from 1959 until 1965, developed the project from its inception and worked throughout his life to complete and build this canonical work, adapting it to current needs and standards while respecting the integrity of the original idea. The Miller House, Oubrerie’s own late masterpiece designed in the 90’s, has already become a landmark in Lexington, where the architect devoted his mature years as a teacher and Dean at the University of Kentucky. It is securely on its way to achieve a place of its own within the history of 20th Century American Architecture.

The thorough documentation of the two buildings with an extensive collection of previously unpublished drawings, sketches and photographs builds a precise and vivid testimony of Oubrerie’s unique architectural trajectory with Le Corbusier’s formidable legacy as a formative and creative influence. The two seminal works, presented side by side with texts from George Ranalli and Kenneth Frampton yield insight into the evolution and current resonance of these two masterworks that span four decades and two distinguished careers. This publication was prepared to accompany an exhibit on José Oubrerie’s held at the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture in New York City, from February 16th to May 14th 2010.
ARCHITECTURE WITH AND WITHOUT LE CORBUSIER

JOSÉ OUBRERIE ARCHITECTE

THIS BOOK IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF ELISE JAFFE + JEFFREY BROWN
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Recently, after introducing Jose Oubrerie’s lecture at the school, I sat in the darkness of the auditorium watching the images come across the screen. The first pair shocked me: a study model of the Firminy Church and a photo of Le Corbusier in his studio with a very young Oubrerie at his side. At that moment I was struck by the enormity of what I was witnessing. Jose Oubrerie had worked with Le Corbusier! One of the greatest architects of the twentieth century. Le Corbusier produced a powerful body of work and Firminy was one of a remarkable series of religious buildings that had produced a singular, mystical, emotionally striking space.

Oubrerie was one of the last of the apprentices to work for Le Corbusier and his responsibility was to develop the sketch design that Le Corbusier had dashed off for Firminy. As in every architect’s office, the role of the assistant is essential to the formation and development of the project. It is not simply a matter of redrawing the design more definitively but rather an elaboration of the implications of the original sketch. Since Le Corbusier spent much of the day painting, Oubrerie and the other assistants were left to interpret and redefine the design by infusing it with their own ideas. At the end of each day Le Corbusier came back to the studio to review the work and decide what to keep and what to jettison as irrelevant.

The Miller-House, built while Oubrerie was Dean of the School of Architecture in Lexington, Kentucky, is more clearly the work of Oubrerie after he emerged from the Le Corbusier studio. Although traces of other Corbusier houses can certainly be seen in this building, Oubrerie has taken the house into another realm altogether. The Miller-House grows from questions of form and space that developed after Le Corbusier’s time and these are evident in the development of the design. Intricate ideas about the program and the form of the house interweave throughout. Although the house at first appears to be a platonic solid, it is formed out of a collection of fragments brilliantly assembled into a ‘tour de force’ of space, form, structure, texture, and surface. The interior passages from level to level are beautifully orchestrated around the central vertical space across which rooms can be seen and through which the landscape expands beyond. The design is deeply considered down to the details - including built-in furniture and color panels - and the resolution is impeccable, delivering an exceptionally executed work both outside and in.

The Firminy Church and the Miller-House bear testimony to the imprint of Le Corbusier’s work on the younger architect’s imagination. Far from the disconnected and incoherent pastiche of so much current form, work that pretends divorce from the ever-inmanent traditions of architecture, Oubrerie has taken the history he inherited through Le Corbusier and subtly and richly transformed it into his own formal lexicon of space, program and design. The result is astonishing and deep in its elaboration of the eloquence of a language that bears the connection from ages past to the current moment. Jose Oubrerie has achieved one of the most difficult qualities in architecture: through rootedness he has achieved timeless.

George Ranalli, Architect
Dean
Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture
City College of New York
January 2010

George Ranalli has been Dean of the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture at City College since 1999. He was born in New York City. He received his Bachelor of Architecture from Pratt Institute in 1972 and Master of Architecture from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University in 1974. From 1976 to 1999 he was Professor of Architecture at Yale University and in 1988-1989 he was the William Henry Bishop Chair Professor in Architectural Design. Mr. Ranalli recently completed his fourth monograph; Sertoga, devoted to his Sertoga Avenue Community Center for the New York City Housing Authority. That project has been widely praised in the New York Times, notably in a May 13, 2009 article by Ada Louise Housely in the Wall Street Journal and in December 2009 Paul Goldberger in New Yorker Magazine selected it as one of the Ten Most Positive Architectural Events in 2009. His architectural and design work has been published internationally in numerous journals including Domus, A+U, Progressive Architecture, L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, Architectural Digest, domenica, Tutt’Art, Architettura, and Lotus. His work has been exhibited and collected at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Sperone-Westwater Gallery, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Centre Pompidou in France, Deutsches Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt, the XVII Triennale Di Milano in Italy, the Denver Art Museum, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and a one man exhibit at Artists Space Gallery in New York. He designed the renovation of the Frank Lloyd Wright Designs for an American Landscape, 1922-1932 for the Whitney Museum of Art in 1997 and designed the installation for the exhibition of work of Carlo Scarpa, in 1999 at the Canadian Centre for Architecture Montreal Canada.

The Goethe Institute of New York has been a leader in the promotion and understanding of German culture and ideas. In 2007 they established a new, international, and interdisciplinary approach to teaching architecture and design. The work at the Goethe Institute of New York is a reflection of a new approach to education in architecture and design that is based on the idea of cross-disciplinary collaboration and interactivity. The Institute is committed to the idea of a new kind of education in architecture and design that is based on the idea of cross-disciplinary collaboration and interactivity. The Institute is committed to the idea of a new kind of education that is based on the idea of cross-disciplinary collaboration and interactivity.
in the western corner of the house. This circulation is
linked at the first floor to a free-standing straight flight that
juts out into the surrounding greensward. A second stair
provides an equally serviceable access from the master
suite to the exterior.

Looking up towards the first and second floor passerselles
which service, in pin-wheel fashion, the upper and lower
levels of the double-height bedrooms, one is reminded of
Pierre Chareau’s masterly Maison de Verre of 1932, not
only because of the metal mesh to the steel balustrading
and the vertical character of the interstitial space but also
because of the way in which each successive component
is articulated within the larger envelope of the house. The
cabinetwork also reminds one of Chareau in that pre-
cisely detailed wooden fittings were installed in the house
as the construction proceeded. The peculiarly rich, tailor-
made approach that stemmed from this unusual working
method resulted in a level of articulation that gave it the
aura of being a “house/machine.” At the same time this
machinist aura is offset by high-quality woodwork in birch
and beech and by colored wall planes (predominantly red,
white, blue, and green) that cause the internal volume of
the house to vibrate. This contrapuntal play is enlivened
throughout by horizontal slots, square picture windows
and plate glass corner fenestration; a variation in window
shapes and sizes has been partially determined by the
desire to provide picturesque landscape views from vari-
ous parts of the house. This pin-wheeling play of openings
around the house remind one of the syncopated mass-
form of the Rietveld-Schroeder House from 1923.

Although the central fireplace with its free-standing tubu-
lar flue and the private terrace of the master bedroom
testify to the presence of domesticity, there is nonethe-
less a certain feeling of monumentality that pervades the
structure as a whole. While this is surely in no small mea-
sure due to the highly rhetorical exterior, it also derives
from the overall size and the treatment of the bedrooms
as though they are small, independent pavilions clustered
around a top-lit atrium. This expansive interpretation of
the Palladian tradition gives the house the aura of a public
building. In other circumstances one might imagine it serv-
ing as the embassy of a small nation state. It is a plastic and
conceptual tour de force; a canonical work which owes
its density and complexity to a concentration of archi-
tectural tropes which might ideally be distributed over a
much larger work.

KENNETH FRAWPTON was born in the United Kingdom in 1930 and
trained as an architect at the Architectural Association School of Architec-
ture, London. After practicing for a number of years in the United Kingdom
and in Israel, he served as the editor of the British magazine Architectural
Design. He has taught at number of leading institutions including the Royal
College of Art, the ETH Zurich, EPFL Lausanne, the Accademia di Architet-
tura in Mendrisio, and the Berlage Institute in The Netherlands. He is cur-
rently the Ware Professor of Architecture at the GSAPP Columbia Univer-
sity, New York. He is the author of Modern Architecture and the Critical
(1995), Le Corbusier (2001), Labour, Work & Architecture (2005), and an
All of the effects of the Firminy building that emanate from the original concept seem to move it toward the political/conceptual discourse of the Seattle Library. In addition to those we have mentioned, consider the four corners of the church. All the drawings from 1961-63 and 1970-74 demonstrate Le Corbusier’s conceptual intention for the shell to join to the base smoothly as a monolith. While the models and drawings show the solid concrete of the base cut away at the corners to become glass, the line of the glass corner is recessed, leaving the skirt of the shell to blouse over them. In the actual building, however, whether by Oubrerie’s design or technical necessity, the glass corners of the base are recessed, leaving the skirt of the shell to blouse over them. While the dimension of the cantilever is minimal, the effect is unmistakable. It is impossible for the viewer to separate the library, the…

Notes:

Neither does the posthumous completion of unfinished works of art belong to architecture exclusively. After extensive study of Edith Wharton’s notes and drafts, Marian Wainwright completed her unfinished last novel, The Buccaneers, a half-century after the author’s death. Literary critics consider the finished novel flawed, though whether this is the fault of Wharton or Wainwright continues to be debated. Mozart’s Requiem, on the other hand, is regarded as one of the composer’s most enduring masterpieces. Yet, at the time of his death, the Requiem, though well-outlined, remained barely half-completed. His widow, who desperately needed the balance of the commission fee, begged a series of composers to finish the work. Eventually, a young friend of Mozart, Susanne, did so with contributions from others.

Pilotis and free-facades complete the five.


Also: Jarrard, “http://www.dakota.edu/haasments/political_churches/white.html” and “the man as the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process, reluctant to move away from the screen and back into the ‘real’ world. I realized that such an addiction was too obsessively attached to the process. After the 1961-63 but Kelly has continued to revisit the theme occasionally ever since the present day. Red Yellow Blue II is a coincidence. Still, though there is nothing to it, it is fun for the imagination to null over some circumstances that surround the coincidence: the painting is one of a number of works by the artist treating the same three colors in similar formal renditions; both horizontal and vertical. Most late from 1961-63 but Kelly has continued to revisit the theme occasionally. Ever since the present day. Red Yellow Blue II (also dates from 1963). The 1963, the year of Le Corbusier’s death, and finally Oubrerie began his studies at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris the year after Kelly completed his own at the same school. “Architecture before Geometry, or the Primacy of Imagination” Assemblage 29, pp. 94-105, August 1999, MIT press.

Oubrerie’s caution that the computer’s seductiveness might lessen the reponsiveness of the architect is in contrast to that issued by the architect Joyce Carol Oates. She warns that the computer’s power to cut and paste threatens to transform the novelist from a focused story teller into a compulsive editor who cannot stop adding to and changing the story. “What makes this dichotomy interesting is that it is not a result of the ethos of the different disciplines, but at least in part technical: a matter of a computer’s relation to its size and memory. Text files are small and too easy for a computer to manipulate; three-dimensional digital models of buildings are very complex, large files which are very difficult to edit piecemeal.”

Jeffrey Kipnis is a professor of architectural design and theory at the Knowlton School of Architecture, Ohio State University. His writing on art and architecture has appeared in many different publications, including Log, Munch’s Harvard Design Magazine, Quaderns, 2G, El Croquis, Art and Architecture, and The Glass House, amongst others. His award winning film, A Constructive Madness, looks at Frank Gehry’s work on the unbuilt but seminal Peter Lewis house project. His most recent study of Stephen Holl’s Block Addition to the Nelson Atkins Museum, is featured in his new book, Stone and Feather.
HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS 1960-1965
ATELIER LE CORBUSIER
Meeting at the Atelier: José Oubrerie, Eugène Claudius-Petit, Le Corbusier, RP Cocagnac, father Tardy, October 30th 1961.

Study model, November 1961.

Study model geometry of the shell, November 1961.

First project, site model, October 1962.
Model Atelier Oubrerie architecte, 1970-79 (modified several times).
The transition from the circle of the top to the square of the base of the shell is achieved by the means of a simple geometry of triangular shaped planes and portions of cones, all cut by a tilted plane, the “cork” of the shell.

The light-cannons surge like extruded pieces from the “cork” surface, their geometry recalls the generating figures of the shell.

Next spread: The “cork” closing the shell shaft with two light canons, the “bell” tower and the cross.
Crossed visuals in the ground floor.
The water runs in the peripheral gutter and is led to a canal surrounding the “base” by means of a vertical shaft.
The west light canon, right over the entrance to the church.
As the entrance door slowly opens up, the box-like hall and the mezzanine level compress the space, reinforcing the visual connection with the altar placed along the same axis.
Above and Next Spread: Once inside, the play of light helps to establish a spatial hierarchy.
Left: the south light canons square and circle.

The western light canon illuminates the altar at sunset.
Details of the main altar:

Seat of the assembly president. Place of the red candle representing the presence of Jesus.
The church during its official opening ceremony, 24th-25th November 2006 with illumination by Daniel Charpentier.
Above, west façade. Right, south façade.
2

MILLER HOUSE
Model for CCNY Exhibition - 2010.
Concrete and Steel skeleton.
Section West-East on west wall, sons’ house above kitchen, catwalks and center space, main stair.
West wall facade details.
South Porch details (text page 255).
Left: "Romeo and Giulietta" daughter’s balcony.
North facade main stair and elevator canopy above entrance.
Center space views from catwalk second floor.
Kitchenette and access to portico terrace.

Left: Upper living room and center space view from third floor catwalk.

Upper living room third floor.
Horizontal window on mezzanine level.

Daughter's interior stair.
THE EXHIBITION

ARCHITECTURE with and without LE CORBUSIER
An exhibition of two works by JOSE OUBRERIE
Eglise Saint-Pierre de Firminy-Vert
Conseil de Ville de Firminy Valence (1960-66), Jose Oubrerie, Landscape and Spatial Environments
39/5/11
Miller House, Lexington, KY
Maison Oubrerie (1956-1960)

Kenneth Frampton, Jose Oubrerie and George Ranalli.