

Plataforma Arquitectura

The Almine Rech gallery in New York will present a sample of tapestries made by Le Corbusier never seen before

By Monica Arellano, July 29, 2022



Courtesy of Almine Rech Gallery

Over sixty years, Le Corbusier used a wide variety of media to explore the themes and forms of his art, from drawing to urban planning, painting, architecture and sculpture. He first discovered tapestry in 1936, in response to a request from Marie Cuttoli, who at the time was commissioning works of art woven in a factory in Aubusson from modern painters. However, it was twelve years later that he expressed his interest in producing woven works of art based on his drawings and arrived in this city in central France, where a true tapestry renaissance had begun at the initiative of Jean Lurçat and Jean Picart LeDoux.

Though facet of Le Corbusier is little known, he made around 30 tapestries which speak of his creative processes and his concerns outside of architecture. Because of this, the Almine Rech Gallery in New York will present an exhibition from September 14 to October 22, 2022, where historical tapestries from throughout Le Corbusier's career will be compiled. Many of the works –which date from 1936– are going to be presented to the public for the first time, being extracted directly from the Le Corbusier Foundation or from private and public collections (such as MoMA).

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"His interest in this art responds to the challenge posed to architects by Fernand Léger, whom he blamed for "radically imposing" his "smooth" and "new" surfaces. Le Corbusier came to believe that "due to its texture, its material, due to the reality of its production", the tapestry "brings its own warmth to an interior", as he wrote in 1962 to Pierre Baudouin, a young professor at the Aubusson art school. Beginning in 1948, Baudouin allowed Le Corbusier to transpose some of his purist compositions of the 1920s and echo the "poetic reaction" assemblages of objects that had followed. This dialogue with the faithful "wool artist" Balduino continued until the architect's death in 1965. The themes of his caricatures expanded gradually, for example, with the introduction of female figures that populated his drawings and paintings. For Le Corbusier, the works of art produced at Aubusson were not merely intended to decorate elite residences. Defining them with the neologism Muralnomad, surely inspired by his travels through North Africa, he perceived them as mobile components of modern homes, which can be "removed from the wall, rolled up, put under the arm whenever you want and hung elsewhere."

-Almine Rech.

Revealingly, Le Corbusier's work on the sketches intended for Baldwin materializes the unity of his artistic thought. In contrast to his earlier attitude during the purist period, when his paintings had determined the plans of his houses, he stated in a letter to the Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer that he had "found in the tapestry an opening capable of receiving part of [his] mural work. where [his] vocation as a painter finds its architectural sustenance in full consciousness."

"The variety of artistic techniques used by Le Corbusier to design the sketches for some twenty-six tapestries Baldwin produced can be seen in the works of art collected by the gallery, from colored pencil to pastel, oil and papier collé. In this way, the exhibition reveals all the resources of an architect who had told the director of the Guggenheim Museum, James Johnson Sweeney, in 1957: "I am a painter, very seriously." Exploring all the processes used on paper, the exhibition expresses the vividness of his imagination by revealing the originality and strength of his woven artwork within the larger context of the post-war tapestry."

- Jean-Louis Cohen, architectural historian and Le Corbusier's curator: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes at MoMA (2013).