ALMINE RECH

Günther Förg
Le moderne

Oct 15 — Dec 14, 2024 | Fondation Le Corbusier - Maison La Roche

Almine Rech Paris and Fondation Le Corbusier are pleased to present Le moderne, Günther Förg's solo exhibition at Maison La Roche in Paris, on view from October 15 to December 14, 2024.

Günther Förg always expressed a complicated and profound relationship to architecture through his work, exploring the connections between abstraction, space, and architecture.

He drew on the formal vocabulary of modernism, both in painting and architecture. His abstract, often monochromatic works were sometimes structured by geometrical lines and blocks of color recalling the principles of order and simplicity associated with architectural movements such as Bauhaus or International Style.

As such, there could be no better setting to show his work than Maison La Roche, designed and built in the early 1920s by Le Corbusier. The house is named after its patron and owner, Raoul La Roche, a banker and collector of cubist and modern art. His collection, most of which was selected by Le Corbusier and the painter Amédée Ozenfant, included paintings by artists such as Juan Gris, Picasso, and Fernand Léger.

The building's architecture is divided into two parts: a gallery for La Roche's painting collection and his private living area. The attached Maison Jeanneret was built for Le Corbusier's brother and his family. Beginning in the 1970s, Maison La Roche and Maison Jeanneret were restored and are now listed as historical monuments on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

The original colors of the interior walls, which were rediscovered during restoration in 2008 and 2009, are an early attempt at the "architectural polychromy", developed by Le Corbusier throughout his work. He did not see color simply as a decorative element, but as an essential architectural component that could transform spaces, influence perception, and structure the environment. He often included wall paintings in his buildings as part of this concept of architectural polychromy.

When he was a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich in the late 1970s, Günther Förg began to make monochromatic wall paintings in various colors according to the places where they appeared. From the beginning, he connected his artistic practice to an environment, making architecture one of the essential elements of his work in order to rethink the context of the exhibition space and that of twentieth-century art in general.

In his studio, Förg liked to surround himself with models that he used to design his future commissions for architectural spaces. A doll house builder constructed these for him. The exhibition features two examples of these miniatures of two unrealized projects. The models shown here, one from 1998 and the other from 2010, display proposed wall paintings for exhibition spaces, including one for the exhibition Permanent Trouble at the Kopp Collection.

The connection between Günther Förg's paintings and Le Corbusier's architectural polychromy lies most of all in their shared approach to color, their use of monochrome, and their way of using color to structure the space and interact with the architecture.

Although he was not a direct disciple of Le Corbusier, Förg referenced him directly in some of his work. For instance, in the 1980s, he began photographing postwar modernist architecture, with examples of the influence of Bauhaus in Israel or that of fascism in Italy. He photographed several iconic buildings by Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, such as the Cité Radieuse in Marseille, of which there is an example in the exhibition, and the Chapelle Notre-Dame-du-Haut in Ronchamp. However, unlike architectural photographs that capture smooth, idealized images, Förg was interested in raw materiality, in deterioration and traces left by time. His photos highlight details like the texture of the concrete, the corrosion of the materials, and the patina of the buildings, emphasizing a certain fragility and humanity in Le Corbusier's work. These framed large-scale photographs are placed against the wall on the floor, as if in the artist's studio, in order to accentuate their sculptural aspect.

Designed with the Estate of Günther Förg, this exhibition also displays paintings from the last part of the artist's life, between 1994 and 2006. In the 2000s, Günther Förg's painting changed, turning away from minimalism for a more expressionist, gestural style with a graph-like aspect recalling the paintings of Cy Twombly. All these works are painted in acrylic, a medium that imposes a certain energy, because it dries quickly, requiring rapid execution and offering little margin for error.
These medium-sized paintings exhibited on the blue or green walls of the villa use a palette of colors including brown, green, and black and refer to great modernist figures such as Edvard Munch, Piet Mondrian, Paul Klee, and Barnett Newman, who constitute the artist's pantheon.

This is the first time that Günther Förg's work has been shown in a domestic space.[1] The connection between Günther Förg's painting and Le Corbusier's architectural polychromy is based on a shared understanding of color as a structural element of space. For Le Corbusier, color, like light, was a functional and aesthetic tool to organize architectural spaces, while Förg continued this exploration in the field of abstract art, questioning it from a critical perspective. Although Förg adopted the formal principles of modernism, he deconstructed the ideals of perfection, order, and purity through his painting.

— Nicolas Trembley, curator & art critic

In collaboration with Le Corbusier Foundation.

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1. Except for the group exhibition '*Chambres d'amis*' in 1986, in which the artists were invited by curator Jan Hoet to show their work outside the museum in private homes in Ghent, Belgium.