2003

Drawing-over: une vie decanté Le Corbusier & Louis Soutter

Daniel Naegele
Iowa State University, naegele@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_pubs
Part of the Architectural History and Criticism Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/arch_pubs/81. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.
Louis Soutter, Le Corbusier’s cousin, was an accomplished violinist who, at the end of his life, was committed to a Swiss asylum. Soutter loved to draw. His lewd and elongated human figures flow together as if fluid, decoratively extending from top to bottom and edge to edge of whatever surface Soutter covered. When Le Corbusier gave Soutter copies of his renowned books, Soutter promptly drew over the book’s illustrations. His drawings did not obliterate the visual text, but commented on it. An intriguing dialectic resulted.

In a 1936 Minotaure article, Le Corbusier sympathetically described Soutter as a spontaneous artist. After World War II, Le Corbusier himself practiced ‘drawing over’. The highly ambiguous visual dialogue that results from the ‘spill’ of emotive scribbling across pre-established imagery is unique in the oeuvre of Le Corbusier and is the subject of this article.

**Drawing-over: une vie decanté**

**Le Corbusier & Louis Soutter**

Daniel Naegele, 1995 & 2003

It follows that an absolute can be reached only by an intuition, whereas the rest [of our knowledge] arises out of analysis. We here call intuition the sympathy by which one transports oneself to the interior of an object in order to coincide with its unique and therefore ineffable quality.

-Henri Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*

In 1936, *Minotaure* 9 featured as frontispiece a photograph by Brassaï titled "Troglodyte", a view taken from inside a cave looking out through two elliptical openings [1]. Seemingly innocuous, this photograph is nevertheless beguiling. There is something curious, perhaps even slightly
sinister about it. We, the viewers, are the cave dweller to whom the title refers. Brassaï has placed us inside this ancient dwelling looking out. But perhaps because of its actual size on the printed page, the photograph implies much more than that. As we look at it, it in turn looks back at us. The ellipses are eyes complete with lower lashes, acute 'veining', and heavy lower lids. Yet the concavity of the image denies this reading of the cave as an object opposed to us. The cave surrounds us. Surely we are not looking at eyes; we are inside, looking out through them.

The cave is us: its rounded openings are eye sockets in the mask within which each of us dwell. The cave is our skull, the 'helmet' that we inhabit as a troglodyte inhabits his hollow. As cave becomes skull, Brassaï calls attention to the limitations placed on our perception by our own skeletal frame; and in enlarging the human corpus, he awakens in us an awareness of our own interiority. We are beings separate from, but dwelling inside the physical construct of a body. This body, this corporeal architecture, both filters and frames all that we see as we look out on the world.
Perhaps by mere coincidence (and so much the better if this is so), "Troglodyte" captures the condition described in the opening lines of an article published in this same issue of *Minotaure*. Titled "Louis Sutter, l'inconnu de la soixantaine," the article begins with a quote:

"...La maison minimum, ou "cellule future", doit être entièrement de verre translucide. Plus de fenêtres, ces yeux inutiles. Regarder dehors, pourquoi? Complications et coups à la beauté de l'Uni. Mes dessins n'ont aucune prétention, sauf celle d'être uniques et d'idée imprégnée de douleur." ¹

The lines are from the writings of Louis Soutter, a violinist turned visual artist. After having, in the words of the article's author, "relinquished all the joys of a bourgeois life" to passionately pursue art, Soutter was confined to a mental institution in Ballaigues, Switzerland in 1923 where he was to spend the remainder of his life.² His six drawings accompanying the article are of numerous nude figures melded together in the space of the sketch [2]. The figures are anguished, their bodies flowing and contorted, the space between them webbed with nervous, erratic scratchings.

Soutter’s drawings could be understood as automatic writing, pouring forth directly from inside to outside without the filter of logic or reason to alter their formation. *Minotaure* was an
appropriate place to present such 'private' works. The most prominent of many Surrealist journals, it championed unknowns, madmen, eroticism, confessional material of all sorts, and visual manifestations of the unconscious mind. The author of the article—his first and only article to appear in this or in any other Surrealist journal—was Soutter’s younger cousin, Le Corbusier.

Soutter greatly admired Le Corbusier, communicated with him regularly and often sent him his drawings and paintings.³ In touching letters, Le Corbusier encouraged Soutter, supplied him with reading material that included his own books, and vigorously promoted his art in both Europe and America. On his first trip to the United States in the autumn of 1935, Le Corbusier organized an exhibition of Soutter’s work at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, later shown at the Galerie Vallotton, Lausanne.⁴ On the same trip he managed to sell a few of Soutter’s drawings, one to Henry Russell Hitchcock.⁵

Le Corbusier's friendship with Soutter is important, for it is one of the rare instances in which we find the architect personally devoted to another—and sympathetic to the frail and tormented human condition which Soutter’s work represents. This, coupled with the architecture metaphor of Soutter’s own statement, as well as the spontaneity of his creativity, and his own particular 'pictorial' rapport with Le Corbusier, make Le Corbusier's short article on this unknown artist worth considering. For Soutter clearly is presented as a 'condition,' the condition of the sensitive 'interior' artist as he faces a hostile 'exterior' world. This condition has a certain resonance with Le Corbusier's own, for it is at this time, in the mid-thirties and at the height of the Depression, that Le Corbusier began again, after some twelve years as modern architect, to portray himself as a painter.
Soutter drew anonymous figures, repeating them over and over again. His paintings (most done after 1936) often are of singular, enormous heads with tormented facial expressions [3].

These naive, child-like paintings are not unlike the 'primitive' colonial art so coveted by French avant-garde artists and critics. In their spontaneity and lack of sophistication and calculation, an authentic and sincere emotional outpouring is recorded [4]. Soutter painted in a crude, direct manner, often not with brushes but with his fingers. He brought to the fore the material itself. Like Van Gogh he made manifest the paste-like quality of paint. In his work, paint is not just color, but a malleable material. It records the impression of the hand of the maker. Moving, disturbing, always 'primitive', Soutter’s painting was labeled "l'art brut", (brut meaning coarse and crude, but also ill-bred, rude, and unfashioned) a label English critics would later adhere to Le Corbusier’s postwar architecture of an equally malleable paste, concrete.

By contrast to Soutter’s art, Le Corbusier’s paintings were pre-meditated, calculated and honed. "Je ne peux pas improviser. Je me refuse à improviser immédiatement," Le Corbusier declared categorically. "Je fourre tout en moi-même pendant des mois et puis à un moment donné ça sort." As he stated in 1920, a painting should be "solidly built upon directives imposed by the format of the canvas, co-modulated by the intervention of a unifying agent," and the "exact play of densities and the values of light and shade" should be precisely determined. Habitually, he would plan his paintings in a series of preliminary sketches, employ regulating lines to order the
work, and apply the paint with great accuracy. There were but few exceptions to this approach, one having occurred in 1935 when a plaster cast of a Greek sculpture made for the Carré exhibition of primitive art to be staged in his apartment arrived unpainted [5]. Outraged, Le Corbusier phoned the Louvre for specifics regarding its colors, then painted the cast literally by hand, without the benefit of a brush. "Two palms were pressed on the palette, steeped in colour and applied to the contours of the bust," he later wrote. "A poem in polychrome was the result, sparkling with life, brilliant. The palms, the thumbs, the finger tips had been enough to define the coloured surfaces to perfection; the sculpture had clearly been created for this." One senses his delight and pride in the spontaneous and expressive sensuality of direct and primitive creation.

IV

"Décantation, après la vie, à la fin d'une vie" was Le Corbusier's telling description of Soutter's drawings. He recognized this personal and emotive spilling-out as the antithesis of his own cool precision and rational regulation. The contrast is evident in the very private 'drawing-over' Soutter had done earlier on each page of four of Le Corbusier's books: Une Maison-un palais, Croisade, L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui and La Peinture moderne. Soutter's figures cleverly, lovingly modify the illustrative text of Le Corbusier, humorously setting his benign personality beside the
aggressive calculation of his famous cousin, gently satirizing the architect's precision with flowing, child-like innocence which both indicts and enriches [6].

Soutter understood the picture plane as well as Le Corbusier. His 'drawing-over' delights in re-framing Le Corbusier's illustrations: reversing their orientation, enlarging or diminishing their scale, altering their content, and, of course, finding hidden faces, then elaborately adorning them with wild accouterments. The figures he added time and again to the foreground and to the sides of Le Corbusier's perspectives [7 & 8] parallel figures found in the somewhat Surreal composition adopted for certain photographic images of Le Corbusier's architecture [9]. And this transformation of illustrative text into 'physiognomic declarations' anticipated similar conversions made by Le Corbusier later.
In *La Peinture moderne*, for instance, on opposing pages, Soutter drew over illustrations of paintings by Picasso (left) and Gris (right), metamorphizing both into large heads replete with wavy hair. To the already physiognomic disposition of a Picasso cubist painting he added another eye, a definite chin, a mouth of sorts, and a head of hair that seems to derive its curls
from the motifs found in the painting. Above and to the side of this head he wrote "Le sort La Mort". On opposing pages he transformed the 1919 Gris still life into a complex double portrait with one figure contained within the other. The smaller, more apparent figure is that of a woman sitting reading a book, her face, hands and bare breasts very evident. Behind her is what appears to be foliage of two distinct varieties, one to the left, the other to the right. Within this composition a second figure can be found: a large head comparable in size to that made of the Picasso. In this larger visage, the breasts become crossed eyes, the blackened leaf of the open book suggests a nose, and the black triangle scratched below the book contributes the mouth. The foliage now becomes hair, bundled behind this large head. The whole ensemble resembles a figure in a Japanese portrait print. Soutter titled his creation "Chinoise LA VIE".

There are other examples where Soutter finds faces and articulates them: for instance, in the three-point disposition of another Picasso [11], or in the inherent abstraction of a high contrast photograph [12], or on the lower torso of a native girl in a Braque painting [13]—the 'torso-face' discovered here anticipating Le Corbusier's frequent use of this ancient motif in his later paintings and in his Modulor Man. And recognition of these overt facial declarations necessarily leads to speculation about far subtler compositions; for example, with his modification of the photograph of the interior of the Villa Stein shown above, Soutter transformed the right half into a cross-eyed visage with braided hair, a chair for a nose, and a caption across its lower lip [7].
The light-heartedness of Soutter's gestures should not belie their profundity. Even the poetic and very pregnant notion of 'décantation' itself may have been provoked by Soutter's drawing, for on the title page of "Esprit de vérité", a chapter in L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui, Soutter pictured 'vérité' in a decanter, bottled as a 'spirit' to be imbibed, with a glass of the stimulant shown spilled across the bottom of the page [14].
Soutter's annotations are intelligent pictorial comments that speak not only of the content of the page they cover, but of the nature and structure of representation itself. Clearly, Soutter read Le Corbusier's texts—both written and illustrative—in a manner Le Corbusier himself, master of ambiguity, could not have anticipated. In so doing, he offered the architect not only an insightful understanding of his illustrations as text, but a new means of achieving a complex, inherently dialectical signification.

Soutter's pictorial 'writing over' was a subtle way of evoking a sense of deep meaning through layering. Others had done work of a similar nature. In the early part of this century, for instance, the American commercial illustrator Charles Norman Sladen adorned his albums of vacation photographs with pen and ink drawings that united his many diverse snapshots into a 'continuous landscape' by "extending their lines as whorls or tree rings or spiderwebs or long grass." Picabia experimented with such layering in numerous 'paintings over paintings' done from 1926 to around 1931 [15], and in the mid-thirties Yves Tanguy modified encyclopedia illustrations in a manner very similar to Soutter's, though with far less exuberance and a much more calculated wit [16]. Picasso, too, had employed 'drawing-over' in 1923 when he modified the front page photographs of the newspaper L'Excelsior [17], and later when, according to Brassaï, he covered the manuscript of Apollinaire's Bestiaires "with drawings of animals of all kinds." And in the mid-thirties, Picasso produced some of the most wondrous and profound images of this kind by fusing original engravings with original photographs [18].
So with his unselfconscious scribbling, Soutter enriched Le Corbusier’s texts with a kind of 'double vision' in which image interrogates image. A dialectical condition results in which all becomes effervescence permanente. Le Corbusier understood this and described Soutter’s drawings as "un écho profond du texte dans lequel ils s’inséreront." Soutter’s decantation, his
'spilling out' across page after page of Le Corbusier barking, served to 'draw over', to metamorphose the master, and in more ways than one.

V

On at least two occasions Le Corbusier adopted a 'drawing over' technique similar to Soutter's. In the 1948 special issue of L'Architecture D'Aujourd'hui dedicated to Le Corbusier's work, both transparent color and colored sketches overlay verbal and illustrative text. A self-portrait sketched in blue is ghosted over his introductory remarks [19]. Sketches of shells in brown colored pencil are superimposed on a photograph of the front facade of the Villa Stein (the shell form is echoed in the topiary shrubbery found in photographs on the opposing page of the Beistegui terrace) [20]. The entire 'text' is illustrative, unified by the flowing effect of spilled color. The multiple layers bring a 'psychic' dimension and dream-like movement to the presentation, enriching it with spatial and symbolic juxtapositions. Le Corbusier's theme is the synthesis of the arts and he opened this issue with his now renowned essay on 'l'espace indicible'.

Decantation of a less calculated nature re-emerged in the mid-fifties when Le Corbusier—furious with the insipid, lifeless, line drawings of Flaxman that illustrated a contemporary French translation of Homer's *Iliad*—drew over each of the black and white engravings in colored pencil. His sketches are vibrant, lewd, violent. They introduce hybrid and metamorphic creatures to the text, among them the horned woman of the 1948 Pavillon Suisse mural and the
"tête de pierre" of Le Poème de l'Angle Droit [21]. Unlike Soutter's 'drawing-over' which frames Le Corbusier's illustrations, in L'Iliade Le Corbusier's drawings, like graffiti, aggressively cover the original illustrations but without ignoring or obliterating the underlying work. Rather he employed the underlying illustration in a subtle manner, assigning it a subservient role while taking full advantage of the potential for metamorphic representation that comes from the alignment of one image with another.

Eyes are of particular importance; they are, quite literally, pivotal. In two sketches, Le Corbusier allowed the heads of god figures of the original drawings to inhabit the eyes of his own monstrous creations, both of which seem to float above the horizon. In one of these drawings, the eye of Le Corbusier's yellow, serpent-like creature absorbs the scowling eye of a god, while his red nude that floats above it seems to release from its own heavy corpus another spirit-like nude, that of the original line drawing [22]. In the other drawing, Le Corbusier has ringed the head of the god with an iris of heavy black crayon, giving it a halo of sorts while at the same time appropriating its face for the pupil of his colossal levitating head [23]. Thus in the resulting profile view, three eyes—the single eye of the colossus and the two eyes of the diminutive face—look directly at us.
Both sketches were done in February, 1955 and are later paralleled in photographs of Le Corbusier's architecture. In a photograph of the Assembly Building at Chandigarh, the building's profile assumes the shape of a head, with the curved umbrella roof as its hair [24]. Within its vacuous eye, in the position of the pupil, sits a large black bird, no doubt le corbeau. A similar parti is evident also in a photograph of Ronchamp at night, a photograph in which the chapel's east facade is transformed into a glowing, radiant face [25]. The eye of this face is the glazed 'window' which houses—again in the position of the pupil—the "statue miraculeuse" of the Virgin mother with child. Mounted on a revolving platform, the statue, the building's eye, can look inward as well as outward.

VI

Although in Le Corbusier's buildings from the twenties and thirties, large and continuous expanses of glass allow for visual release to the exterior of the building, at Ronchamp, from inside the chapel, there is but a single aperture through which one may look out unobstructed. In the mid-thirties such minimal visual release was antithetical to Le Corbusier's conception of a new architecture in which the pan du verre was charged with symbolic significance. His Minotaure article nevertheless opens with the statement by Soutter quoted above in which Soutter, paralleling body and building, proposed an architecture without eyes. "Plus de fenêtres,
ces yeux inutiles," Soutter proclaimed, insisting that the house of the future be built entirely of transluscent glass. "Regarder dehors, pourquoi?" he asked. Le Corbusier interpreted this desire as manifestation of Soutter's "learning to look within," of his "intense interior life of thought." He was quick to state that Soutter's introspection is "l'antipode de mes propres idées," that from his buildings one looks out. But fifteen years later at Ronchamp light penetrated the building only through slits and small 'holes' where the view out is obscured by writings and drawings on the glass. Once inside this gigantic head on the hill, one looks out only through a single aperture, the glass eye in which the virgin resides. As with the Illiad drawings, our eye aligns with the eye of this building. We realize the space we inhabit as a state of mind. The very structure of our body has been enlarged and, as with Brassai's "Troglodyte", we are made profoundly aware that we inhabit our own skulls.

This condition of interiority, of introspection, would occur again in Le Corbusier's work, at Brussels in 1958, where he conceived his pavilion without a facade, "an Electronic Poem contained in a 'bottle'...a stomach assimilating 500 listener-spectators." And although in 1936 Le Corbusier could assure his readers that Soutter's wish for an abode "entièrement de verre translucide" was the opposite of his own ideas on architecture, just one year later he built the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux, a windowless tent structure of translucent colored canvas—its sloping roof and bowed walls (as portrayed in black and white photographs, at least) clearly anticipating the interior of the Ronchamp chapel.

VII

When he wrote of Soutter's condition in 1936, Le Corbusier did not foresee the introspective architecture he himself would create twenty years later. What he did foresee was the possible anguish of exposing for public consumption an "intense interior life of thought." "Is it of any use," he asked his Minotaure audience, "to place in circulation today at the threshold of the winter of a life, one more name?" And he followed this question by noting Soutter's self-effacing
anonymity, "His drawings are never signed." Le Corbusier presented Soutter as the overtly sensitive, introspective modern man who makes manifest in visual and readable form his own inner psyche. "He has learned to look within. Through him we can see inside a man." Le Corbusier, with all his brash exteriority, had regarded his own painting as a private affair. To exhibit this work was to expose his inner self, and it was at this time that he began to slowly reveal himself as a painter again. In this sense, "Louis Sutter: l’inconnu de la soixantaine" was a manifestation of the inner turmoil he himself anticipated experiencing. "Est-il utile de mettre en circulation aujourd’hui, au seuil de l’année d’une vie, un nom de plus? " The inference was as much to Le Corbusier himself as to Louis Soutter.

Although painting was an important part of Le Corbusier’s creative production and one that he worked at constantly, since 1923, as mentioned earlier, he had exhibited his paintings only twice: in 1933 in New York, remote from European critics and colleagues, and in the small 1935 exhibition billed as "Les arts dits primitifs dans la maison d’aujourd’hui." The 1933 exhibition was at the John Becker Gallery. In his review of the show, Henry-Russell Hitchcock wrote: "Since 1925 painting and architecture have diverged sharply in their development. The new architecture, now firmly established, has for the present no further need of the aesthetic research of painters." In the 1935 exhibition only a few of Le Corbusier’s paintings were shown, these together with "sculptures by Bénin, other negro sculptures, a few Greek, Henri Laurens, tapestries by Léger, [and] paintings by Picasso, Braque [...]." Staged by the collector Louis Carré, the exhibition was held in Le Corbusier’s painting studio in his recently completed Porte Molitor apartment, described on the announcements as "La Maison de Verre (Le Corbusier et P. Jeanneret, Architectes)." The paintings he exhibited were recent works, and staging the exhibition in his own architectural creation could only have forced the viewer to consider the painting-architecture relationship written off by Hitchcock.
This ten day, informal exhibition was a safe way for Le Corbusier to re-enter the art world. It would have attracted those interested in primitives, in Louis Carré's collection, in the avant-garde work of Picasso, Braque and Léger. For those who came to see the work of Le Corbusier, no doubt the focus was as much on his architecture and on his life style (the artist-architect, or the visual arts scientist in his laboratory (his wife compared the apartment to "a hospital, a dissecting lab"), as on his paintings. 'L'art brut' was evident in the vaulted roof and exposed masonry wall of Le Corbusier's studio, a 'palette' repeated at the Maison de Week-End built concurrently with the staging of this exhibit.

When finally in 1938 Le Corbusier exhibited fifteen years of his painting in a major retrospective at the Kunsthaus Zürich, the reviews were not good. "L'exposition de Zurich a été une consécration pour moi d'abord," he later wrote. "J'ai pu voir que ma peinture avait de la fermeté, qu'elle était personnelle. Aujourd'hui je suis estimé ou hai pour mon œuvre. La peinture révèle un côté de sensibilité utile à être connu. On ne peut plus me tuer davantage qu'on l'a fait! Et puis je me montre maintenant comme je suis: un technicien suffisant, poursuivant la route de l'harmonie: création poétique, source de bonheur." Clearly Soutter's work and Soutter himself, as presented by Le Corbusier prior to this exhibition, were analogous to this fragile, sensitive side of Le Corbusier, his vulnerable interior. With "Louis Sutter: l'inconnu de la soixantaine," Le Corbusier 'previewed' his own 'coming out'. When he presented 'une vie decanté' to the readers of Minotaure, it was his own private self, as much as the life of Soutter, that spilled forth. Two years later he would write of the painter's vulnerability, "La peinture—SA peinture, le met nu sur la rue."34

Also and of equal importance, Soutter's condition and his unique artistic expression must have made Le Corbusier acutely aware of artistic expression itself as an act of metamorphosis, as initially a taking in of the objective world—a "transposition, transfert des événements extérieurs dans l'intérieur de la conscience"—and then, ultimately, an externalizing of an inner emotional or
psychological state. It is shortly after writing about Soutter that he defined the creative act as *une pensée en effervescence permanente* and that he declared the 'siège de l’infini' the ultimate end of this act. 36 The sensation of art, he wrote, is *décidément l’insaisissable, c’est le mystère,* and "*Le mystère est une ouverture profonde devant l’âme avide toujours d’espace.*" 37 This change in emphasis in Le Corbusier's theory of art, from the rational and certifiable to the mysterious and unknowable, from the object to the sensation of space evoked by that object in rapport with other objects and with the spectator, was an essential and fundamental change. It would greatly affect his architecture in the years following the Second World War when technology and objectivity gave way to the primacy of what he had by then termed 'ineffable space.' The psycho-sensorial nature of ineffable space allowed for an architectural manifestation of decantation: an architectural analog of the 'interior of consciousness.'
Notes

References to FLC (Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris) documents are to the boxes and numbers as categorized by that archive in 1993. The Fondation has since digitized much of its material and in so doing has changed nearly all of the reference numbers. No means of cross-referencing was established.

1 Le Corbusier, "Louis Sutter, l'inconnu de la soixantaine," Minotaure 9 (1936): pp62-65. Although spelled without the 'o' throughout this Minotaure article, the correct spelling of Louis' last name is 'Soutter'. In English:
"...The minimum dwelling, or 'cell of the future', should be entirely of translucent glass. No more windows, those useless eyes. Why look out? Complications and blows to the beauty of the Universe. My drawings have no pretensions, except to be unique and of ideas conceived in sorrow."

2 Born in Morges in 1871, Soutter died in Ballaigues on February 20, 1942. He studied engineering, architecture, and the violin before studying drawing in 1894 in Lausanne, Geneva and Paris. Soutter married an American woman in 1896 and moved to Colorado Springs. In 1904 he returned to Lausanne, divorced and became physically and mentally ill.

3 See Michel Thévoz, Louis Soutter ou l'écriture du désir (Zürich: Institut suisse pour l'étude de l'art, 1974). Also, Louis Soutter (1871-1942) Zeichnungen, Bücher, Fingermalereien (Munich: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus. 1985); Michel Thévoz, Louis Soutter II, Catalogue de l'oeuvre (Zurich, 1976); as well as Louis Soutter, Musée de Marseilles, 1987; and René Berger and Ernest Manganel, Soutter (Lausanne: Editions Mermod, 1961). Much of Soutter's work is now preserved at the Musée cantonal des beaux-arts, Lausanne.

4 The exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum was in 1936, and at Vallotton in 1937. In 1939 there was an exhibition of Soutter's work at the Wehe Gallery, New York.

5 FLC Box D1-15, # 29-30: November 14, 1935 letter from H. R. Hitchcock, Director, Wesleyan University Architectural Exhibitions, Middletown, Connecticut stating that he had purchased one of Soutter's drawings to present to the Museum at Hartford. He sent Le Corbusier a check for $10, the cost of the drawing, and asked for a photograph of Le Corbusier. He also mentioned color drawings and the possibility of purchasing one of Le Corbusier's painting.


8 Louis Carré had an apartment in the Immeuble rue Nungesser et Coli in which Le Corbusier lived. In a letter [7], Le Corbusier described the exhibition as follows:
As quoted in Petit, Le Corbusier, lui-même, p80. More on this exhibition below.

Vincent Scully, in his "Le Corbusier, 1922-1965" in H. Allen Brooks, ed., Le Corbusier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) p51, refers to this cast as the "Athenian Calf Bearer" and parallels it with the enlarged photograph which decorated the skylight well of the 1935 Maison de Weekend (see Œuvre complète-2, p130). Scully describes the photograph as "the Ionian korai from the Acropolis of Athens [...] looking more Oriental than ever and indeed suggesting the Khmer sculpture that Malraux was
dramatizing during this time in his romantically savage novel La Voie royale.

'Le Moscophore' is described in more detail and a copy of the specifications for its colors is reproduced in "Les Arts primitifs dans la maison" in Le Corbusier: le passé à réaction poétique. (Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques and des sites/ministere de la culture et de la communication, 1988), pp 132-134. This article also describes the other artifacts exhibited. See, also, Le Corbusier, "Les arts primitifs dans la maison d'aujourd'hui," L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui (July, 1935), pp 83-85.


10 All but Croisade are held in the FLC archive. The books were Soutter's private commentary on Le Corbusier's writings and are not mentioned in the Le Corbusier article.

11 For two reasons I hesitate to claim that Soutter's drawings directly inspired the rather unusual photograph shown here. First, I know neither when Soutter did the drawings nor when Le Corbusier first saw his drawings. Second, it is doubtful that Le Corbusier directed the photography of the Maison Clarté, though certainly he selected the images to be published and determined their presentation format. This photograph appeared in several different publications, sometimes without the mysterious man in the foreground, as is the case in the Œuvre complète-2 image. In fact, the sinuous and somewhat sinister black figure is an aberration in the photographic œuvre of the firm's work. Still, Le Corbusier often emulated in photographic form the 'compositions' that he discovered in painting.

12 The motif is hardly exclusive to Le Corbusier and can be found in medieval paintings, in 'primitive' sculpture [see Dr. Eckart von Sydow, "Masques-Janus du Cross-River (Cameroun)," Documents 6 (1930): pp321-328], and in the work of the Surrealists (Magritte and Man Ray, for instance). In Le Corbusier's paintings it is most evident in the Taureaux series in which he constructed totem-like figures with a human head as torso. But slightly more abstract 'torso faces' seem to be present in paintings from the thirties also. For instance, in the 1936 Deux femmes à l'engrenage and in the 1937 Deux figures au tronc d'arbre jaune [Petit, p223] the torsos of the two figures have rather distorted physiognomies, faces nevertheless not unlike those in the double portrait Ozon et Georges of 1943 [Petit, p226].


14 See Maria Lluisa Borras, Picabia (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

15 Yves Tanguy, "En marge des mots croisés," in Documents 34, special no. 1 (June, 1934), pp61-63.


19 The description is in a letter dated 16 October 1936 from Le Corbusier to Jean Giono, whom Le Corbusier tried to persuade to exhibit Soutter's drawings. It does not refer specifically to the drawings Soutter made in Le Corbusier's books, but to Soutter's drawings in general. See Louis Soutter (Marseilles, 1987), p31.

20 I assume Le Corbusier fully responsible for the graphics and page layout of this more-than-100-pages 'treatise'. This assumption is based (1) on comments made by Pierre Vago, rédacteur en chef of L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, in a May, 1992 interview with the author regarding Le Corbusier's insistence on complete control of the 1933 special issue of L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui devoted to his work; and (2), on
the similarity of this visual text to that of New World of Space, published the same year and designed by Le Corbusier.

21 Van Doesburg had done something similar in 1928 for the cover of the tenth anniversary issue of De Stijl which features a photograph of himself over which is superimposed a verbal text in light blue lettering.

22 Soutter often drew similar shell-like forms. One that closely resembles that sketched by Le Corbusier over the Villa Stein is found opposite the "Esprit de vérité" title page in L'Art decoratif d'aujourd'hui and shows a nude woman entwined in the shell shape [14].

Salvador Dali superimposed a sketch of a shell over a photograph of the Art Nouveau iron gates of Antonio Gaudi in his "De la beauté terrifiante et comestible, de l'architecture modern style," Minotaure 3-4 (1933), pp 69-73.

23 The book's illustrations are by John Flaxman, engraved by Schuler. Le Corbusier described them as "Art des Olympes pour professeurs et bicornes d'Institut" in a note scribbled below the book's frontispiece and dated Feb. 21, 1955. The book was discovered by Mogens Krusstrup in the mid-eighties in the personal bibliothèque of Le Corbusier at the Fondation Le Corbusier. The drawings, to which Le Corbusier occasionally returned between 1955 and 1964, were intended to appear in the form of a series of lithographs to be published by Chez Mourlot of Paris. All the drawings are reproduced in Mogens Krusstrup, Le Corbusier L'Iliade Dessins (Copenhagen: Borgen, 1986), re-published in Mogens Krusstrup, L'Iliada Le Corbusier (Milan: Editrice Abitare Segesta, 2000).

Although Krusstrup does not mention it, the theme of ancient Greece was a rather constant one with avant-garde painters. As early as November 1911, according to Gino Severini, [Tutta la vita di un pittore, I (Rome, Paris, Milan: Garzanti, 1946), p139], we find Picasso remarking: "One could do a very modern painting depicting Greek warriors." And in the twenties and thirties, renowned artists—Bonnard, Braque, Rouault, Chagall, Dufy—were commissioned to illustrate new editions of classic books. Emile Bernard, for instance, illustrated the famous 1930 Ambroise Vollard edition of the Odyssey. At this time, too, Vollard commissioned Picasso to do illustrations for André Suarès' Hélène chez Archimède, a book that was not published until 1955. In the fifties, Tériade, the publisher of Verve, asked Chagall to illustrate in color lithography a revised French version of the Longus text of Daphnis et Chloé. Chagall also designed the sets and costumes for Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé which opened at the Paris Opéra in 1959. See J. E. Pouterman, "Les livres d'Ambroise Vollard," Arts et Metiers Graphiques, Sep. 15, 1938: pp45-56; and Carlton Lake, Confessions of a Literary Archaeologist (New York: New Directions Press, 1990).

24 In Creation is a Patient Search, p212, Le Corbusier captioned a photograph of his mural at the Jean Badovici house: "Graffiti at Cap-Martin (fragment), about 13 x 8 ft., 1938." This mural is a 'line drawing' of three overlapping figures, similar in many ways to the line drawing 'paintings over paintings' Picabia did in the late twenties and early thirties.

25 Le Corbusier kept postcards of this "Statue miraculeuse de Notre Dame du Haut Ronchamp (Haute-Saône)." See FLC Postcards 5 FRA 64 and 5 FRA 65.

26 Le Corbusier, Creation is a Patient Search, p186.


28 FLC, Box C2-5, #1.

29 Le Corbusier, Creation is a Patient Search, p118.
The announcement for the exhibition is reproduced in Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même*, p81. The exhibition ran from July 3 to July 13, 1935.

In 1956 Alvar Aalto designed a house for Louis Carré, completed in 1959 at Bazoches-sur-Guyonne, Ile-de-France.

*Le Corbusier*’s 1935 painting *La parqueuse d’huîtres* was exhibited and is featured in a photograph in the *Œuvre complète-3* [pp156-57] account of the exhibition. The short written text introducing the photographs reads:

> La technique des groupements est en quelque sorte une manifestation de la sensibilité moderne dans la considération du passé, de l’exotisme ou du présent. Reconnaître les ”sériesæ, créer à travers temps et espace des ”unités”, rendre palpitante la vue des choses où l’homme a inscrit sa présence.

Included are two small sketches of "Possibilités d’exposition du ‘Musée sans façades’.”

Quoted in Brassai, *The Artist in My Life*, p85.


> Now the painting of Le Corbusier is not good. It begins with the glasses, bottles, violins of late Cubism. Then the composition fragments, the line softens..., the color intensifies... Today Le Corbusier’s exuberance delights in abstraction, a blundering exuberance, sometimes absurd...Is this to say that we should ignore Le Corbusier’s painting? Certainly not. But we would be better interested if he did not interest himself in them so much. He should keep his production secrets to himself; for to reveal them, is to kill them off!


"Le Corbusier, "Peinture," unpaged.

These goals were in some ways similar to those of certain Surrealists. See, for example, Paul Nougé, "Les images défendues," in *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution* 5 (15 May 1933): pp24-28. This short treatise is divided into five sections the titles of which might serve to summarize the text: "La Vision déjouée," "L'Homme en proie aux images," "La Naissance des images," "La Métaphore tranfigurée," and "Des Moyens et des fins."

"Le Corbusier, "Peinture."
Illustration Credits

1  BRASSAI. Troglodyte, frontispiece for Minotaure 9 (1936).


4  LOUIS SOUTTER. Souplesse. 1939. [Postcard. Lausanne. Muséecantonal des Beaux-Arts.]

5  Photograph by Albin Salaün of the painted plaster cast of Greek statue, 1935. [Œuvre complête-3, p156]

6  LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over page 151 of Une Maison-un palais, the League of Nations elevation. [FLC]

7  LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over page 73 of Une Maison-un palais, Garches interior. [FLC]

8  LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over page 166 of L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui, stairs/deck. [FLC]

9  Photograph by Boissonnas of IMMEUBLE CLARTE’ BALCONY with Pierre Jeanneret and silhouetted foreground figure. [L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, no. 10 (1933), p99]

10 LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over pages 130-31 of La Peinture moderne, Picasso and Gris painting. [FLC]

11 LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over a page of La Peinture moderne showing a painting by Picasso. [FLC]

12 LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over pages 138-39 of L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui, featuring a photo captioned "Fabre, the entomologist." [FLC]

13 LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over page 54 of La Peinture moderne showing a painting by Braque of a girl. [FLC]

14 LOUIS SOUTTER. Ink drawing over pages 172-73 of L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui, 'Verité'. [FLC]

15 FRANCIS PICABIA. Craccaec, 1930. [Borras, Picabia , p368]

16 YVES TANGUY. Drawings over encyclopedia illustrations. [Documents 34, special no. 1 (June, 1934), p63]

17 PABLO PICASSO. Drawing over L'Excelsior front page, 1923. [Silver, Esprit des Corps, p290]

18 PABLO PICASSO. Photo-lithograph montage. [Cahiers d'Art, #6-7 (1937), p165+]

19 LE CORBUSIER. Self-portrait sketch over text for L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, 2nd Special Number (April 1948), p3.
Abstract

Louis Soutter, Le Corbusier’s cousin, was an accomplished violinist who, at the end of his life, was committed to a Swiss asylum. Soutter drew prolifically. When Le Corbusier gave Soutter copies of his renowned books, Soutter promptly drew over the book’s illustrations. From top to bottom, edge to edge, his lewd and elongated human figures cover the entire surface of a page, flowing together as if fluid. An intriguing dialectic resulted. Soutter’s drawings did not obliterate the visual text of Le Corbusier’s books, but commented on it.

In a 1936 Minotaure article, Le Corbusier sympathetically described Soutter as a spontaneous artist. Subsequently, after World War II, Le Corbusier began his own ‘drawing over’—drawing over the book illustrations of others and over texts that he himself had written. The highly ambiguous visual dialogue that results from the ‘spill’ of emotive scribbling across pre-established imagery in the œuvre of Le Corbusier is the subject of this article.