

CULTURE

Where worship Corb

A heavenly abundance of Le Corbusier material is on display in the Lutyns' crypt of Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral, writes Ellis Woodman



The opening section, Contexts, investigates Le Corbusier's relationship with six cities.

Furniture from Unite d'Habitation.

EXHIBITION

LE CORBUSIER: THE ART OF ARCHITECTURE
The Crypt, Metropolitan Cathedral, Liverpool
Until January 18 2009
★★★★☆

It is 21 years since the last major Le Corbusier exhibition was staged in Britain, and perceptions of his work have shifted a great deal in that time. Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century, the Hayward retrospective of 1987, arrived in the midst of the post-traditionalism which passed for architectural orthodoxy in the 1980s, and the press duly co-opted the show as an opportunity to rehearse the hackneyed arguments one more time. Perhaps enough time has passed that we can discuss the work on its own merits rather than adding it to the canon of 20th-century urban calamities that were perpetrated under its influence?

The title of the new exhibition, which opened last week, certainly suggests a shift of central focus in that direction. Indeed, save for a small — and I think unwise — use of photographs documenting Le Corbusier's influence in the

UK, it remains tightly focused on his own production. So France, it finds no shortage of material. As a subject for an architecture exhibition, Le Corbusier has the great merit that he worked across such an extraordinary range of media. The show includes film, paintings, sculpture, furniture and books. As well as the more conventional spread of architectural drawings and models. Much of this material rewards being seen first hand rather than via the pages of a monograph.

Le Corbusier was, also, of course, the most successful architect, Picasso-like in his quest for continuous innovation. The exhibition is certainly not monotonous. However, bringing a curatorial focus to this Adlauden's career of material has clearly proved a challenge. A comparison with the Whitechapel Art Gallery's copiously responsible 2002 show on Mies van der Rohe is instructive in this respect. Mies's path was a much less wayward one than Le Corbusier's, but the curators of that exhibition still thought it wise to restrict the range of material under consideration by addressing only

In Liverpool, there is really an

extraordinary quantity of stuff to savour and, wonderful as much of it is, the whole makes for a somewhat indigestible meal. The narrative the curators Mairo Kite, Stanislas van Moos and Arthur Kirling have fashioned is divided into three chapters that broadly follow the chronology of their subject's life: The First Contexts, only begins with the Le Cane de Fonds period before globe-trotting around five other locations — Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Algiers, Moscow and New York — but is one of the few concessions in Le Corbusier's prewar career. We get a strong sense of Le Corbusier as a figure in constant motion, sketchbook at hand, greedily absorbing influences as various as the Byzantine architecture of Turkey, French surrealism and the industrial production techniques of the American city.

However, the transition to the next chapter feels awkward, as a display of furniture and wallpaper from the beginning of Le Corbusier's career suddenly jerks us back in time. This section, Privacy

and Publicity, is devoted to the pre-war domestic projects and the relationship of their spatial preoccupations to Le Corbusier's paintings of the period. There are a few good models, but his famous remark, "the plan is the generator", the paucity of two-dimensional graphics is striking. That judgment may reflect the curator's ambition to bring a mass audience to the work — it shaped the exhibition to draw 40,000 visitors in its Liverpool incarnation — but is one of the few concessions in that direction.

The Third chapter, Built Art, reasserts the chronology, being a survey of the post-war work. You could spend an afternoon in this section alone, but even then it is very far from comprehensive: the Malenco Jooel got passed over with a single model. La Bourne gets chopped entirely. Looking at a beautiful timber model of the recently completed church at Firminy, I was struck by its powerful formal resonance with the battered morphology and attenuated ramps that are features of Ren Koolhaas's recent work. No doubt visitors to the last exhibition saw relationships to the very different structures a figure such as Richard Meier was building at the time.

In another couple of decades we shall surely have the opportunity to view this magisterial work through the lens of another era, and find it in creative avatars still ripe for investigation.

The Built Art section is a survey of Corbusier's postwar works.

We get a sense of Le Corbusier as a figure in constant motion, greedily absorbing influences



More events. An extended What's On guide is available at bostonline.co.uk/listings

Celebrating a past master of all trades

EXHIBITION
CARTONS & CORONETS: THE GENIUS OF OSBERT LANCASTER

Wallace Collection, London W1
Until January 11, 2009
★★★★☆

including Jim Richards, John Benjamin and Robert Byron, shaking up a cocktail of equal parts modernism, whimsy, and humour — with a dash of Edwardian bittern.

Lancaster began to contribute a daily cartoon to the Daily Express just before the second world war. Naturally, a good deal of space at the exhibition is devoted to these. Their key figure was Maudie Littlehampton, who eventually began a whole dynasty. Of those shows at the Wallace, modern art was represented by Pompeii. History, as well as in a few "serious" architectural sketches.

Lancaster trained at the Slade School of Art and in 1934 moved to a job at the Architectural Review under Hubert de Cronin Hastings. Here he was part of a dream team



Osbert Lancaster (left) and Maudie Littlehampton (right) in 1934.

Trying to encompass all the facets of Osbert Lancaster's career in one exhibition may seem like a losing game. It's didn't always exist, the work multifarious might have been inevitable. Just to describe him: witty, dandy, traveller, cartoonist, historian, social critic, columnist, editor, writer, musician, designer.

This year is the centenary of his birth. In tribute, James Knox has curated an exhibition at the Wallace Collection, selecting from the vast archive of Lancaster's work amassed by publisher John Murray.

Even if his name has been eclipsed from public view, many readers of BD will know of Lancaster because of his sermonic and perceptive analysis of architectural styles, illustrated with brilliant drawings. We might refer to an opulent, 1920s old-world style house as "a snookier Tudor" or use "Pant Street Dutch" as shorthand for the buildings of Richard Norman Shaw and his disciples. These terms appeared, with many other apt descriptions, in Pillar to Post (1938) and Home Sweet Homes (1939). Illustrations for these works — which like all Lancaster's cartoons sum up the essential aspects of a design or fashion moment — are featured strongly in the architectural section of the show,



Lighter, stronger, longer

Long span, light weight lattice beams

- Metsec lattice beams allow design freedom for individual roof design like Birmingham's Park Central — with long spans, complex valley and feature cantilevers — a development providing city centre living in eight acres of parkland.
- Pre-engineered offices for faster site installation.
- Clear unobstructed spans of up to 40 metres.
- Easy routing of services through the web lattice.

Register for your Free Technical Manual and design software or ask about a CPD certified seminar
0121 601 600 lattice_joists@metsec.com

Metsec is a voestalpine group company
www.metsec.com

voestalpine
ONE STEP AHEAD

Profession turns out to sift through a comprehensive collection

JEREMY DIXON
Dion Jones Architects

What's interesting is that it's a collected collection of real objects held by the Vitra Design Museum (Germany). In a sense, it's a random collection of his stuff. That's very different to a comprehensive exhibition of his

work. I had expected a mega-exhibition. You get a particular collection in London — works of art, sculpture, painting — from which the people who have set it up infer things about Corbusier's personality. There are lots of paintings. Members of the public who don't know his work might think this was an art. You could point out lots of things that weren't there. It took me a while to understand what they had done and why; it's interesting.

CHARLES HOLLAND
Fat

I thought it was an excellent exhibition. I like seeing work in strong settings. It's a relief to have a change from the ubiquitous odd white box.

CLARE WRIGHT
Wright & Wright

It was fantastic to see some of the models. Fernmy and Rooncham. I liked the fact that it was put into context of what else was going on at the time in cities such as Paris. It would be quite difficult for

a non-architect, who might see it as about painting and furniture. The objects and paintings relate to his building from the crypt and the atmosphere made it really odd and intriguing layout. The cathedral on top is pretty weird, too. Some great exhibits, particularly the battered original wooden models and the film of Dalí in the surrealist Paris apartment.

MIKE STEVILL
Stiff & Trevill

I enjoyed it and as an architect you would enjoy it, but it's just happens that I was out before. Corb is an architect who has to be seen in 3D, so the lovely big models were a great treat.

big moment that never came. I enjoyed the paintings, but he was an architect not a painter. The Philips Pavilion mock-up and Fernmy's social model and drawing are good, studied pieces of work, but there's no big thing that would make memorable. The show at the Hayward was more dramatic and more exciting. It's dry and studious, and in many ways very good, but I'd give it four, not five, stars.