
Avant – Après: Architectures au fil du temps, 150 films d'architecture inédits

Curator: Patrice Goulet

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The idea for this exhibition seems immediately compelling: in the eastern wing of the Palais Chaillot, at the location which for many decades had housed the famous Cinémathèque Française, the museum and archive of films and related material that Henry Langlois had founded in 1936 (now established in Frank Gehry's former American Center), an encounter of film and architecture would be celebrated.

Patrice Goulet, the curator for contemporary architecture at the Institut Français d'Architecture (and billed in the exhibition brochure as "one of the great discoverers of architectural talent"), arranged 24 large screens next to each other in the long, uninterrupted curved space of the gallery. 150 short films about recent buildings (many produced by documentary filmmaker Pierre Marie Goulet, and 35 from other sources) were shown in three groups of 50, covering the periods 1964-1998, 1999-2004, and 2004-2010. Each group ran on eight screens simultaneously, but staggered in time to ensure that no film would ever appear on two screens at the same time. This arrangement also recalls one of the lesser-known spectacles at the World's Fair of 1937 nearby. The Palais de l'Electricité had been designed by the architect and set designer Robert Mallet-Stevens in such a way that films could be projected on its curved, 200 meter long horizontal façade at night. Avant-garde filmmaker Jean Epstein created a film for that occasion, in which three parallel projections told the story of time and the water cycle under the title *Panorama au fil de l'eau*.

Between the 150 architecture film clips, scenes from 24 film classics would occasionally show up, as phantoms of the past, among them Eisenstein's *October*, Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, or Griffith's *Way Down East*. The 150 documented buildings, mostly from the last two decades, stand chiefly in France (some by Jean Nouvel, Dominique Perrault, Lucien Kroll and Rudy Ricciotti, and many by architects little known outside of France). But a few internationally acclaimed recent objects were also included, such as Rem Koolhaas's Seattle Library, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Will Alsop's Toronto Design School, or Daniel Libeskind's

Jewish Museum in Berlin. The actual criteria for the selection of the buildings and their sequential arrangement, however, remained somewhat obscure. The curator's favorites seem to have been Jean Nouvel (11 projects), the team of Jean Philippe Vassal and Anne Lacaton (10 projects) and the offices of Jacques and Raphaëlle Hondelatte (8 projects), followed by OMA and Massimiliano Fuksas (5 projects each).

The main problem with the presentation was that it turned out to be too cumbersome to find out what the object of each clip was. At the beginning of each short film, a number appeared and the visitor was supposed to look up the information in the accompanying leaflet. The light level was so low, however, that reading its small print was nearly impossible.

Nevertheless, despite this central flaw, the impact of a flood of architectural images from the densely arranged screens alone was impressive. The visitors could participate in the orchestrated sequencing by walking back and forth between the screens in order to see a certain film again. Space and time, film and architecture were suddenly caught up in an intense relationship, which demanded patience and a willingness to engage with the concept.

Dietrich Neumann
Brown University