

**Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes**  
MoMA, New York  
Until 23 September

**Top**  
Cabanon,  
Roquebrune-  
Cap-Martin,  
1951; recreation  
of the interior

**Bottom**  
Parthenon,  
Athens, 1911,  
in watercolour,  
gouache and  
pencil on paper

## Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes

MoMA presents a compelling case, says Claire Barliant, for seeing Le Corbusier as a lover, not a conqueror of nature

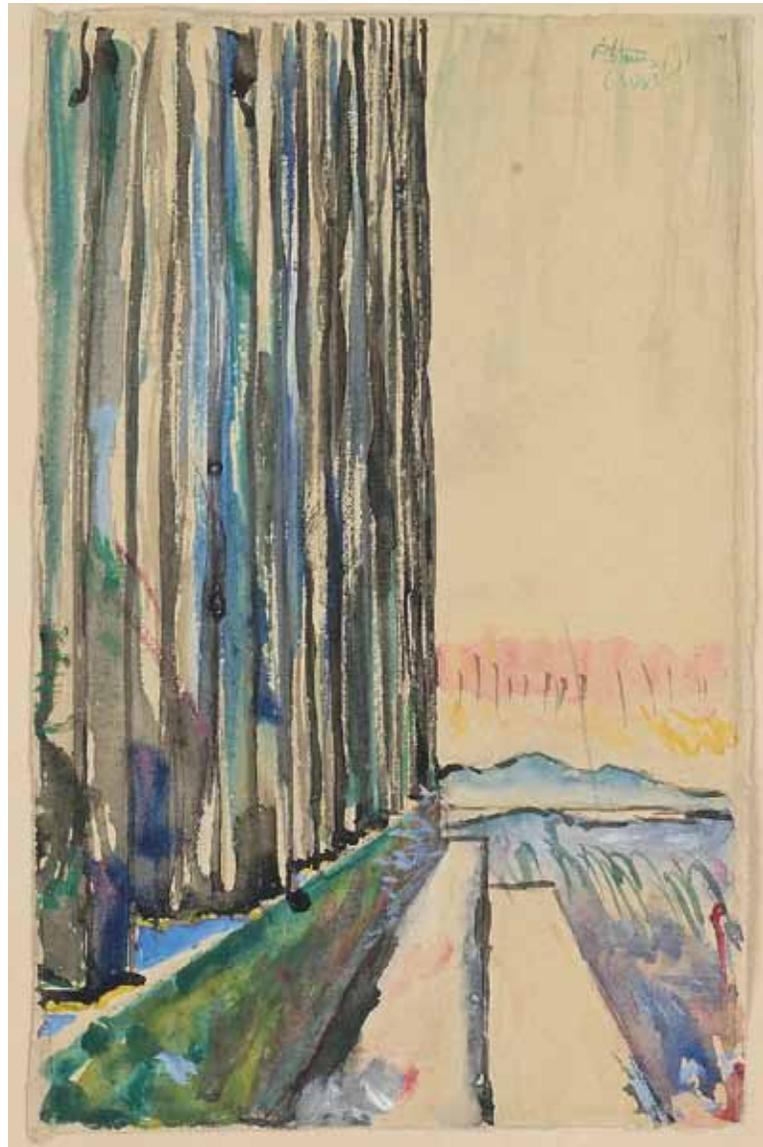
"L'Académisme dit: Non!" is scrawled on a large sheet of brown paper, one of hundreds of objects in this encyclopaedic show on Le Corbusier. It begins with drawings from his school days and his first house, Villa Fallet, a traditional chalet completed in 1907 when he was just 20, and culminates with his final commission, a hospital in Venice completed in 1965 just before he died at 77.

The slogan – "Academicism says no!" captions a 1929 sketch made during a lecture on the Eiffel Tower, the cathedral of Notre Dame and modernist skyscrapers. This was

the architect's way of promoting his "Radiant City" plan, through which he sought to eliminate Paris's central arrondissements, replacing them with sixty-storey towers and stretches of green space, and separating businesses from residences.

That is the Le Corbusier we know: hellbent on dragging the world into modernity with elevated highways and superblocks. MoMA curator Barry Bergdoll and New York University professor Jean-Louis Cohen, who co-organised the show, seek to counter this image by arguing that the Swiss-born architect was well aware of the importance of the natural landscape, and strove to highlight rather than obscure it.

They make a persuasive case. Interspersed among the drawings, models and life-sized recreations of interiors are photographs by Richard Pave that emphasise Le Corbusier's sensitivity to landscape, such as the way the Alps cradle the Notre-Dame



du Haut in Ronchamp, its sloping rooftop supposedly inspired by a crab shell. A pristine 1932 model of the Villa Savoye exemplifies his frequent edict that the "outside is the result of an inside". The structure, in a suburb of Paris, illustrates his "five points" of architecture, including the use of pilotis, which lift the house to capitalise on fresh breezes, a roof garden and a panoramic ribbon window to permit the broadest possible view of the outdoors.

The rooftop terrace, complete with a wading pool, is also a highlight of the Unité d'Habitation, built as public housing in Marseille between 1947 and 1952. While this building was a precursor for many less-than-ideal housing projects, its airy conditions prefigured calls for "green building", as well as micro-living, by offering small studios for singles. The architect's disdain for air-conditioning inspired many aspects of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard (finished in 1963), Le Corbusier's only US building: brises-soleil shade the interior, and operable windows allow for cross-ventilation.

Though the exhibition may not entirely succeed in shifting the focus from Le Corbusier's ruthless, if often prescient, plans for rebuilding cities to his appreciation for nature, it certainly gives a full picture of the

man. Videos of him at different stages in his life convey someone who was garrulous and witty – qualities that come through loud and clear in his vibrant 1935 lecture drawings at Princeton University.

The colourful sketches he drew in front of live audiences (one imagines them captivated) employ simple outlines that clearly demonstrate complex concepts: a sun is used to present the relationship between interiors and outside space; volumetric shapes – a cone, a sphere, a cylinder, or a box – evolve into rooms. His effortless brilliance, restless and impatient, comes through best in these loose, propulsive sketches. A large section of the exhibition is also devoted to Le Corbusier's painting career, for which he used his real name, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret: mostly still lifes that have a surprisingly beefy, primitive energy.

Having exhaustively tracked Le Corbusier's staggeringly productive career, the exhibition closes with a recreation of the "cabanon" he built in 1952, where he spent most of his time toward the end of his life. The intimate interior resembles that of a ship – everything serving a specific purpose. After years of publicly encouraging people to live on top of one another, he spent his last days in a one-room shack on the Riviera, apparently in blissful solitude.