Numerous interventions have been implemented in the Parisian urban fabric since Henri IV’s Place des Vôges. The first large-scale attempt at “reinventing” Paris can be traced to 1794, when a government committee published the so-called Plan des Artistes, which initiated a debate on the need to modernize the city. This debate lasted well into the 1930s and included the competitions for the 1937 International Exposition, the topic of this essay. In the tradition of previous plans for the city, the competitions intersected with controversies about the future of Paris and its long history of large-scale interventions, such as Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin (1925), which he reiterated in 1932 in considering the Paris International Exposition.

During the planning period for the exposition, two independent series of competitions were held that, in a sense, summarized the debates of the entire decade of the 1930s. While both sets of competitions dealt with the upcoming exposition, the two could not have been more at odds. The first was organized by artistic institutions in 1932 to select the location for the exposition in a way that would best serve the expansion of modern Paris. The second, a series of thirteen competitions held from December 1934 to May 1935, was sponsored by the exposition’s administration itself to decide which architects would be invited to design pavilions for the fair.

The first contest, in 1932, coincided felicitously with another major urban competition for the development of the Voie Triomphale (Triumphal Avenue) extending westward from Napoleon Bonaparte’s Arc de Triomphe (Triumphal Arch) to the Suresnes Bridge on the Seine (Figure 1). The intent was to develop that segment of the overall axis started at the Louvre in the early seventeenth century and give it a final ending. The interconnectedness of the two urban undertakings was highlighted by some of the entries to the Voie Triomphale competition, such as André Granet’s, which included an “International Exposition for 1937” (Figure 2). Granet’s idea was to use the built area of the exposition grounds, after the exposition ended, as an art and artisanal center.

In 1928, at the request of Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, the French Ministry of the Interior created the High Committee for the Planning of the Paris Region (Comité Supérieur de l’Aménagement de la Région Parisienne) under the direction of the Paris senator Louis Daussset. The committee was asked to study available options for the containment of uncontrolled growth of Paris. The targeted area encompassed a radius of 35 kilometers with Notre-Dame de Paris at its center while incorporating into the capital 650 administrative communities, or communes, the way Paris had been growing in the past.
The very idea of considering Paris as a regional entity introduced the concept of Greater Paris (Grand Paris) as official policy, that is, of Paris as an urban territory that went beyond traditional Paris intra muros, which had been Baron Haussmann’s sole concern. The committee’s premise was that suburban Paris needed to be reorganized, not extended. This implied a new approach to the suburbs (banlieues). The reorganization bestowed on the suburbs a new urban status, undermining their existing semirural character. The need for such a plan appeared increasingly acute, principally owing to the profound economic and social transformations that France underwent following World War I. The committee’s study did not involve modern theories of urban planning: there were no linear cities, no satellite cities, only an effort to improve the existing conurbation structurally and administratively.

On 14 May 1932 the parliament passed a law requiring the elaboration within two years of a detailed development plan for the Paris region. Henri Prost was named head of the planning team. The so-called Musée Social, under the direction of Marcel Poète, also played a crucial role in devising a comprehensive approach to the urban problems of the city. The law was long overdue. Initiatives and calls for a Regional Plan of Paris had been heard from administrators, artists, and sociologists since the end of the nineteenth century. In 1911, for example, the Conseil Général de la Seine had created the Commission de l’Extension, which opened a competition of ideas for a “rational” development of Greater Paris. Yet the idea of an “urban region” was resisted, and Paris continued to be treated exclusively within its administrative borders—that is, within its fortified walls. Le Corbusier was among those who adamantly refused to consider Paris beyond these limits, or to accept the notion of a “regional plan,” as his entry to the competition for the 1937 Exposition confirmed dramatically.

Zoning and road networks were the main concerns of Prost’s Regional Plan. Within that framework, the creation of greenbelts between districts and the maintenance of a semirural character to the environment were the next priorities of the plan, which would need to remain flexible and adaptable to local conditions. Established urban and rural aesthetic sites were to be respected even by the road network—an early example of care for the preservation of the genius loci. Population density was to be maintained at a low level, and high-rises were banished. Long, compact buildings were to be avoided for reasons of security (to protect against harm from bombardments and the spreading of fire) as well as for aesthetic reasons in an environment of small cottages and villas to be preserved.

Prost’s Regional Plan, and particularly the plan’s accommodating attitude toward Paris’s suburbs, created a rift between the general body of urbanists belonging to the
Société Française des Urbanistes (French Society of Urban Planners) and Le Corbusier, whose radical propositions included the outright razing of the banlieues and the absorption of their population into intra muros Paris, which he proposed would be scattered with high-rises amid lush green spaces. Le Corbusier presented his idea in his entry to the first 1932 competition for the exposition, which will be discussed later. Members of the Union of Modern Artists (Union des Artistes Modernes, or UAM), such as Eugène Beaudouin and Marcel Lods, instead inverted Le Corbusier’s plan by moving the high-rises into the suburbs, as can be seen in their noted housing project La Mouette at Drancy. As part of the city’s program of creating affordable housing for the so-called Red Belt (Ceinture Rouge)—working-class suburbs that voted overwhelmingly for the Communist Party—Beaudouin and Lods’s project represented the first Parisian tower-and-slab system, a type of structure that would become ubiquitous after World War II. Such compromise with CIAM norms undermined the goals of Prost’s Regional Plan, which sought to regulate, not destroy, the Parisian suburbs. The Regional Plan of Paris was not officially adopted until 1939 and was abandoned with the start of the war; nevertheless, the best entries of the 1932 competition for siting of the exposition took Prost’s plan into serious consideration, as the discussion of the competition will show.

Early History of the 1937 Paris Exposition

Shortly after the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition closed, Fernand David, an official with the Chamber of Commerce of Paris, launched the idea of a new exhibition for 1937. David saw the new exposition simply as a continuation of the previous one and thought it should be held on the same site, the esplanade of Les Invalides.

By June 1930, discussion of another exposition had reached the French parliament, and the issue of the site immediately became divisive. Socialist deputy Pierre Cot, future distinguished minister of the French Popular Front, wanted a centrally located site in Paris, while the Radical Party’s Émile Faure suggested the Bois de Vincennes, the site of the Colonial Exhibition, which was held in 1931.

At first, the exhibition was called the International Exposition of Modern Art in Paris in 1937 (Exposition Internationale de l’Art Moderne à Paris en 1937). In January 1932, its thematic framework was broadened. Senator Henri Tournan suggested that it be called the International Exposition of Civilization (Exposition Internationale de la Civilisation), with the aim of reinforcing the activity of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, a committee of the League of Nations that promoted international cultural/intellectual exchange among scientists, researchers, teachers, artists, and other intellectuals.12 Left-wing deputy and Paris city councillor Eugène Fiancette proposed the theme of an “International Exhibition of Workers’ and Peasants’ Life” and received the support of the Paris City Council for his proposal.13 In the end, however, none of these titles or themes were retained for the exposition, which was ultimately titled the International Exposition of Art and Technology in Modern Life (Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne).

The site of the exposition was also the subject of proposals from architects and urbanists. Donat-Alfred Agache, secretary of the Société Française des Urbanistes, had been critical of the temporary effects of the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition.14 In September 1925, he had written: “The great mistake regarding the urban development of Paris is to have set up an event of such importance in the very center of Paris, where, instead of serving the embellishment and future development of our capital with what it could have left behind (important buildings, streets and avenues, parks, etc.), it will leave nothing but ashes and rubble.”15 Agache had a specific alternative site in mind for a future exposition: “the free land extending beyond the Place de la Défense, that is, where the growth of Greater Paris will be most...
significant ... on that marvelous location where our Voie Triomphale comes to an end.”

In May 1931, the ad hoc Study Committee for the International Exposition of Modern Art in Paris (Comité d’Étude de L’Exposition Internationale d’Art Moderne à Paris) was formed at a meeting of the Society of Decorative Artists (Société des Artistes Décorateurs) under the presidency of Frantz Jourdain. The Study Committee, whose sole purpose was to launch a competition, invited representatives of six professional art and architectural associations, including the recently founded Union of Modern Artists, to join the effort to plan an exposition. Referring to the unfortunate experience of 1925, the Study Committee backed the idea of an exhibition set on the outskirts of Paris, where it would stimulate the city’s future growth.

Endorsing Agache’s proposal, made at the close of the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition, the Study Committee urged competition entrants to “develop a site or a city district that will be best served by the most recent city planning concepts.” Unlike Agache, however, the Study Committee saw the new city district as an impermanent demonstration of new ideas:

The actual 1937 Exhibition would use only temporary structures: a successful exhibition has to be primarily a large public debate about ideas among artists of all nations ... to satisfy the spiritual and material needs of modern life. It is actually the impermanent aspect of the exhibition that will allow audacity, and inventiveness.

In what was evidently coordination with the premise of the Regional Plan under elaboration, the Study Committee—chaired by Prost; Louis Bonnier, a parliament deputy; and Adolphe Dervaux, president of the Société Française des Urbanistes—evaluated the competition projects along two criteria: feasibility of the projects and possible gains for the urban improvement of Paris. The committee suggested sites outside Paris, such as Issy-les-Moulineaux, the Porte Maillot at the Bois de Boulogne, Fort Mont-Valérien, Nanterre (an area extending beyond the Voie Triomphale), the Parc de Sceaux, and, within Paris itself, the banks of the Seine in the vicinity of the Eiffel Tower. The head of the jury that judged the competition entries was Paul Léon, director of the Beaux-Arts Academy, who had served as commissioner general of the 1925 Decorative Arts Exposition.

The 1932 Site Proposals

The entries for the 1932 siting competition represented an array of remarkable solutions dominated by two distinguished teams: the partnership of Beaudouin and Lods and the team of Pierre Patout and André Japy. Two schemes by

Le Corbusier and Auguste Perret did not draw awards, the first because it was filed in violation of the competition rules and the second because it was a project commissioned by the government independent of the competitions. The winners of the site competition included both younger and more established entrants. Young CIAM members Beaudouin and Lods won first prize. They located the exhibition at the Mont-Valérien fortress in suburban Suresnes, west of Paris (Figures 3 and 4). The fort, which survives today, would have been the centerpiece of the exhibition. The reclamation of this site would have had to correspond with the city’s plan for extension, the new Regional Plan of Paris. Since the development of the Regional Plan had only recently begun, Beaudouin and Lods’s competition entry indicates that they made some educated guesses about the plan’s provisions for western Paris: that the Suresnes Bridge was destined to become the principal entry point to Paris from the West, that Avenue Foch would be extended for rapid transit without intersections, that a metro station in this area would be a
transit hub, and that an airport was projected near the proposed entrance of the exhibition. The partners also took advantage of the main virtue of the site, a panoramic view of Paris with the Seine and the Bois de Boulogne in the foreground. The river could provide ideal sites for aquatic festivities, hydroplane landings, and water sports, and Beaudouin and Lods’s proposal included locks, piers, breakwaters, and a yacht harbor. Beaudouin and Lods were concerned with facilitating the exposition’s “organic” but also “rational” insertion into the city. The basic principle for the two architects was that “if the current development of the city had a determining influence on our choice for the exhibition site, the exhibition, in return, would have to leave its stamp on the future of the city.”

Before becoming a point of attraction in itself, the exposition had to allow an unhindered flow of city traffic, and even to accelerate it. The partners treated the exhibition as one functional and rational element in a larger urban system.

Second prize went to the team of Patout and Japy (Figure 5). They chose the districts along the Voie Triomphale, between the Seine and the Défense traffic circle, arguing that the site and the urban development stimulated by the exposition should be in themselves objects of exhibition, “creating and modifying entirely” the appearance of these city districts. The new district should, therefore, be an exhibition of city planning, “an art almost unknown to the masses.” Patout and Japy engaged the entire western region of metropolitan Paris based on three closely interdependent aims: first, “to achieve the urban renewal and sanitation of an entire district” as a starting point for the development of the Paris region; second, “to create a very large district serving intellectuals, scholars, artists, artisans, etc., with a complete and integrated municipal infrastructure, as well as the necessary commercial facilities”; and finally, “to allow for the creation of a sport center equipped with physical education facilities.” Celebrating modernity, the plan boasted a double airport for airplanes and hydroplanes, which was intended to become the regional aeronautic base of Paris. Other entrants also proposed airports, including one built on a platform over the Batignolles train station; the competition’s jury envisaged visitors arriving at the exposition directly by airplane or by hydroplane, landing in the heart of the city.
Le Corbusier’s Mundaneum concept and his immeubles à redans, Bossu invaded half of the Left Bank with a “City of the World,” straddling a superhighway running from east to west. A second highway would have the City of the World cut in half along a north–south axis, reviving, as it were, a Roman cardo and decumanum scheme at an immense scale.  

Le Corbusier’s entry was disqualified. He not only missed the deadline but also revealed his identity by including known images of his work in his entry. By way of apologizing for missing the due date, he presented his project in the form of a small brochure, in which he proposed a new title for the exhibition: 1937 International Exhibition of Housing (1937 Exposition Internationale de l’Habitation). He argued that contemporary urbanism hinged on a “correctly understood modernism”: the home. Starting with the housing issue, Le Corbusier looked at issues such as “home fixtures [équipements]; breathing of the home; silence in the home; the introduction of a new home economics through some collective facilities; physical and nervous recovery; the upbringing of children; the preschool and school life; the harmonious development of the solar day, allowing a balanced physical and spiritual life” (Figure 7).  

According to Le Corbusier, study of the home would facilitate the development of a series of themes that would lead back to the subject of modern art. Architecture would cease to be a question of style and would be concerned with an “art of living.” His plan addressed “home builders; furniture designers; the inventors of home utilities; all those who think they could offer appropriate solutions to the new problems in the life of the men of the present era.” He included “makers, industrialists, the whole of the building industry,” whose “universal character” appeared to him
as qualified to solve effectively “the general crisis of industrial production.” He anchored the exposition “at the edge of the Bois de Vincennes” (see Figure 7). Faithful to the concepts he developed in the 1920s, and firmly opposed to the idea of Paris extending to “100 kilometers in diameter,” as he understood Prost’s Regional Plan, he insisted that the “flow” of the city should gravitate “toward its center” by absorbing its suburbs within the city walls (Figure 8). Vincennes was to be the first element of this Ville Radieuse, or Radiant City, with one thousand inhabitants per hectare concentrated along an east–west axis traversing the metropolitan area, pushing its way through Paris beyond the Porte Maillot and parallel to the Voie Triomphale. In Le Corbusier’s vision, the exposition would be the starting point for a radical, *intra muros* recasting of metropolitan Paris. In other words, his plan, a Trojan horse of sorts, was to situate the exposition at the gates of the city for an easier conquest (Figure 9).

After the 1932 competition concluded, the Federation of French Artistic Crafts (Fédération des Métiers d’Art) and the Federation of Creative Artists (Fédération des Artistes Créateurs) formed the historic Corporative Union of French Art (Union Corporative de l’Art Français), thus erasing for the first time the institutional segregation between “fine” and “applied” arts. In a manifesto the associated artists reiterated their desire to ban forever the term *decorative arts* and establish a single term for all—modern art. The new union continued its involvement with the future exposition by mobilizing artists under the cochairmanship of modern architect Frantz Jourdain and progressive urbanist Dervaux.

At the end of 1932, the Ministry of Commerce was put in charge of the exhibition. Aimé Berthod, senator and former minister, was nominated commissioner general. Paul Léon, who had been vice commissioner of the 1925 Decorative Arts...
Exposition, was nominated assistant commissioner general, and the architect Charles Letrosne—another veteran of 1925—was nominated architect in chief with an assistant, Jacques Gréber. Letrosne produced a new name for the exhibition: International Exposition of Industrial and Decorative Arts of the Worker’s and Peasant’s Life (Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels de la vie Ouvrière et Paysanne).

After the exposition’s administration was formed, only a site was missing. In complete disregard for the results of the 1932 competition, the government chose the Jardins du Trocadéro, the traditional site of previous world’s fairs. On 8 April 1933, the magazine L’Illustration published the exhibition’s preliminary master plan by Letrosne and Gréber. The Paris Municipal Council confirmed the site on 14 April 1933. What Agache had identified as the “mistake of 1925” would therefore be repeated. The Corporative Union of French Art accused the small business owners and merchants of Paris of having pressured the government into locating the exhibition in an area that best suited their own narrow interests, that is, in the heart of the city. The Musée Social published a protest against using open spaces, which were in notoriously short supply in Paris, for the exposition and reiterated its desire to see the exhibition held on a site chosen in conformity with the Regional Plan of Paris—but to no avail.

The art world was dismayed. To remedy the situation, artists published demands to move the responsibility for the exposition from the Ministry of Commerce to the Ministry of National Education, where it would be under the direct authority of the Academy of the Beaux-Arts. The fiery deputy Anatole de Monzie, Beaux-Arts director and minister of national education, created an advisory board for the exposition in support of the artists. In July he announced that Letrosne and Gréber’s plans would be “amended.” There were rumors about a plan that “would encompass all of Paris.” As revealed later, the name of one member of de Monzie’s advisory board had been kept confidential: Auguste Perret, who made another proposal for the exposition.

**The Perret Proposal**

Perret’s plan was an unusually ambitious work of urbanism that would have affected the entire southern half of the city. The project, finally unveiled in the autumn of 1933, used the exposition as a pretext to create new avenues on a northwest–southeast axis between the Porte Dauphine and the Porte d’Italie, traversing the Colline de Chaillot and the Champs de Mars. This powerful continuous movement of avenues would have added a magnificent perspective to Haussmannian Paris, well within the classical spirit of the city. Perret’s idea was to create “the Champs-Élysées of the Left Bank” (Figure 10). In an interview about the project, he stated:

Yes, I pull down the Trocadéro, the sad remains of the 1878 Exhibition. Yes, I eliminate the barracks of the École Militaire, which block the fine Gabriel façade. And this is what I replace them with: the Trocadéro becomes a Palais where all the large museums scattered in Paris are centralized. From the architectural point of view … the plan includes at the center a colonnade allowing a wide view of the Gardens.

The colonnade, 23 meters high, would carry an attic 7 meters high containing skylighted exhibition spaces (Figure 11). Two museums would be set on each side of the 190-meter-long and 30-meter-wide portico, supporting a third museum. Two wide, square courts would house important large-scale sculpture. Facing the Seine, the gardens would descend to a double Iéna bridge, crossing over to the Champ de Mars, where not a single tree would be removed.

To this visionary program, Perret added a huge auditorium on the Avenue du Président Wilson; he also proposed covering the Gare aux Charbons at the Champs de Mars.
(something done only after World War II) and raising an experimental low-cost structure for workers’ housing over the station. On the other side, east of the Eiffel Tower, he projected a “French village” where the old government Garde-Meuble du Mobilier National (Government Repository for Furniture) was located. Perret concluded, “We will put together our prefabricated buildings on-site, as is done with a log cabin, just three months prior to the Exhibition.”

In an attempt at social integration, his transversal avenue of the Left Bank would establish a direct connection between the working-class districts of La Bierre (Place d’Italie) and the luxurious avenues of the west. From the standpoint of the exposition itself and its links with the urban fabric, the Perret proposal had some real advantages. With regard to city traffic, the plan did not spread out along the quays. It would not interfere with traffic except at a few fixed points, where underpasses or overpasses could be constructed that would remain after the exposition and could easily deal with the problem. Perret and de Monzie believed the 1937 Exposition would also provoke a renewal of French architecture, while its construction could provide jobs for thousands of workers and artists who were “eager to live,” to use an expression heard at the heated artists’ meetings.

By 1 December 1933 the city council had not yet taken a position regarding the Perret plan, despite an ultimatum laid down by de Monzie in September. The council maintained its support for the less threatening Gréber proposal. In effect, the stalemate amounted to a confrontation between two teams of architects—one supported by the left-leaning national government, the other preferred by the conservative city council—reflecting a political cleavage between national and local governments.

De Monzie was trapped: he could not move without the consent of the city of Paris, which owned the land, but he refused to admit defeat and called for, and obtained, help from the other ministries concerned. In January 1934, the minister of war agreed to pull down the barracks at the École Militaire, the national government and the parliament were getting used to the idea of the Trocadéro’s demise, and the press appeared increasingly determined to support de Monzie. The confirmation of the Perret proposal seemed imminent.

The Cancellation of the Exposition

At this point, all the planning and maneuvering collapsed. The “wave” of fascist riots of February 1934 swept away the government. The riots were thwarted, but the immediate result of the crisis was the fall of the government, and in the midst of the political disarray the planned exposition was canceled. Gaston Doumergue, a left-leaning politician and a former president of the Republic, replaced the Radical Party’s Édouard Daladier. It soon became known that not only had the Perret project definitely been abandoned but also the exhibition itself had been canceled. There would be no 1937 Exposition.

The resulting commotion was huge. A storm of protests burst forth, and artists started to organize. The rallying center for artists, writers, and architects was the Maison de la Culture, which by 1936 numbered seventy thousand members. Artists and architects petitioned the government, demanding the reinstatement of the exposition, at the same time that they held daily antifascist rallies for the “defense of the Republic.” On 23 March Comœdia ran an
article titled “Whatever Else, There Will Be a 1937 Exposition,” in which critic Yvanhoe Rambosson began:

God helps those who help themselves, says the proverb. This is the stance assumed by the Union Corporative de l’Art Français, which yesterday held its first plenary meeting in the offices of the Commissariat Général de l’Exposition de 1937. This meeting of the entire “nation des arts” formally decided and proclaimed its determination to unite in realizing an exhibition in 1937, regardless of the position the government or the city of Paris may assume. Rambosson concluded: “This is a decision of capital importance because it represents the first serious promise to date that an exhibition, uncertain until now, will actually take place.”

Artists and industrial designers distributed leaflets in protest of the canceled exposition. The Union Corporative de l’Art Français set up a temporary Admissions Committee to collect the names of artists and organizations that wanted to take part in the exposition, and members of the union were urged to apply by 25 March 1934. Two months into the drama, with incessant threats of strikes, the government finally retracted its decision to cancel the exposition. On 15 May 1934, the government and the city reached an agreement to reinstate the project. This episode was of crucial importance, since it was thanks to this grassroots movement of rare strength that the exhibition was reinstated, creating significant avenues of influence for the progressive artistic world. Its influence was reinforced by the rising wave of the Front Populaire, with which it shared common causes. As the painter Amédée Ozenfant observed, “This surge of the heart, of the spirit and of the arms, helped the Front Populaire contribute to this gigantic exhibition ... in a tragic moment for the world... . The rebirth of a collectivist spirit in France started on February 12, 1934, when the counterdemonstrations of the Left managed to undercut the attempted coup d’état by the Far Right.”

Most of the cultural policies, including pressure on the exposition leadership, were formulated in the Maison de la Culture, which relocated from a working-class district to the prestigious vicinity of the Champs-Élysées as its popularity grew. Under the circumstances, the choice of Edmond Labbé for the new commissioner general (replacing a discredited Berthod) was conditioned by the new cultural and political climate, in marked distinction to the conservative ideology that had defined the Colonial Exposition in 1931. Yet, in the wake of the “surge” that ultimately reinstated the project, the exhibition still did not have a name, having had too many, and it was no closer to having a clear purpose. Only the choice of the site survived—the same one that had been used in the two previous centuries.

The parliament voted the project into law on 6 July 1934. By an ironic coincidence, the Regional Plan of Paris was officially filed the day before the agreement regarding the exhibition was reached. Labbé formed a new executive team. The minister of commerce signed a decree defining the responsibilities of the various departments. A new advisory board was named, and the two chief architects, Letrosne and Gréber, prepared the exposition’s site plans. De Monzie, no longer a minister, would write some time later: “The [Perret] plan I had conceived was probably too ambitious for 1937. But, once again, wisdom was sought after in pettiness.” At the very top of the exposition leadership, however, some inconsistencies still lingered. As head of the jury for the 1932 site competition, Léon had claimed that “the present gardens [of the Trocadéro] blossom as a glorious entity, and they appear difficult to use; the Eiffel Tower, in addition, has been there for more than forty years, and it would seem difficult to install an event dedicated to modern art around this structure so well known in the world.” As deputy commissioner general of the exhibition, Léon declared, “In front of the Iéna Bridge, the Eiffel Tower, that marvel of French engineering, will celebrate in 1937 the fiftieth anniversary of its construction.” He was clearly trying to find a rationale for a site that had never been fully convincing, but the choice had been made, and too much time had already been wasted. Bypassing anything approaching a competition, but faithful to a certain populism, Labbé set up a “suggestion office” for the exhibition, calling on all who so desired to send him their ideas for the exposition. According to architecture historian Pierre du Colombier, “the worst follies” piled up at that office.

One such “folly” came from Le Corbusier, who proposed a housing slab one kilometer long straddling Bastion Kellermann in the vicinity of the Place d’Italie. In his correspondence with the exposition leadership, he claimed that an unspecified “Grande Industrie” would foot the bill. When no industry, small or large, came to his rescue, he proposed two skyscrapers that would be left unfinished. The goal was demonstrate to the public two modern building systems. As no government funds were to be found—in addition to the city’s vivid opposition to such constructions, given that it had previously voted that no permanent buildings would be left after the exposition—the painter Fernand Léger, a friend of Le Corbusier, suggested that the skyscrapers could be cheaper to build if they were made of wood. Taking this joke seriously, Le Corbusier asked the firm Charpentiers de Paris to give him a cost estimate for a wooden high-rise, which would demonstrate the advantages of steel and concrete as building materials.
Another among many suggestions came from a self-appointed initiative committee, the Comité d’Initiative, supported by the periodical *La Cité Moderne*. Although in favor of “celebrating steel at the Exhibition, … as a material so specific to our modern times, and which we recommend should be represented at the Exhibition by an outstanding construction,” the committee suggested that the Eiffel Tower be torn down—“a demolition that,” the committee admitted with largesse, “may still temporarily make some minds recoil.”69 In its place, a more appropriate skyscraper would be built, much taller than the demolished tower. The skyscraper would “put steel to its best use” but would be veneered with stone, “in keeping with our national taste” (Figure 12).70

On 10 September 1934 Labbé published his exhibition program. The exposition was now christened the International Exposition of Arts and Techniques Applied to Modern Life (Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques Appliqués à la Vie Moderne), its final name. Significantly, neither *arts décoratifs* nor *arts appliqués* appeared in the title, indicating the influence the progressive art world had on the exposition leadership. Five days later, the fair’s commissariat opened the first design competition for two permanent structures, a city museum of modern art and a national museum of modern art, to be built adjacent to each other on the Seine’s Right Bank.71

The Last of the Beaux-Arts Competitions

The history of the 1934–35 competitions and their impact on the exhibition of 1937 is the history of the dislocation and disintegration of the Perret plan.72 It was a dislocation to the extent that the new program spared the old Trocadéro and thus moved the site of the new museums up the Seine, and it was a disintegration in that the land made available for the exhibition was dispersed while the number of proposed museums, and hence the magnitude of the cultural undertaking, was sharply reduced.

The competition for the museums of modern art attracted a total of twenty-eight entries, the work of three hundred architects. The winning designs reveal that the Perret plan had not died in the minds of most of the entrants. In many designs, Perret’s colonnaded portico remained, even though it no longer made much sense given the museums’ new location on the banks of the river. Instead of opening onto a
grand panoramic view of Paris, the portico now faced an unimpressive 100-yard drop to the very edge of the Seine. Most designers tried to remedy this situation with forced perspectives—removing trees, giving esplanades impossible widths, and having graceful bridges leap over the Seine but land nowhere.

The team of Jean-Claude Dondel, André Auber, Paul Viard, and Marcel Dastugue won first prize (Figure 13). Whatever merit may be found in their project today, some contemporaries considered awarding first prize to this entry an act bordering on lunacy. “It would be madness,” wrote a critic in *Beaux-Arts* magazine, “to build this project.”⁷³ Architect Édouard Debat-Ponsan, for his part, commented in response to a survey conducted by *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* among architects who participated in the competition, “I think I am not wrong in stating that first prize was given to a pretty drawing made up of a square, stairs, and a big hall.”⁷⁴ Le Corbusier saw “just another street; I thought there were already too many streets in Paris.”⁷⁵ Perret was more categorical: “The construction of the two museums on the Avenue de Tokyo must be stopped. The site is absolutely detrimental to the preservation of paintings: just clay washed by fogs from the river, sunken under a 12-meter-high abutment. The artworks will be drowned in fog.”⁷⁶ Le Corbusier, who was a loser in the competition, summed it all up in a few words: “We’ve been had like rats!”⁷⁷ There was evidence of infringement of competition rules, raising doubts as to the presumed anonymity of entrants and the fairness of the proceedings. According to the press, the jury members knew the names of the entries’ authors well before the end of the proceedings.⁷⁸ Even the “establishment” magazine *L’Architecture* admitted as much, if otherwise praising the results.⁷⁹ A more general problem, because it was to be repeated in subsequent competitions, was the hypocrisy toward young, less well-established architects. While loudly proclaiming that these competitions should be a forum where the largest number of ideas and new talent would have the opportunity to be heard, the competition organizers began by telling young architects to temper their youthful passions and associate with architects whose value—and above all experience—had been proven by time.⁸⁰ Another problem was the jury selection. As art critic Georges Brunon-Guardia summed it up sarcastically in *Nouvelles Littéraires*, “The jury [was] made up of fifty-seven...
members, several of whom [were] even competent."81 The jury consisted mostly of national and city authorities, holders of elective offices or administrators, and included the presidents of fifteen professional organizations. Absent from the jury were representatives of notable art institutions such as the UAM, which had provided a jury member for the 1932 competition. Among the significant names passed over were Le Corbusier, Rob Mallet-Stevens, Georges-Henri Pingusson, Bossu, and Michel Roux-Spitz, to say nothing of Beaudouin and Lods.

With the competition for the two art museums over, a new series of competitions opened in December 1934. These competitions were intended not to select projects but rather to identify architects who would later receive commissions for the exhibition. The contests followed one upon the other at a breathtaking pace, ending on 25 March 1935.

Competition for Camouflaging the Trocadéro
To begin, the 1878 Trocadéro Palace—also known as the Palais de Chaillot, or Chaillot Palace—had to be temporarily camouflaged in a “pertinent 1937 style.”82 This idea, it seems, came from Letrosne, whose master plan had assigned a select location to the Trocadéro Palace. Considering that this exhibition was expected to celebrate modern life, something had to be done to conceal the obsolete style of Davioud’s Trocadéro, a structure that had already served that purpose in several world expositions. Entrants were therefore asked to “present a proposal for a temporary solution to completely mask the present façades,” achieving, as specified, a “1937 style” at “almost no cost” (Figures 14 and 15).83 Several hundred architects took up the challenge, the greatest number of entrants of all the competitions for the 1937 Exposition. “It was, no doubt, the most exciting competition,” exclaimed the conservative L’Architecture without irony.84

More than a few voices were raised against this “odious caricature of an assignment unworthy of a great city,” as Brunon-Guardia declared.85 Ironically, earlier proposals that had included the Trocadéro’s demolition had been countered with assertions that the price of such an undertaking was prohibitive. As the architecture critic Albert Louvet added in L’Architecture, “Where would we end up if we were to embark
on the destruction of monuments that, for better or worse, have ceased to please? Remember that not so long ago, when the architecture of the Middle Ages was held in diminished esteem, there were architects who would see Notre-Dame disappear without displeasure. Of the three hundred entries, the jury retained eight. Among the entries were “proposals to please all tastes,” as L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui noted sardonically—from a proposal with the appearance of a cathedral to an amusement park complete with roller coasters cascading down the Trocadéro.

Louis-Hippolyte Boileau, Jacques Carlu, and Léon Azéma, one of the award-winning teams, hid the old building within a shell exposed to expressionistic light effects recalling Fritz Lang’s 1927 film Metropolis (Figure 16). At the center of their rendering, a huge, backlit figure rose high above the camouflaged towers, and moving searchlights crisscrossed the sky in a cinematic effect. The general layout reflected Gréber’s early master plan, with two “foreign pavilions” symmetrically closing the composition along the Seine in anticipation of the future siting for the Soviet and German Pavilions.

The firm Herr, Roth, and Thibault won second prize. These architects saw their entry as not only providing “effective camouflage of the Trocadéro, but using the body of this landmark as a surface for exhibitions.” Images would be projected on a large, screen-like waterfall surface flowing down the Trocadéro. Joseph Marrast, who had worked with Prost in Morocco, hid the Trocadéro with a massive construction of such “sovereign dignity” it resembled a Romanesque church (Figure 17). Indeed, Marrast seemed to have appreciated this similarity as well, as he declared to the jury, “With regard to my proposal the best I can say is that the project was drawn up not as a temporary camouflage but as a permanent building.” In La Construction Moderne, critic Jean Favier asserted that despite “a somewhat overly religious appearance, this project [conveyed] a powerful effect. [It was] skillfully rendered—exquisite design.” His colleague Louvet in L’Architecture was even more convinced by the project. In his view, “the Trocadéro [had been] clad in a monumental construction endowed with a strong character; the façades are well proportioned and beautifully ornamented.” This “fine, skillful, and artistic” design had only one defect: “In the perspectival rendering, the masses of houses in the background were replaced by masses of trees, making the design a bit removed from reality.” All in all, the quality of criticism in these journals matched the quality of the scrutinized competition entries. The project coded Par Avion by Maurice Boutterin, recalling American art deco precedents, had, according to Louvet, an “uncomplicated and generous” arrangement, distinguished by “an effective camouflage of the body of the building and its towers.” It offered “an attractive appearance seen from the Champ de Mars”; in a word, it was a “very good proposal.” The Trois Cocottes entry by Charles Halley stood out for its “good layout, framed, all the way down to the Seine,” by four well-distributed palaces; a generous arrangement with central waterfalls framed by two broad avenues. In short, the project had “an excellent overall appearance, of a generous composition and very decorative.” “Generosity” seemed to be a well-regarded virtue among the critics, as it was repeatedly mentioned in the reviews. There was also a
project offering “nighttime effects of admirable virtuosity,” while another was “very skillful but confused.”

More courageous competitors risked having their entries disqualified because they transgressed the propositions of the competition. The respected Niermans brothers, Jean and Édouard, who had worked with the Perret brothers in Algiers, referred to Auguste Perret’s earlier proposal through a compromise between its radical approach and the preservation of the past. They kept the building’s “belly”—the most expensive part—but did away with the two towers and the wings. This central area was to become a museum of comparative sculpture. Under the esplanade, a garage would be built for twelve hundred cars, and, referring back once again to the Perret plan, two museums would be placed symmetrically, one at each end of the main building.

Publication of the results of the competition was followed by a storm of public indignation. For example, art critic Claude Roger-Marx wrote, “Here is the marvelous heresy we are offered: camouflaging the Trocadéro, an exhibition building, for the duration of the 1937 Exhibition in order to
later give back to this temporary structure its permanent ugliness.99

Under the pressure of general scorn, in which the noted satirist Jean Effel joined (Figure 18), the exhibition authorities reversed their position: the Trocadéro would not be touched; it would “undergo only interior changes.” More precisely, the landmark would be “presented,” but not masked, by a simple screen built between it and the Seine, which, as Roger-Marx added sardonically, “would in no way prevent the monument from remaining visible at the center of the panorama it crowns in such an undeniably impressive manner.”98 This decision was announced on 2 February 1935, only a few days after the publication of the competition results. The immense and expensive effort asked of France’s architects, amid an economic crisis, seemed all for naught. A few weeks later, things took another dramatic turn when the commissariat announced that the Trocadéro Palace would be demolished.99 Pierre Vago, editor of the progressive L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, declared ironi
cally, “The Trocadéro, which after all, crowns in such a majestic way the panorama of Passy-Chaillot, the silhouette dear to [the art critic] Clément Vautel and the authorities of the 1937 Exhibition, is destined to disappear.”100

In fact, a compromise had been reached. The Trocadéro’s central body and its towers (“the lobster,” as Perret called it) would be razed, and the wings would be camouflage
d, but this time in a permanent and “really modern” way.101 The arms would be broadened and veneered in white marble. The project was entrusted to Carlu, who was named chief architect of the Palais de Chaillot thanks to his title of architect of civil and national palace buildings and his friendship with Léon, the current deputy commissioner general of the exposition. Architects protested the arbitrary choice of Carlu and his team. L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui was the forum for a heated exchange between the Carlu team and those who believed that the position of chief architect should have been granted to someone who had opposed camouflage from the outset and had advocated the removal of the old structure. Worse, Carlu was accused of plagiarizing the ideas of passed-over entrants, such as Charles Siclis, who was excluded from the camouflage competition for having refused to camouflage.102

The leading names of the French and international art worlds published an indignant statement headlined “Protest against the Imminent Reconstruction of the Trocadéro,” in the January 1936 issue of L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui:

The artists, writers, and art critics whose signatures appear below rise up with determination against the present plan for the reconstruction of the Trocadéro. Without questioning the choice of architects, they consider that an important problem of city planning distinctly exceeds the framework of just one exhibition, and that, in this matter, all improvisation is dangerous. They consider the mongrel solution adopted to represent a true waste of public money and a serious mistake. They call, finally, on the highest authorities of the nation and the city to undertake with urgency all the measures required to stop a badly conceived and already discredited initiative.103

Although no one supported the Carlu team’s design publicly, the city decided to build the project.

**Competition for the Entrance to the Exposition**

Before the Trocadéro controversy came to a conclusion, the last competition of the 1934 series was announced, a contest to address the main entrance to the exposition from Trocadéro Square. In order to understand the difficulty of this assignment, one must remember that the fate of the Trocadéro itself had not yet been decided. In other words, this was an entrance with no entry: the competitors had to squeeze around the narrow arcades of the old Trocadéro. They were instructed not to change the overall design of the square, but to place at its center a structure that would serve as a marker of the exhibition and be visible from all of the five avenues that met there. This structure could include ornaments, providing that nothing “blocked the sidewalks.”104 In short, the competition sought a beautiful esquisse for a “decorative” program—an ideal topic, the press claimed, for recent Beaux-Arts graduates who excelled in the famous concours d’esquisse of the school.105 The competition rules explicitly stated that the drawings must “resemble those of the École des Beaux-Arts.” Albert Laprade and Léon Bazin suggested—“with excellent taste”—a finely crafted tower at the center of the square, complete with lavish floral decoration.106 The trees at the center of the square were preserved and spanned by a series of arcades. This adornment allowed for a rich manipulation of light, a device Laprade used
frequently. Later, Laprade was asked to erect on that plaza a pavilion dedicated to peace. With the central body of Davioud’s Chaillot Palace now gone, Laprade started the grand axis of peace with a semicircular pavilion (Pavillon de la Paix) open to the Eiffel Tower, thus forming a symbolic entrance to the exposition (Figure 19). Mallet-Stevens closed the other end of the axis (the Avenue de la Paix) with a similar curved Palais de la Lumière—therefore, light was associated with peace in fulfillment of Gréber’s master plan. In 1936, Jean Giraudoux pointed with scathing irony to such futile hope with the premiere of his prophetic drama *The Trojan War Will Not Take Place*—a doomed plea for peace just three years ahead of the start of World War II.108

When the results of the competition for the entrance were revealed on 15 February 1935, once again there were roars of protest. Competitors were enraged by the breach of their anonymity and by the jury’s systematic violation of other competition rules.

**The Second Series of 1934–35 Competitions**

In the second series of competitions, the last contest represented a turning point, defining thematically and aesthetically both the exhibition and the position of its leaders toward modernity. The competition was dedicated to the exploration of light at the exposition. Gréber, by then chief architect of the exposition, decided that the exposition’s uses of sound, light, and water should be designed and orchestrated down to the smallest detail.

The competition’s focus was the illumination of the Seine. Some architects hoped to flood the bottom of the river with light. Among the winners, Beaudouin and Lods’s proposal stood apart. The watercolors they submitted were so beautiful that it was decided they would be used for the official exhibition poster (Figure 20). Beaudouin and Lods’s plans for the illumination were described as a “magical vision,” an “orgy of colors.” Skillfully manipulated artificial clouds set ablaze with light produced the widest variety of colored water motifs. As Beaudouin and Lods explained:

> Our effort will be to compose a great symphony of light and water, sustained and exalted by music. Each night, after dark, we plan to organize the greatest variety of pageantries both in programming and layout, but always involving the entire exhibition. The movement of music, light, and water could be conducted by radio from a single podium set, either in Rome, Beirut, or New York.109
Figure 20 Eugène Beaudouin and Marcel Lods, competition entry for the 1937 Exposition’s illumination, May 1935 (Archives Nationales, Service Interministériel des Archives de France, Paris, F12-12443; photo by author).

Figure 21 Eugène Beaudouin and Marcel Lods, light spectacle, night view, 1937 Exposition, Paris (Photo Chevojon, author’s collection).
The Seine would become a brilliant orchestra, performing music scores for illuminated sound and hydraulic effects. The combined features would be set against a background of fountains and water jets intimately synchronized with light from different sources and peppered with fireworks (Figure 21). The plan was accepted as submitted and then was scrupulously implemented at the exposition. The most ephemeral architecture at the exposition was trusted to the two most frankly rationalist architects, among the very few in France, who competed; this was not the least of the paradoxes embedded in the early stages of the exposition’s invention.

The brothers Raoul and Lionel Brandon, who won second prize, approached water and light in true architectural terms—that is, by treating those materials as if they were solids. There was no question of unbridled movement in their project. Theirs were calm visions: vaulted cascades, reflected light illuminating façades, searchlights turned upward, to cast parallel columns supporting the heavens, as made chillingly famous by Albert Speer’s “cathedral of light.”

Conclusion
By May 1935, the competitions for the 1937 International Exposition of Arts and Techniques Applied to Modern Life came to an end. In Comœdia Rambosson raised the question of whether it was possible for anyone to make responsible judgments in the face of 250 entries to the competitions, totaling some one thousand drawings. Once again, “renderings” carried the day, in the well-established Beaux-Arts tradition. What was not yet known was that the entries submitted in these competitions, arguably the last “Beaux-Arts” exercises on a grand scale in France, were a great disappointment to the exhibition leadership. While a number of competition winners received commissions for the upcoming exposition, Labbé and Gréber had to undertake serious revision of the competition results in order to incorporate the most progressive architects who had been left out of the competitions.

Both Labbé and Gréber had clearly expressed their interest in committing the exposition to a modern vision of architecture and art. They understood the significance of the union of the arts in the late 1930s project of modernity. If their vision of modernity was eclectic because of their pluralistic approach, this did not diminish their concern about having inherited, through the competitions, a number of schemes by architects whose qualifications as modernists were questionable. Even greater was their concern that they had been deprived of the contributions of the most radical proponents of a modernity understood as a permanent quest for innovation. Throughout 1936, Labbé struggled to set aside funds to commission work from such architects as Le Corbusier, Georges-Henri Pingusson, and Rob Mallet-Stevens, none of whom had been successful in the competitions.111 Faced with inconclusive results from the 1934–35 competitions and limited by the imperatives of an economic crisis, the leadership of the exhibition drew on a well-established tradition of the French exposition universelle: the use of light displays. Gréber and Labbé opted for light as the most suitable way of referring to the Enlightenment—as the foundation of the Republic—and to technological modernity.

Ultimately, the leadership managed to include the best modernist French artists and architects in the wake of the demands of the nation des artistes, as the press referred to the solidarity movement of artists for the defense of the exposition.112 Grounded in the tradition of the Enlightenment (peace and light), the exposition leadership translated the concept of the Siècle des Lumières into its most direct physical form. Electric light was to provide that power of innovation, transcendence, and fascination that would connect the exhibition in the most immediate way to both its origins and modernity.113 Labbé later wrote in his general report on the exposition, “We chose as a goal the apotheosis of that supernatural force: Electricity.”114 If not necessarily a “supernatural force,” electricity was a welcome deus ex machina.

On the occasion of the 1937 Exposition, the “reinvention” of Paris, the City of Light, was a missed opportunity. The “reinvented” Paris emerged only as a mirage in phantasmagoric light pageantries for the duration of the exposition—the last international exposition held in France.115 The never-resolved plan for Grand Paris remains to this day a matter of contention.116

Notes
2. The Artists’ Plan proposed tracing large rectilinear and radial axes throughout the city. Napoleon’s consulate started the monumental Rue de Rivoli perspective along the extended Louvre and the Tuileries gardens, but not until Haussmann’s radical modernization of the French capital did it become a major east–west artery of Paris. Also under Haussmann, Hector Horeau—an implicit critic of the prefect—advocated a position halfway between Haussmann’s concept of “urban regularization” and the tabula rasa of the future CIAM urbanists, including Le Corbusier. Horeau’s advocacy of affordable housing for the Parisian working class, however, represented a shift in the urbanists’ discourse that remains a central concern to this day. For a close review of these complex urban discourses, see, among others, Georges Duby, Jacques Le Goff, et al., Histoire de la France urbaine, vols. 3–4 (Paris: Seuil, 1980–85). See also Eugène Hénard’s recently reprinted Etude sur l’architecture et les transformations de Paris (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 2013).


8. The Musée Social was founded in 1894 as a nonprofit private foundation with the aim of displaying permanently the documents of the Pavilion of Social Economy at the 1867 Exposition Universelle, which Frédéric le Play conceived within a Saint-Simonian industrial ideology. In addition to its decisive role in the development of urbanism as a socially conscious science, the Musée Social played an important part in introducing in France the concept of Howardian garden cities. See Colette Chambelland, ed., Le Musée social en son temps (Paris: Presses de l’École Normale Supérieure, 1998), 402; Janet Horne, Le Musée social: Aux origines de l'état providence (Paris: Belin, 2004), 383; Susanna Magri, Les laboratoires de la réforme de l'habitation populaire en France: De la société française des habitations à bon marché à la section d'hygiène urbaine et rurale du Musée social, 1889–1909 (Paris: Ministère de l’Équipement, du Logement, des Transports et du Tourisme, 1995), 104.


10. Le Corbusier, 1937 Expo. Int. de l’Habitation Paris (15 June 1932), author’s collection. This work was also reproduced in L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui 9 (Dec. 1932), 89–90, and later in a special issue of the same journal on Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret.


12. The International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation was established in 1922 and counted such distinguished members as Henri Bergson, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Béla Bartók, Thomas Mann, Salvador de Madariaga, and Paul Valéry. Jean-Jacques Renollet, L’UNESCO subîtée: La Société des Nations et la coopération intellectuelle, 1919–1946 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999). The intent of such an exposition was to give “a response” to the 1913 Chicago World’s Fair, which was perceived as dealing only with the technical and material dimension of a “Century of Progress” without reference to the broader philosophical consequences of such progress. For a study of the fair in Chicago, see Lisa Schrenk, Building a Century of Progress: The Architecture of Chicago’s 1933–34 World’s Fair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).


16. Ibid., 53. Today’s Grande Arche de la Défense is situated beyond this point and is considered to be the end of the historic axis that starts at the Louvre.


20. Ibid., 121.


22. Ibid., 122.


28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 88.

30. Ibid.


32. “Concours pour l’Exposition de 1937: Jean Bossu,” L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui 9 (Dec. 1932), 89. Lateria, as Paris was known, was founded as a Roman castrum on the Left Bank of the Seine; the cardo became today’s Rue Saint-Jacques and the decumanum today’s Rue des Écoles. Bossu’s cardo took up the Roman axis.


34. Ibid., 5.

35. Ibid., 3.

36. Ibid., 5.
37. The president of the Société Française des Urbanistes was to declare later regarding this project, *Expositions Internationales et Urbanisme: “A contemporary of ours, acting in a country that the proletarian dictatorship had renovated, a country where, indeed, everything had to be created from scratch, almost launched in France a cruel fashion. In order to urbanize Paris, this Nero without torches anticipated the elimination of everything that was there, demanding that the place be wiped out.” Urbanisme 17–18 (Aug.–Sept. 1933), 246.


42. See the monthly column on the exposition by Yvanhoe Ramboisson in *Comœdia*, Mar. 1934, 9.

43. Ibid. Perret’s name was probably kept confidential because of an ongoing conflict between the government and the city council.

44. In 1987 Perret’s project was found in the exposition papers at the Archives Nationales and transferred to the Institut Français d’Architecture (IFA). The idea of a monumental axis in this part of Paris was not new. As early as 1911, Councillor Charrier, who influenced Perret, revived Haussmann’s project of a large avenue directly connecting the Porte Maillot and the Front Populaire, in *Interview with Perret in Paris 1937 Exhibition.* Le Corbusier revealed on that occasion that he thing that was there, demanding that the place be wiped out.” Urbanisme 17–18 (Aug.–Sept. 1933), 246.

45. Interview with Perret in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* 3 (2 Mar. 1935), 12. The museums were the Musée Guimet, the Musée d’Ennoeu, the Musée Henner, the Musée Gustave-Moreau, the Musée du Luxembourg, and the Jeu-de-Paume. The Marine and Ethnographic Museums were already located on this site.

46. Ibid., 13.

47. An underpass was built for the 1937 Exposition (with the German and Soviet Pavilions on top of it) at the former Tokyo Quay, facing the Eiffel Tower.


51. The government decree was published in the media a week later.


53. The prospect of the exposition was a source of hope for unemployed artists and architects after the 1929 stock market crash, the full blow of which devastated Europe. Mary McLeod, “Le Corbusier and Anarchosyndicalism” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1985), 202.


56. Ibid., 7.

57. Ibid.


61. Labbé, who was educated at the École Normale Supérieure, ended his career as general director of the Ministry of Technical Education. He was recalled from retirement to help solve the crisis of the 1937 Exposition. On the Colonial Exposition of 1931, see Patricia Morton, *Hybrid Modernities: Architecture and Representation at the 1931 Colonial Exposition, Paris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).


68. This project was contemporaneous with Le Corbusier’s Ville Radieuse, derived from his proposals for Moscow. The same year, an issue of *Urbanisme* derided his Ville Radieuse by calling it Ville Hombreuse, or City of Darkness, due to the fact that, given the height of the buildings, the green spaces between them would be cast in shadow for most of the year. For a detailed account of this episode, see Udovički-Selb, “Le Corbusier and the Paris 1937 Exhibition.” Le Corbusier revealed on that occasion that he was not, as he pretended to the exposition leadership, as interested in the materials’ virtues as he was captivated by the volumetric effect such building would have on the skyline of Paris.


70. See the brochure *Au cœur de Paris: Exposition générale internationale de Paris, Exposition Internationale de 1937 à Paris, Archives Nationales, F12-12442.* What is particularly interesting about this project—the foolishness of the idea notwithstanding—is its markedly “American” look. The École des Beaux-Arts had educated generations of American architects, and it was now reflecting back its aura of modernity through the filter of American prestige. See Jacques Gréber, *L’Architecture aux USA: La force d’expansion du génie français* (Paris: Payot, 1920).

71. “Concours pour les deux musée d’art moderne,” *L’Architecture* 9 (Sept. 1934), 23. Creating two museums was a compromise solution to satisfy the city of Paris, which was giving the site for the national museum to the government free of charge.
72. The series of competitions launched in October 1934 and completed in May 1935. It included competitions involving the following: (1) two museums of modern art (city and state), (2) the Trocadéro Palace (camouflaging the existing façades, redesigning the gardens down to the river, and redesigning the interior of the concert hall interior; the first of these two projects could be treated separately or in conjunction), (3) the exposition’s foreign sections, (4) decorating the Eiffel Tower, (5) decorating the Trocadéro Square, (6) the Sceaux Gardens, (7) the Seine (designing the use of water and light for nighttime festivities), (8) the Transportation and Tourism Exhibition, (9) the Applied Arts and Manual Arts Exhibition, (10) adaptation and decoration of the Alma Bridge, (11) country life and private architecture (this competition was canceled), (12) the Regional Center, and (13) the adaptation and decoration of the Passy Bridge (treated in conjunction with competition 10).

75. Le Corbusier, in ibid., 23.
77. Le Corbusier, in ibid., 23.
78. Ibid., 27.
80. Ibid., 34.
82. Gabriel Davioud’s Trocadéro Palace was created as a temporary structure on the occasion of the 1878 Exposition Universelle. Although it was meant to be demolished immediately after the exposition, it remained in use until 1936.
84. Ibid.
89. Joseph Marrast, quoted in ibid., 83.
91. The only two journals that dealt with the competitions in a systematic way were *La Construction Moderne* and *L’Architecture*—both self-assured representatives of the conservative architectural establishment.
93. Ibid., 119.
94. Ibid., 120.
95. Ibid., 121.
96. Ibid., 130.
98. Ibid.
102. In his proposal, Siclis tore down the central part of the building but retained the two towers, just as Mallet-Stevens and Carlu had done before him in a September 1934 proposal. The two proposals also had in common a large underground, or partially underground, theater designed to take advantage of the steep grade of the gardens.
103. “Protest against the Imminent Reconstruction of the Trocadéro,” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* (Jan. 1936), insert. The document was signed by writers, painters and sculptors, art critics, and theater directors, but the architects were not invited, for obvious reasons. The writers included Louis Gillet, François Mauriac, Pol Neveux, André Suarès, Jean Cocteau, Pierre Crenage, Jean de Fabrègues, François Le Gris, Henri-Philippe Livet, Jean Loisly, Gabriel Marcel, Thierry Maulnier, Louis Salleron, Robert Valéry-Radot, Henri Martineau, and Pierre Pascal. Significantly, most of the writers were not aligned with the political Left, as might have been expected; the list represented a broad political spectrum. The painters and sculptors included Jacques-Émile Blanche, Maurice Denis, Edmond Aman-Jean, Édouard Vuillard, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, André Derain, Georges Rouault, Raoul Dufy, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque, Marcel Gromaire, Édouard Goerg, Jean Lurcat, Cassandre, André Lhote, Roger Chaplain-Midy, Aristide Maillol, Charles Despiau, Henri Laurens, Jacques Lipschitz, Joseph Csaky, Morice Lipsi, Osopi Zadkine, and Marcel Gimond. Among the art critics who signed were Bernard Champagne, Pierre du Colombier, Maximilien Gauthier, Waldemar-George, André Salmon, and Georges Brunon-Guardia. The theater directors included Jacques Copeau, Charles Dullin, and Louis Jouvet.
105. Ibid.
107. The 1937 Palace of Light by Mallet-Stevens replicated the position of Eugène Hénard’s Palace of Electricity at the 1900 World’s Fair in Paris.
111. Charlotte Perriand’s participation in the Pavilion of Agriculture was part of a Popular Front government program. Perriand was one of the founders of the UAM.
112. In this context, the left-leaning head of the École des Beaux-Arts, Georges Huisman, played a major role as he mediated between the avant-garde artists (notably Le Corbusier) and the exposition leadership.
113. As early as 1934, Le Corbusier, then the exposition’s first chief architect, proposed combining all the elements of light, water, color, and sound in one single architectural study. Following suit, the exposition’s first commissioner general insisted that light become a central feature of the exposition. Bonnier, a government administrator, proposed that the majority of the pavilions be “made out of glass and steel,” most notably those built under the Eiffel Tower, now destined to be the “anchor” (le clou) of the exposition. Depôt du Conseil des Ministres, Archives Nationales, P60 945–51.
115. Some visual echoes of these light pageantries have survived to the present day, such as the light displays on the Eiffel Tower. The most brilliant reenactment of the 1937 phantasmagoria occurred at midnight of 31 December 1999 in celebration of the new millennium.