by artist Tracey Emin. The tawdriness of mass tourism in Benidorm and Blackpool did not feature in the exhibition either, which is a pity, since there is a whole subculture of the seaside that has played an important role in working-class myths since the war. Several generations of young people had formative experiences as redcoats (resort marshals) in the Butlin's holiday camps, and this was barely mentioned. Similarly, Club Med was presented more or less in its brochure form, rather than as a lived experience. The important point to make about these postwar examples of commercialized utopias is that they evolved indirectly from the socialist, communist, and fascist holiday camps of the 1930s. This was well demonstrated in the exhibition.

Where the exhibition really shone was in the documentation of the intense urbanization of the Mediterranean coast, with projects such as La Grande Motte, with its megastructural pyramids, attracting two million visitors a year. Concern over this high-rise densification of the coastline led to the founding of the Conservatoire du Littoral in 1975. The listing of seaside towns followed, and a number of sensitive and ingenious planning projects were carried out in the following decades to manage tourism so as to minimize damage to the environment. Nevertheless, some outrageously projecting resorts, straight out of science fiction, were well documented in the catalogue by Gilles Ragot. Paul Maymont, who projected a number of floating and land reclamation schemes for the bay of Tokyo, also designed the Thalassa floating resort for Monaco in 1962, setting a challenge that was met by numerous architects over the next decades.

TIM BENTON
Open University

Related Publication

Pierre Chareau: Modern Architecture and Design
Jewish Museum, New York
4 November 2016–26 March 2017

Measured in relation to its historical significance, Pierre Chareau's material legacy is vanishingly small. The canonical Maison de Verre (1932), a glass and steel-frame residential structure in Paris, meticulously restored by its current owner, is the sole survivor of his mere five built works. A few examples of furniture pieces by Chareau are held in museum collections, with the exceptionally rare remainder secreted in private holdings, and the archival traces slight and scattered. These facts alone would have made the comprehensive exhibition at the Jewish Museum, the first in the United States, a feat of scholarly probing and curatorial muscle. But through the combined intuitions of the curator, Esther da Costa Meyer, and the designer, Elizabeth Diller of Diller Scofidio + Renfro, the show accomplished something more elusive still—something like an act of conjuring. The brief flowering of Chareau’s work took place largely in interwar Paris, suspended between two global cataclysms. Married to a Jewish woman, his own heritage murky, Chareau did not escape the vast

Figure 1 Alexis Mossa and Jules Chéret, L'hiver à Nice, poster, 1 January 1890 (Nice AD Alpes-Maritimes, 49 F10122).
displacements of the second. After he immigrated with his family to the United States at the beginning of the 1940s, his career founded, untethered from an haute bourgeois clientele and, more profoundly, orphaned and bedeviled, untethered from an haute bourgeois culture. The exhibition sketched out the architect’s cultural circles and included examples from the Chareau’s notable collection of modern art. In exile, the architect’s talent was undiminished, as evidenced by the remarkable small house he built for the artist Robert Motherwell on Long Island in 1947 (demolished in the 1980s), but it struggled to find new outlets.

Meanwhile, Chareau’s critical reception suffered another, classificatory, rupture—between his architectural production, dominated by the Maison de Verre (Glass House), and his work in interior and furniture design. Da Costa Meyer aspired to recover an analytical, historical, and biographical unity within a lifework marked by disruption and fragmentation. Played out in the space of the exhibition, this reconstructive impulse had an archaeological effect. Chareau’s production came across as embedded in a distinct milieu, both material and behavioral: an environment of objects and gestures. A display case for ephemera at the entrance opened onto a much larger platform, a unifying register that cut horizontally across the exhibition and allowed the visitor to see a white screen with papers and documents. Across the room, the visitor could see a white screen on which shadowed figures in period clothes moved in furnished settings, absorbed by everyday activities—the drying of dishes, the shedding of coat and hat—like lamplight silhouettes against curtains drawn on private worlds.

As a furniture designer, Chareau was an ensembleur, a profession on the rise in interwar Paris, focused on the orchestration of complete interiors, including furnishings, lighting, wall decor, and the volumetric shaping of the spatial container. An “ensemble,” notes historian Marc Vellay, was “a spatial response to a given activity.” Like other renowned Parisian ensembleurs, such as Francis Jourdain and Djodafone-Bourgeois, Chareau designed a number of comprehensive interiors, both for private clients and for exhibition. These survive only in photographs and the vibrant pochoir prints that were the publishing and promotional complements of the trade. Eventually, the concept of space as behavioral register of cultured domesticity was displaced by furniture piece as objet d’art and luxury commodity. In the exhibition, fragments of Chareau’s assemblages could be discovered behind the moving-image screens, the pieces silhouetted there voided of projected inhabitants—neither period rooms nor individual objects, but haunted ensembles.

The furniture designs bring to the fore the issue of “functionalism,” which has long bedeviled efforts to assess Chareau’s architectural modernity. His approach was premised on deft and daring juxtapositions of nominally industrial forms and materials (cast iron, hammered-steel plates, hall-bearing hinges) with elegant detailing and luxury materials (brocade, lacquer, exotic wood veneers) that bespoke conspicuous consumption. Likewise, his fascination with function and mobility—folding chairs and table leaves, rotating desk cabinets, sliding vanity mirrors—conveyed not so much the efficient economy of machines but the stylized abstraction of movement as such, rhetorical like gestures. While the burgeoning modern movement sought to recast its bourgeois clientele as the new subject of a fully functionalized mass society, Chareau’s work assimilated the force fields of instrumentality and mechanization within the sphere of domestic intimacy, conceived as the last refuge of preindustrial humanism. His preferred shape was the semicircle—a line inscribed by the rotating gear and the sheltering arm.

In the second part of the show, the material objects of display were filtered through a spectrum of technological mediations. Photographs, the sole surviving traces of Chareau’s interiors, lined the periphery of a black-box room; four of them were joined with isolated fragments of extinct furnishings in virtual-reality-aided reconstructions. Through the virtual-reality lens, the objects arranged against dark walls like forlorn actors before a CGI screen could be restored to the fullness of their original settings. Modern architecture’s imaginary was, as we know, profoundly affected by the optics of photography and film. This is especially notable in the photogenic qualities of the Maison de Verre, exploited by generations of photographers. Among the selection of such images presented in the show was a group of spectral glass-plate negatives taken by Georges Thiriet in 1932. As in the famous prints by László Moholy-Nagy, the negative was an unparalleled medium for conveying the aspiration to the immaterial in modernism’s cult of glass and steel. Those lines of light on glass were echoed in the show by the lines of ink on drafting film in the adjacent axonometric projection studies of the building, done in the mid-1960s by a group of architects led by Kenneth Frampton. Architecture, one was reminded, always operates in modes of abstraction and technological mediation.

The show’s culminating room was a tour de force of technological reanimation. A 3-D rendering of the Maison de Verre was projected on a screen that moved back and forth, inscribing a virtual volume, like a digital counterpart of the preceding axonometric (Figure 1). As the screen moved, the image stripped away vertical slices of the transverse section, passing periodically. Each pause isolated a detail, which then alighted on the adjacent wall in a video sequence filmed at the actual site, showing a couple acting out the everyday motions of the building’s occupants. The animated rendering captured the spatial fluidity of the structure, while the filmed movements—sliding partitions and turning gears to open windows, rotating shelves—performed the house as lived-in mechanism. But what became apparent as one watched the building’s sectional denuding and reconstruction was how much Chareau’s fascination with mobility had to do with the negotiation of interchanges. The viscous translucency of the glass-brick envelope, he wrote, was to “draw a veil between the inhabitants and the outside world.” Diaphanous perforated metal screens, retractable stairs leading to the boudoir, turntables built into walls for the discreet passage of refreshments between rooms—all these choreograph lines in space and ritualized movements as provisional thresholds of intimacy. Chareau’s subjection of the machine to the exquisite purposelessness of decorum brings to mind the analyses of Theodor Adorno, the philosopher of bourgeois culture’s demise. The abstract, evanescent gestures of tact, he notes, existed to build “space enough between [people] for the delicate connecting filigree of external forms in which alone the internal can crystallize.”

Anna Vallay
Connecticut College
The sober yet expectant atmosphere of a rich archive, brimming with objects that point to numerous riveting stories, greeted visitors to this exhibition at the Graham Foundation. An array of documents were displayed within austere spaces, mostly photographs by Iraqi architect Rifat Chadirji, curated from his extensive collection previously deposited at the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut (now at MIT) (Figure 1). The photographs, amassed by Chadirji over several decades, capture his design work from 1952 to 1978, alongside various aspects of Iraq’s cultural life—rituals, crafts, and spaces—as well as his social circle and travels. The stark presentation of the images suggested a minimum mediation between the archive and the visitor, giving the intricate details, enigmatic figures, and unfamiliar landscapes a striking impact.

The selection for this exhibition—focused primarily on architectural projects and urban scenes—was similar to that for the first iteration of the show at Columbia University’s Arthur Ross Architecture Gallery, held earlier the same year, but filled a larger space at the Graham Foundation’s Madlener House. The material was generously displayed in four rooms on two floors, an impressive volume dedicated to a subject that many visitors were encountering for the first time. This expansive scale contrasted sharply with the intimacy of the displayed archival pages, each featuring a few small photographs.

On the ground floor, visitors circulated around Chadirji’s photographs mounted on freestanding skeletal structures, while his larger limited-edition etchings of projects, printed in 1984, were wall mounted. On the second level, Chadirji’s photographs were carried away from the walls by similarly delicate armatures. A selection of fellow Iraqi photographer Latif Al-Ani’s photographs, also held by the Arab Image Foundation, were shown on the upper level, but mounted directly on walls.

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**Related Publication**


**Notes**