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Lille métropole musée d'art modern d'art contemporain et d'art brut, France

Monday 27 Sep 2010

Silence of the LaM



Max Lerouge



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EDITORIAL

Lille métropole musée d'art modern d'art contemporain et d'art brut reopens after 4 years of extension and renovation work

Nestled in a vast expanse of open parkland near the metropolitan city of Lille is the self-titled Lille métropole musée d'art modern d'art contemporain et d'art brut. Originally opened in 1983, the museum has been the recipient of multiple generous donations over the years, including a vast collection of artworks from Geneviève and Jean Masurel in 1979, including pieces by Picasso, Léger and Miró.

Heavy, crude concrete protrusions now scabble around the raw brick edges of Roland Simounet's original museum, like the stubby fingers of a sticky-mouthed child clawing for something wildly out of reach. Flow is not something that comes naturally here. Whilst the internal refit completed by architect Manuelle Gautrand is almost seamless in integrating the existing building with the new, as soon as one steps outside they are hit by the profound separation of the two segments - one an austere almost educational-looking facility, the other a freshly punctured concrete mass that houses the recently donated art brut collection. The splayed 'fluid and organic volumes' create an array of high-ceilinged blank canvases for the exhibits, hung tastefully throughout the extension space.

Gautrand invites us to enter her intricate private world, explaining: "The complexity of the project was in fact that the existing building is listed, so it means that that during the competition the Monumental authority wanted us to keep a distance between the existing museum and the extension."

She continues: "I decided not to respect the guidelines which were to create resistance between the existing and the extended part. I wanted in an opposite way in fact to envelope the museum of Roland Simounet because I felt more comfortable with this architecture in a way, and also I wanted absolutely to respect this free way to walk contemporary art, modern art and art brut."

It is difficult to see where the flowing, organic form she repeatedly refers to is hiding, as the vast concrete mass that latches onto the original museum encapsulates neither element in its entirety from an external viewpoint. For those of you who are not familiar with art brut (also commonly referred to as 'outsider art'), its roots lie in raw emotions, directed away from mainstream artistic endeavours towards the realms of the absurd, regularly incorporating pieces devised by those in mental institutions and the psychologically disturbed.

With this in mind, it seems natural that the museum's authorities desired an architectural construction separated from the existing facility as the forms of art are so different in style and interpretation; however the juxtaposition of the art displayed inside - much of which was never meant to be viewed by the outside world - and the external mass which commands ones full attention is somewhat unsettling. Whilst the exhibitions are

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intriguing and fuel the innate human curiosity that lies among us all, the experience in itself is rather disconcerting; one feels as if they have stumbled into the raw vulnerability of the damned, reading through the most private thoughts of the mentally disturbed.

Due to the delicate nature of the artwork in the permanent exhibition, the use of large amounts of natural light was expressly forbidden. Gautrand's punctuated concrete walls filter daylight in inconsistent lace-print patterns across the interior - an intrinsic artwork all of its own. Strangely, this doilie design doesn't detract from the vast array of art brut pieces as one imagines it would, only adding to the unsettled atmosphere of the cavernous hanging spaces.

Sian Disson
 News Editor

Key Facts

Status **Completed**
Value **20(m€)**

MANUELLE GAUTRAND ARCHITECTURE
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