

Tomorrow, Life will Reside in Poetry

Written in Paris, 19 August 1956

We are living in a time of profound transformation taking place in different domains, which cannot fail to have far-reaching consequences for contemporary architecture. This is an appeal to architects to warn them against becoming dispersed between the science of the engineer and the inventiveness of the sculptor, thereby making themselves superfluous, and to encourage them rather to face the new conditions head on, eyes open.

Today, in the wake of a period of experimentation in every possible direction, aesthetics have managed to break with a formal limitation as a result of the relatively recent shift from figurative representation to abstraction. Experimental painting has come out in reaction against such tendencies as neo-plasticism, and has succeeded in once again freeing human imagination from all of its various taboos, thus making possible a new step in artistic creativity.

In the course of this same post-war period, scientific techniques have developed to such an extent that construction methods represent virtually no further obstacle at all to the realization of free very forms, involving an absolutely original conception of space. One only need mention concrete or steel casts, thin sheets of steel-reinforced concrete, stainless or non-oxidizing metals and their welds, to get some idea of the means currently available to a free and audacious imagination.

Furthermore, the rectangle -- for a long time the basis of all architectural aesthetics -- is losing meaning for a number of different reasons. Which is why it is important in large-scale constructions that the wind-resistance of rounded forms compare very favorably with that of flat surfaces. On top of which, concrete performs better in sheet-form than it does in the girder-form customarily in use today. Scientific techniques seem only to be awaiting an aesthetic with a clear outlook for their deployment.

Contemporary architecture -- thanks to the happy coincidence of these two aesthetic and technical conditions -- has no further reason whatsoever to remain confined within the severe doctrine of functionalism imposed on it, on the one hand, by an obsolete imagination and, on the other hand, by what were still rudimentary techniques forcing the architect to use methods of decoration to arrive at the aesthetic aspect he was after. For a long time, architectural aesthetics -- lacking construction possibilities large enough to allow a freedom of plastic expression -- dealt only with the surface of the form, being unable to enter the skeleton, thus leaving architecture a second-rate decorative art.

For the first time in history, architecture has been able to become a veritable art of building. An art whose plastic expression depends upon the organization and assemblage of its elements -- in much the same way as a painter organizes his brush strokes. It is only logical

that at the outset this tendency, already present in functionalism, would manifest itself through the use of materials such as steel and glass, enabling clear and apparent construction.

But today, architecture has at its disposal unlimited building techniques which make it into an absolutely independent art of sculptural and pictorial decoration, without, however, it falling into the sterility of functionalism. It will be able to make use of techniques as if they were an artistic material of the same status as sound, color, and speech are for the other arts. It will be capable of incorporating into its aesthetic the manipulation of volumes and voids of sculpture, and the spatial colorism of painting, in order to create one of the most complete of all of the arts, at once lyrical in its means and social in its very nature. It is in poetry that life will reside.

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Written in Paris, 19 August 1956, by Constant as a statement to the First World Congress of Free Artists, which was held in Alba, Italy, between 2 and 8 September 1956. Translated from the French [*Demain la poésie logera la vie*] by Stephen Wright. English translation on line available on [NotBored](#).