

RIETVELD SCHRÖDERHUIS

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GERRIT RIETVELD, UTRECHT 1969/1974

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Gerrit Thomas Rietveld lived and worked in Utrecht all his life, as did many of the people who commissioned works from him. In 1919, his designs were published for the first time in the journal “De Stijl”. Theo van Doesburg was the driving force behind the De Stijl movement, to which Piet Mondrian and J.J.P. Oud also contributed. De Stijl developed to become one of the most important avant-garde movements in the 20th century. After building the Schröderhuis, Rietveld joined Het Nieuwe Bouwen and his style became more businesslike. He built 934 houses in Utrecht over a period of forty years, including the Garage house on the Waldeck-Pyrmontkade, one of the earliest prefab concrete constructions.

The Rietveld Schröderhuis was built by Gerrit Rietveld for Truus Schröder in 1924. She commissioned the work and had a great influence on the result. This is the only building that was ever built in accordance with the architectural principles of De Stijl. The typical De Stijl colors – red, blue and yellow – were characteristic, combined with white, grey and black, but so was the relationship between the interior and exterior and the unity between the individual pieces of furniture and the fixed parts of the furnishings.

According to Rietveld and Schröder, it is necessary to adopt an active approach to life. Housing is also a conscious act. The way in which the house was furnished reflected this conviction. The inhabitant had to perform an act for every activity: he had to create the bathroom by folding open a wall, screen off the sleeping corners by sliding the walls, and achieve privacy by placing shutters in front of the windows. The house was literally a machine to live in.

In 1974, the Rietveld Schröderhuis house had existed for fifty years and was placed on the register of listed buildings. The Rietveld Schröderhuis Foundation was established in order to manage and conserve the house. The exterior was the first thing to be restored. The restoration architect was Bertus Mulder, who studied Rietveld’s use of color in detail; originally the shutters were painted in a large number of different colors which were often mixed in situ. This paintwork was an extremely delicate and relatively costly part of the restoration work. The Sikkens Prize Foundation, which also contributed to the conservation of the Rietveld Schröderhuis house in 1969, supported the restoration. Just as Rietveld received

the first Sikkens Prize, his celebrated house was the first project which was supported with Sikkens funding in 1969.

After the death of Truus Schröder the house became the property of the Rietveld Schröderhuis Foundation in 1985. After it was restored, this passed the house to the Centraal Museum to be managed. The house has been open to the public since 1987. At the end of 2000, UNESCO placed the house on the World Heritage List as “an important and unique icon in western architectural history and a masterwork of human creativity”.