

THEO VAN DOESBURG, 2006

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AUBETTE

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The Aubette in Strasbourg was well known as a Gesamtkunstwerk. The building, which dates from the eighteenth century, was redeveloped in the 1920s by Theo van Doesburg, Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. This reorganization was one of the important works of De Stijl and references are made to this monument of modernism in numerous publications.

The Aubette was built as an entertainment complex where the public could play billiards, eat, drink, dance and see films. One of the special aspects of the interior of the Aubette was the use of color as an architectural element in addition to form. “Without color, architecture lacks expression and is blind” (Van Doesburg in De Stijl, 1928).

Unfortunately, the first visitors were hardly able to appreciate the avant-garde designs of the Aubette. It was entirely abandoned until it was rediscovered in the late 1980s.

In August 1983 an exhibition opened on De Stijl in the Kröller-Müller Museum. A scale model of the large dance hall of the Aubette was copied for this, the most important space in Theo van Doesburg’s “rebuilding” of the interior of this building in 1927-28. The Sikkens Foundation paid for the model.

From September 1991, the Sikkens Foundation also participated in the research preceding the restoration of the interior of the Aubette. Van Doesburg organized more spaces, but we are concerned here only with the large dancehall. The French laboratory of Akzo Nobel Coatings carried out technical research into the original colors of the Aubette and the results were presented in June 1992. The presentation was in the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, surrounded by the original designs and paintings by Theo van Doesburg.

In 2007 an exhibition was organized about the Aubette in the NAI, and prior to this a detailed publication was also published. The monograph described the building in its historical and artistic context, in which the relationship between color and architecture had a central place. Van Doesburg’s articles with regard to this theme were included in their entirety, also in connection with their significance for the interpretation of the spaces he designed. The

correspondence between the Arps, Van Doesburg and the brothers Horn, who commissioned the works, gave a clear insight into the development of this entertainment centre. The influence of Dada, typography, the furnishings and the restoration of the Aubette are described in separate contributions.

The restoration of the Aubette, the book and the exhibition Icon of Modernism –Van Doesburg’s Aubette (NAI Rotterdam 2007) confirmed the unique status of this building as an icon of De Stijl architecture.