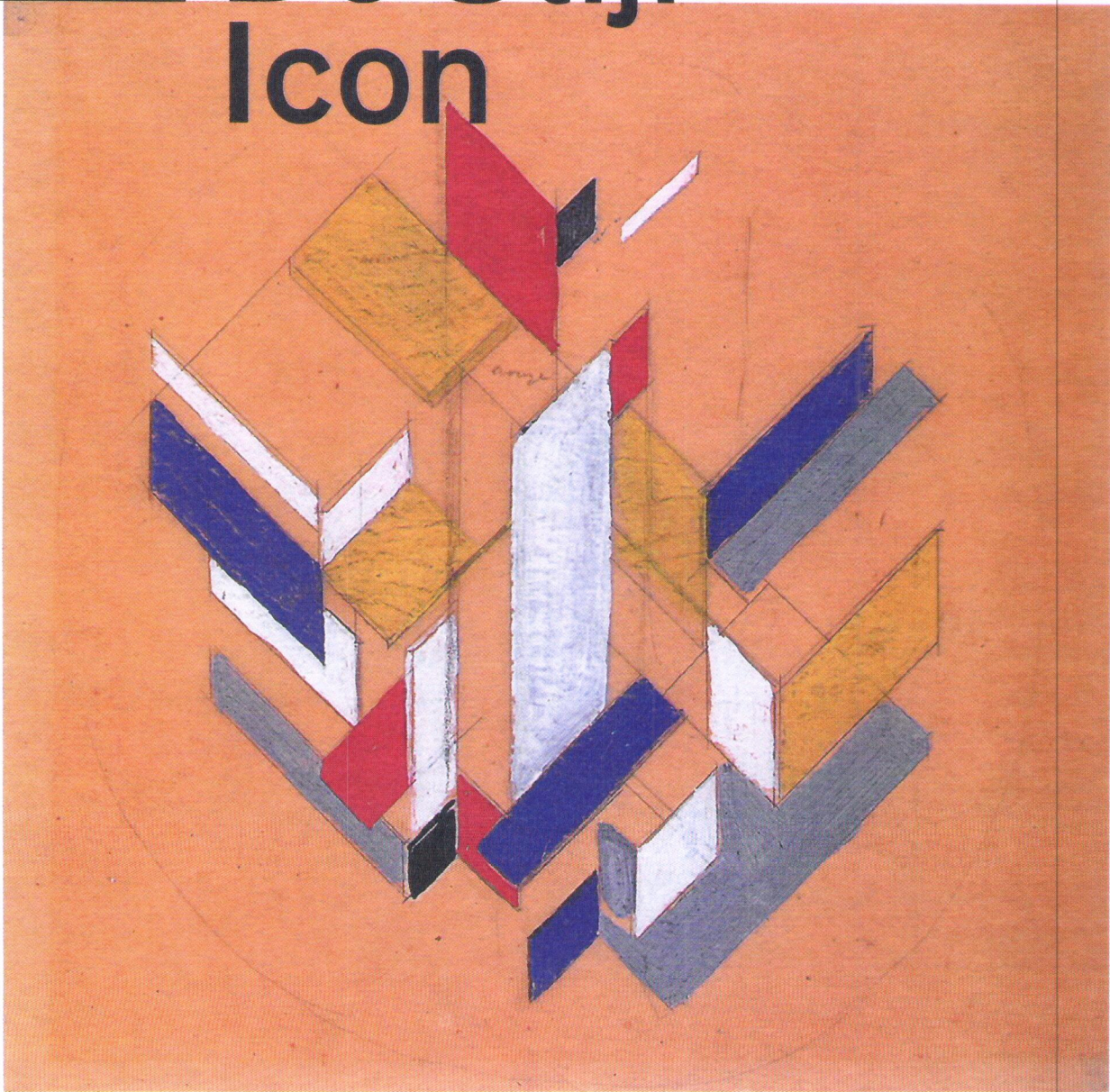


Maison d'Artiste.

Unfinished De Stijl

Icon

Dolf Broekhuizen (ed.)



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2016.

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Editor

Dolf Broekhuizen

Texts

Ole Bouman, Dolf Broekhuizen,
Paul Meurs, Alied Ottevanger, Kees Somer,
Wouter Jan Verheul, Michael White

Copy editing

Robyn de Jong-Dalziel

Translation

Robyn de Jong-Dalziel (except essay
Michael White), Walter van der Star (French
quotes essay Alied Ottenvanger)

Picture editing

Dolf Broekhuizen
with Ingrid Oosterheerd

Graphic design en lithography

Lex Reitsma

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Brecht Bleeker

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Introduction

Maison d'Artiste: an unfinished icon

They were so incredibly proud. And exhausted. When the design for an artist's residence, 'Maison d'Artiste', went on show in October 1923, the presentation material had only just been finished. Together, the artist Theo van Doesburg (1883–1931) and the architect Cornelis van Eesteren (1897–1988) had spent the months leading up to the opening working feverishly on the De Stijl exhibition, of which this design was one of the key works. Night after long night they had worked on the drawings and the model. The Maison d'Artiste was intended to show just how innovative De Stijl was. In Van Doesburg's view the De Stijl group was, in the Netherlands at least, the most important avant-garde movement and right then it was a trendsetter as well. The model was more than a purely spatial sculpture; it could also be regarded as a manifesto for a new architecture. With it they would set their stamp on the art world. For Van Doesburg, the exhibition 'Les Architectes du Groupe "de Stijl"', in the gallery of the respected art dealer Léonce Rosenberg (1879–1947) in the heart of the art world, Paris, was proof that De Stijl was receiving international recognition and was more than the magazine for which he was the tireless propagandist.

The Maison d'Artiste is one of three designs the two Dutch designers made specifically for the Paris exhibition [fig. 1]. What is special about this design and the other two, 'Maison Particulière', a private residence and 'Maison Rosenberg' (also known as Hôtel Particulier), a house with museum for the Rosenberg art collection, is that they were based on a new conception of architecture and living. And of the three, Maison d'Artiste was its most radical expression. The Maison Particulière and the Maison Rosenberg were composed of volumes and planes slotted into one another as independent elements, which then made up a single whole [figs. 2, 3]. The Maison d'Artiste is more radical, because here the rooms are placed on different levels

load-bearing walls is completely abandoned. Instead of a corridor, a staircase functions as the central core, binding the various rooms together and providing a dynamic spatial experience. Because rooms spill over into one another, a freer manner of living is possible. While the windows in the Maison Particulière were still designed as a hole in the wall, as was customary at that time, in Maison d'Artiste Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren went a step further and windows span the facade or even occupy an entire wall. Colour planes and facade planes are congruent, which serves to emphasize the basic constituents of architecture, such as space, surface and colour, and gives the architecture a new aesthetic. Indeed, painting and architecture coincide totally, forming a harmonious whole that offers the occupant powerful impressions, rendering the separate disciplines of painting and sculpture redundant.

One can only imagine the disappointment Van Doesburg must have felt a few years later when he discovered that, after the exhibition, his models had ended up in the cellar of the publisher of the avant-garde magazine, *L'Architecture vivante*, where they had succumbed to the damp. All that remained were the design drawings and a few black-and-white photographs of the models. The project remained forever in the design phase and was never realized. The discrepancies between the drawings and the model of the Maison d'Artiste reveal that the designers were still feeling their way, that it was a 'work in progress'. Anyone wanting to realize the house, will need to take new decisions in order to convert the design into a realizable plan.

Although the Maison d'Artiste did not progress beyond a design, it was nevertheless not without influence. Since that 1923 exhibition, Van Doesburg and Van Eesteren's projects have secured a special place in the development of modern architecture and visual art. The Maison d'Artiste belongs to the Dutch cultural canon. De Stijl is without doubt one of the most impor-

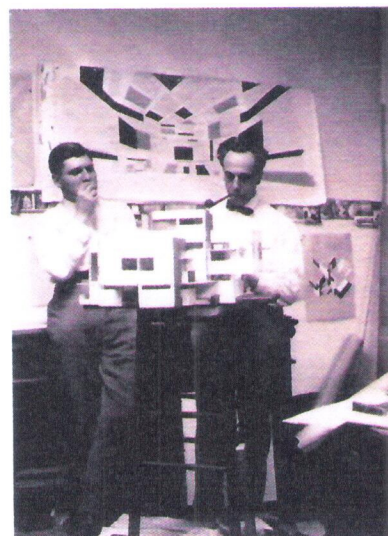
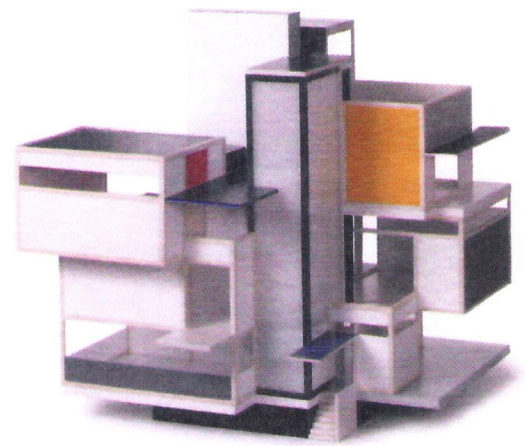
Maison d'Artiste Unfinished De Stijl Icon

The design for the legendary artist's house, Maison d'Artiste, is one of the key works of the Dutch avant-garde movement De Stijl. Created in 1923 by painter Theo van Doesburg and architect Cornelis van Eesteren, the design shows what De Stijl aspired to: a new everyday environment through the harmonious fusion of painting and architecture.

Maison d'Artiste. Unfinished De Stijl Icon explores the revolutionary cultural importance of the design and its significance for the history of De Stijl, and discusses the dilemmas surrounding a contemporary realization of the unbuilt design compared with other late realizations of designs by famous twentieth-century architects, such as John Hejduk and Le Corbusier.

The wealth of perspectives and illustrations makes *Maison d'Artiste* a must-have reference work for anyone interested in De Stijl and the treatment of the cultural heritage of the Dutch avant-garde. With contributions by: Dolf Broekhuizen, Ole Bouman, Paul Meurs, Alied Ottevanger, Kees Somer, Wouter Jan Verheul and Michael White.

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