

Project

Albers-Honegger Donation and Préau des Enfants Espace de l'Art Concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France

The new museum for the Espace de l'Art Concret (EAC) was built on the occasion of the donation of the Albers-Honegger Art Collection, parts of which had been displayed since the 1990s on a rotational basis in the castle of Mouans-Sartoux. The castle rooms will mainly be used for temporary exhibitions in the future. The new museum is the second freestanding annex on the castle grounds, following a children's painting studio called the Espace Art, Recherche, Imagination designed by architect Marc Barani. A third small building, the Préau des Enfants, was erected shortly after the museum. Both are set in a steeply sloping wooded area within the surrounding park.

The museum building's minimal, square-shaped ground plan and its tower-like structure with cantilevered elements made it possible to insert it into the wooded site with as little disruption to the existing trees as possible. Its position on a slope enables ground-level access at various building levels. A projecting section forms both the entrance to the museum and a bridge to the path outside. The access area for the public conference space and for deliveries also projects from the main volume of the building.

The museum entrance is elevated half a story above the first exhibition level. The galleries, connected by open stairs, are arranged at half-story level and form a spiral tour through the building. Two closed, sky-lit staircases serve as escape routes and also offer visitors a short path back to the entrance after finishing their tour. In addition to the lift, these staircases form an interior vertical connection between the conference space and the other rooms on the lower levels.

The arrangement of the galleries along the façades, the lateral lighting via the windows, and particularly the proportions of the spaces recall those of a large home rather than resembling a classic museum. Although the windows do not provide the even illumination often thought desirable in galleries, this solution meets the express wishes of the donors, who wanted natural light that would enable the works of art to engage in a vivid dialogue with the world outside and to be seen under a variety of lighting conditions. The windows are placed at differing heights in the galleries. Double-paned and resembling box-type windows, the outer pane of glass is affixed to the exterior of the façade to offer primary protection from wind and rain, while the inner pane, which can be opened, provides thermal insulation. Between the two windows, and thus shielded from the weather, fabric blinds afford protection from the sun. The blinds can be closed if desired, transforming the windows into sources of pure light, like glowing panels.

The building is constructed of poured concrete, which is painted a light yellowgreen, in anticipation of the moss and algae that the nearby trees will eventually cause to cover it. Intriguingly, this color generates two diametrically opposed effects. On the one hand, it glows in contrast to the surroundings; on the other, it forms a harmonious background for the changing colors of the trees.

The donors' commitment to art education is expressed again in the nearby Préau des Enfants, an open concrete structure in the forest where the children's drawings and painting studies are exhibited.

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Credits

Project:	Albers Honegger Donation, Espace de l'Art Concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France
Address:	Espace de l'Art Concret Château de Mouans 06370 Mouans-Sartoux, France
Spatial Programme:	Construction of a detached, tower-like museum building as an extension to the 'Espace de l'Art Concret'; 14 exhibition spaces, entry hall, conference room, offices and secondary rooms.
Competition:	1999, 1st Prize
Planning/Construction:	2001 – 2003
Client:	Ville de Mouans-Sartoux, France Etat, Ville, Conseil Régional PACA, France Conseil Général des Alpes-Maritimes, France
Architecture:	Annette Gigon / Mike Guyer, Architects, Zurich Collaborators: Competition: Eva Geering, Dalila Chebbi Planning/Construction: Gilles Dafflon (Project Manager)
Costs and Construction Management:	BET G.L. Ingénierie, Nice, France
Gross Floor Area (SIA 416):	1'829 m ²
Structural Engineer:	BET G.L. Ingénierie, Nice, France Preliminary Design: Dr. Lüchinger + Meyer Bauingenieure AG, Zurich
Electrical Engineer:	BET G.L. Ingénierie, Nice, France Preliminary Design: Elkom Partner AG, Chur
Building Services Engineer:	BET G.L. Ingénierie, Nice, France Preliminary Design: 3-Plan Haustechnik AG, Winterthur
Photography:	Serge Demailly, La Dadière d'Azur, France André Morin, Paris, France