

Work

First, he was a manual worker. He learned to engrave and chase watchcases. The trace of manual work remained in all his works: forms felt and shaped by the hand. He traveled around the Mediterranean. He liked all that architecture made with the hands according to human scale, in Greece, Turkey, the Mزاب. That sculptural architecture erected with both hands was present in all his works, and could later be found at Ronchamp.

His hand was always drawing. He drew trees, leaves, and buds. To draw them was to have his fingers feel the seed that had made them. Their shape was not a random thing. It was organic, a life form. He drew landscapes, shaped by the forces of wind and water, by life, and by the human hand.

“The hand that contains so many inner lines and so many meanings around its perimeter, in its texture; it contains the character of the person, which means that the most hidden, most secret, most subjective, most elusive things can very well be revealed by a precise trait, a line on the hand, by the hand's muscles, by the shape of the hand.”²³

It was the head that guided the hand, but sometimes the hand guided the head.

He said, “I let it all go from my hand into my head.” And, “Sometimes, it is my hand that precedes my mind.”²⁴

The head thought. The hand touched. The body sensed.

His hands acted up “head and hand combined, wherefrom stems in a quiet way the flesh and spirit of human work.”²⁵

While the head thought, it was best not to let the hand draw too early or too fast. Le Corbusier at work meant to wait first, and sometimes for a long time. I often worried about this. We would have to turn in a project on a given deadline, and Le Corbusier would wait. Sometimes it seemed that he had forgotten. He did not talk about it. He let it be born.

"When I am given a project, I am in the habit of putting it into my memory bank, that is to say, of not allowing any sketch to be made for months. The human mind is made in such a way that it enjoys having a certain independence: it's like a box into which one can throw in a haphazard way the elements of a problem. We then allow them to float, to stew and ferment. Then it comes a day when a spontaneous initiative from the inner self triggers it all: we take a pencil, a charcoal crayon, color pencils (color is the key to this process), and we give birth on paper. The idea comes out, the baby comes out. It has arrived in the world and it is born."²⁶

He saw from the beginning just as the composer hears from the beginning.

"Not to draw, but to see first the project in one's head. The drawing is only useful to help with the synthesis of the thought-through ideas."²⁷

"It is impossible to organize the pieces if you do not have the shape of the whole inside your head."²⁸

Then, one day, he would come to the office at rue de Sèvres with a bundle of sketches, generally made on typing paper, with black pencil, ball-point pen, and mainly color pencils. It would all be there;

the entire project would be contained in them. At first we would have a hard time understanding these sketches. Then we would learn to read them, to see them. They contained the seed of the whole project. All we would have to do then was to tidy them up with a T-square and set square, and Le Corbusier would continue to see over the drawings in detail to the end. He would remain seated for a long time at our drawing boards. He clarified. He corrected. He reinforced the exactness and the rigor. He finished up. He made us draw certain details full-scale on a big blackboard that went all the way to the ceiling. The *loggia* of the *Unité* at Marseilles was drawn full-scale in this way and scrupulously put together. To the smallest detail, even at the building site, Le Corbusier drew and wanted to make things better.

It sometimes happened, but not often, that a draftsman suggested an idea or even a shape. Most of the time Le Corbusier, somewhat annoyed, rejected them right away. He could not bear to have someone interfere, and if he finally adopted the suggestion it was in a rethought way. He would draw it again and reintegrate it into the unity of the whole. He was the sole author of all the projects I saw being born.

All of that in no way contradicts his unquestionable need to have good assistants to whom he entrusted much of the work and who extended his own work by transforming his drawings into final drawings, working out the technical details, representing him at innumerable meetings, and supervising the building sites. He needed Charlotte Perriand to create the furniture prototypes and supervise their manufacture. Before 1939, he did everything with

his cousin and associate Pierre Jeanneret, a man of great qualities who represented him again, after the war, at Chandigarh. After 1945, he would have done nothing without his team of faithful, dynamic young men. He knew that. At the opening of the *Unité* at Marseilles he ended his speech with an emotional reference to them: "It is to them that I give thanks."