

Le Corbusier—Triple Threat Innovator



Composition: LE CORBUSIER

MULTIPLICITY—of names, nationalities, talents and careers—has formed the warp of the life of the renowned French-Swiss architect-artist-writer, Le Corbusier, born Charles Edouard Jeanneret in 1887. With a weft composed of singleness of purpose and a crusading spirit for the creatively functional, the strong, single fabric of his career has been, and still is being woven.

A retrospective view of the accomplishments of this triple personality are now being shown, for the first time in New York, at the Mezzanine Gallery in Rockefeller Center (until October 11). It is made up of a group of his oil paintings, and about fifty small silverpoint, watercolor and crayon sketches; scale models, photographic enlargements, and plans for his major architectural achievements; and displays of his books, articles and magazines, all of which have had a profound influence on modern thought and achievement.

Along with Ozenfant, Le Corbusier invented Purism. The earliest painting in the collection, and the only one of that period (1920), is familiar to art audiences as part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. By 1929, the next date chronologically, the more delicate colors and rigid still life arrangements of simon pure Purism have given way, and a red, stylized but

still recognizable figure appears on a canvas executed in a manner since made quite familiar to American audiences by Leger. One of the most beautiful of these large compositions, both in design and color, is a tapestry which now belongs to the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. The numerous sketches fill in the story of the artist's evolution from rigidity to movement, from the inanimate to the animate. The whole group, small as it is, gives an excellent idea of LeCorburier's influence on artists who have followed.

Architect-theorist Le Corbusier issued a manifesto in 1923, two sentences of which have become cliches: "The house is a machine for living in. . . . Tear man away from his first machine age; bring to him his essential pleasures." One need not stop for the floor plans or the small print accompanying the handsome big photographs of his early houses to see his realization of those aims. Later, he turned to multiple dwellings and city planning.

During the occupation Le Corbusier formed a tremendous research organization called Ascoral, made up of professional architects, engineers, scientists, artists, economists, educators, lawyers, sociologists, philosophers, farmers and "workers of all ages." They went into and coordinated every known detail of urban and rural planning against the day of reconstruction. Their findings, still in the manuscript form, will fill ten volumes. Le Corbusier will arrive in America sometime this month on a technical mission for the French Government.

The exhibition was assembled from public and private sources by the Walker Art Center for the American Federation of Art and sponsored in New York by the French Embassy. After this initial showing it will tour the country.—Jo GIBBS.

