

L'AUBETTE 1928

MUSÉES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG





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THE ORIGINAL AUBETTE

The creation of the Aubette was wish of the Duke de Choiseul (1719-1785), Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, War and the Admiralty (1758 to 1770), and in 1765 it was entrusted to the architect and architectural theorist, Jacques-François Blondel (1705-1774). The initial project included, in addition to the building itself, the symmetrical treatment of Place Kléber but this was abandoned due to insufficient resources. Between 1765 and 1778 the Aubette was built and eventually became a military building housing body guards with lodging quarters and a police post. The building was named the “aubette” at the end of the 18th century because the changing of the guard took place in front of the building every day at dawn.

THE AUBETTE IN THE 19TH CENTURY AND AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY

Having included a café from 1845, in 1869 the Aubette housed the municipal painting museum (created in 1803) that was ravaged by fire on the night of 24 August 1870. The building was renovated between 1873 and 1875. The original plan was not strictly adhered to: the roof was modified and decorations added.

New improvements were mooted in 1911. The City invited forty architects to work on the project but it was never carried out. In 1922, Paul and André Horn of Mulhouse (an architect and a pharmacist who came to Strasbourg to start major urban works laying down the axes of the modern city) rented the right wing of the Aubette with a view to creating a leisure complex. They entrusted the interior refurbishment project to Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber, who in turn included their friend Theo Van Doesburg.



THE HORN BROTHERS' INITIATIVE

The City of Strasbourg, through the intermediary of its mayor, Charles Peirates, gave its blessing to the Horn brothers' project at the beginning of the 1920s. The promoters proposed to make the Aubette "a public monument of general interest [...] to endow the City of Strasbourg with magnificent function rooms". In 1922, a 99-year emphyteutic lease for the right wing was accorded to the Horn brothers on condition that they preserve the frontage which was a classified historic monument. From 1922 to 1926, Paul Horn, a professional architect, drew up the first interior plans. The same year, the brothers included Jean Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp in the project. In 1926 the artistic couple invited the Dutch painter and architect Theo Van Doesburg to join them. Initially asked to draw up new plans, Van Doesburg, who envisaged the Aubette as a Gesamtkunstwerk (total artwork), also offered to carry out decorative additions plus furniture design and graphic design.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPLEX

The Aubette leisure complex included four levels (basement, ground floor, mezzanine and first floor) with the three artists sharing the decoration work. Only the first floor spaces (housing the ciné-bal and the function room with geometric decorations by Van Doesburg and the Foyer-bar by Sophie Taeuber) have been restored. In the basement, the American bar and the cavern dancehall, decorated by Arp with supple biomorphic shapes, broke with the geometric spirit of the other decors. On the ground floor, the decoration of the café-bar and the restaurant was entrusted to Van Doesburg while Sophie Taeuber decorated the «Five O'Clock» tea room and the Aubette-bar. Only the billiard room, the open space open to the public in the mezzanine, was decorated by Arp.



Jean Arp in his studio
in Place Kleber, 1927
Fondation Arp, Clamart

BIOGRAPHIES

THE HORN BROTHERS

The Horn brothers came to Strasbourg to work on the large breach which was to become rue du 22-Novembre, as decided in 1908 by the Mayor of Strasbourg. It was a question of creating a new block in the city to improve the neighbourhood. In 1911, Paul Horn (1879-1960), an architect from Mulhouse, was asked to manage this operation, he was joined by his pharmacist brother André (1873-1948) who was brought in to oversee the financing of the project. Following architecture studies in Karlsruhe and Munich, Paul Horn worked with Hector Guimard in Paris whereas André was a graduate of the pharmacy faculty in Strasbourg. Financially speaking the operation turned out to be fruitful for the brothers who constructed offices, housing and the Hannong hotel which was decorated by Sophie Taeuber. She and Van Doesburg were also asked to decorate André Horn's flat, in which he kept part of his collection of works by contemporary artists.

HANS JEAN ARP

(Strasbourg 1886-Basel 1966)

Having frequented Expressionist and Cubist circles, Arp participated in the foundation of Dada in Zurich in 1916. Subsequently, he moved closer to Surrealism and Constructivism. He had a multi-disciplinary approach, writing poems and making collages and reliefs and, from 1930 onwards, sculptures with organic forms. Arp met Sophie Taeuber in 1915 and married her in 1922.



Sophie Taeuber-Arp in her studio
in Place Kleber, 1927
Fondation Arp, Clamart



Theo Van Doesburg in his studio
in Place Kleber, 1927

SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP

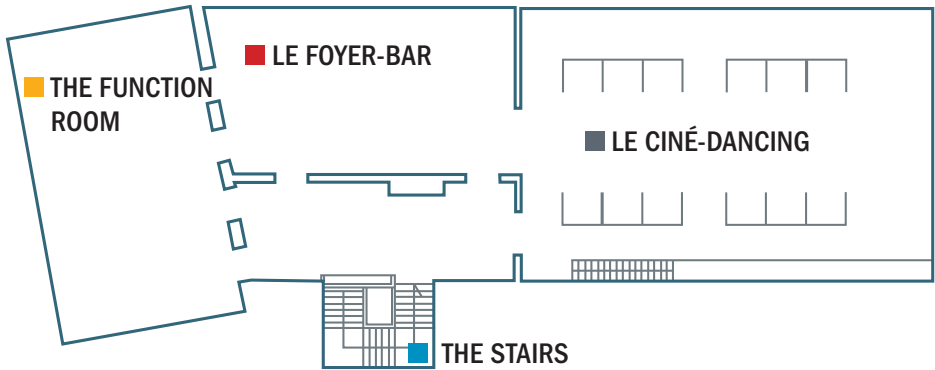
(Davos 1889-Zurich 1943)

Sophie Taeuber frequented design schools before participating in the foundation of Dada. She subsequently committed herself to Constructivist abstraction. She worked with painting, sculpture, dance, reliefs and tapistries with a formal vocabulary that oscillated between orthogonal rigor and linear undulations.

THEO VAN DOESBURG

(Utrecht 1883-Davos 1931)

Theo Van Doesburg was a self-taught painter, architect, poet and theorist. In 1917 he founded the De Stijl review in which he published the aesthetic principles of Mondrian's Neoplasticism. In 1924 Van Doesburg introduced a variant on this system, based exclusively on the right angle with the oblique at 45°, which he used to found Elementarism.



THE RESTORED ROOMS



■ THE CINÉ-DANCING (OR CINÉ-BAL)

Taking into account the orthogonal division of architectural elements and the presence of the rectangular screen wall, for the decor of the walls and ceiling of this room Van Doesburg composed an oblique grid of squares, rectangles and triangles with the colours black, white, yellow, green, blue and red. Numerous sketches reveal the different stages of research for the decor of this 250m² room. Van Doesburg applied the aesthetic theories of Elementarism, the movement he founded in 1924, which affirm the use of the oblique in contrast to the Neoplasticism of Mondrian which was based on the use of verticals and horizontals only. The room benefits from unilateral natural lighting from the south thanks to five windows that overlook Place Kléber, reinforced by the lighting elements on the ceiling.

■ THE STAIRS

Designed by Theo Van Doesburg, the stairs provided access to the first floor from the mezzanine, and are situated in the position planned by Paul Horn in his blueprints.

In architectural terms, the stairs are situated in a rectangular cage and are composed of three flights and two landings. The painted decor is attributed to Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Arp. The long vertical stripes of grey and blue contrast with the broken lines of the stairs and accentuate the upward movement. The stained glass window (the model for which is conserved in the Strasbourg Musée d'Art moderne et contemporain) was designed by Arp. It is composed of thirty tiles of rectangular cathedral glass with a range of tones in grey, blue and beige.



■ THE FUNCTION ROOM

For this decor Van Doesburg adopted an exclusively orthogonal composition animated by vertical and horizontal lines that create squares and rectangles. The chromatic range consists of elementary colours (yellow, blue, red, black and white) dear to the Neoplasticist aesthetic. Two nuances of the same colour are juxtaposed to create a “discord”. Certain modules hold enamel plates, each containing sixteen bulbs, thus creating artificial lighting. The original project included coloured linoleum flooring. The floor was finally done in parquet.



■ THE FOYER-BAR

The trapezoid space of the foyer-bar was conceived by Van Doesburg as a hyphen linking the function room and the ciné-bal. It was an open place in which the visitor could quench his thirst while following the film projected in the ciné-bal. The destination of this space corresponds to Van Doesburg's wish to encourage circulation between the different spaces so that the visitor might profit from the various leisure activities on offer. The decor of the foyer-bar was carried out by Sophie Taeuber-Arp. The composition is an arrangement of different rectangular flat tints with grey and red nuances. Van Doesburg drew a sketch for the floor which was certainly done in situ as it repeats the decor of the walls and ceiling.





THE RESTORATION

HISTORY

The Aubette leisure complex retained its original decor for a period of less than ten years. It was covered over and then partly destroyed after 1938. The idea of restoring the avant-garde decor, that was known from numerous photographs from that era and preparatory sketches in colour, emerged in the 1960s under the impetus of Victor Beyer, the then head curator of Strasbourg Museums. The first surveys, carried out in 1977, confirmed the presence of vestiges of the 1928 decor. Restoration work, exclusively concerning the ciné-bal, was undertaken in September 1985, at the same time that the room and the staircase were classified as historic monuments. The foyer-bar and the function room obtained the same classification in 1989. The work in the ciné-bal was completed in 1994. A second project, aimed at restoring the decor of the whole of the first floor (function room, stairs and foyer-bar) was endorsed by the municipal council in December 2001. The restoration work started in May 2004,

having been placed under the authority of a scientific committee composed of French and Dutch experts. It took two years to carry out surveys and take samples of the original layers, choose the tints following expert analysis and paint the various spaces. The new restoration opened on 8 June 2006.

RESTORATION TECHNIQUES

When the first restoration work was undertaken in the au ciné-bal in the 1990s, it was decided to carry out restoration by conservation, in other words to preserve the original pictorial layer by covering it with plaster placed on a reversible support in order not to damage the original work. The restoration of colours was based on the findings of the surveys carried out in the previous decade. The restoration of the function room and the foyer-bar was even more precise, thanks to careful research into the chromatic range based on stratigraphic samples and chemical tests. The original colours were restored with their full force.





“L'AUBETTE 1928”

Place Kléber

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from 2 pm to 6 pm

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Information at 03 68 98 51 54
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