

The Art of Collecting Architecture — Mari Lending — What do we think of when we ask where the most important places for the development of contemporary architecture are? Is it schools, museums or practices? Maybe even specific people, or boardroom luncheons? What if we were to suggest none of these but rather the auction house? Especially today, it's hard to think of architecture without the markets it circulates in and the forces that make it move. Mari Lending has uncovered an interesting turn of events that is not nearly as new as we might suspect. Debates surrounding whether architecture is art or not are undoubtedly one of the eternal questions of the discipline, but sometimes, especially on the auction block and in the eyes of speculative investors, that decision is made not by but on behalf of the discipline. We might even be surprised at how important the distinction between art and other commodity forms being made in the auction house actually is.

The old, inconclusive debate on whether architecture belongs among the fine arts was given a resolute proposition in May 2007 when Christie's in New York City presented Richard Neutra's *Kaufmann House* as lot number 42 at the high-profile 'Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale', not as design or real estate but as a *piece of art*. The bidding was unsensational – the deal was concluded in a few minutes and the price landed on its lowest estimate of \$15 million – and the contract was terminated a few days later. Yet, the affair appeared historical when observed from the somber, glamorous atmosphere of the auction room.

From the collecting practices of the Renaissance through the establishing of modern public museums, art forms such as sculpture and painting slowly found their place within cultural and economical exhibition conventions. Moved to museums and incorporated into collections, art works produced for site specific experience have long since become naturalized in their current, cultural habitat. Architecture, however, has remained a challenge for the modern world of collecting and exhibiting. Displayed architecture normally involves matters of representation while most art works can be presented as the real thing, whether de-located or produced for a versatile market. Exhibited and collected, architecture most often concerns the *oeuvre* rather than the *ouvrage* to borrow a distinction from Jean-Louis Cohen: the project, the design, the model, the drawings, the photos, the intellectual work, as opposed to the built work.¹ Matters of decontextualization are critically highlighted in regards to collected and displayed architecture, not only due to scale, heaviness and the built structure's inexorable groundedness in its place of origin, but also in relation to authorship and ownership. Furthermore, the economical transaction of architecture has traditionally been unfolding differently from the dynamics of the art world.

The thorny question of whether architecture belongs among the fine arts has been disputed in different guises, within different theoretical, aesthetical and institutional contexts, from conflicting positions and supported by various interests. The Enlightenment construct of aesthetical disinterest has continued to inform our conceptions of architecture as a useful or applied art and one definitely invested with interest, actually impossible to understand without optics of usefulness. The detaching of aesthetic experience from the sphere of the useful has never really applied to architecture.

The Norwegian philosopher Marcus Jacob Monrad captured this dilemma perfectly when discussing the possibility of theorizing an autonomous architecture in his two-volume *Æsthetik* of 1890. Modeled on Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art* given in Berlin in the 1820s, Monrad's aesthetics devoted more attention to concrete architectural works. He was in fact a philosophical eyewitness to the works that later led Sigfried Giedion to claim that construction was the soul of 19th century architecture. Well-travelled, Monrad saw the new structures performed in steel, concrete and glass all over Europe as the final fulfillment of the idea of a 'pure' architecture, representing nothing but itself and its increasingly less obvious structural principles. He observed this manifestation of architecture as art with excited ambivalence as it also marked the very dissolution of architecture, threatening, as he beautifully described it, to immaterialize and "dissolve into air" –echoing Gottfried Semper's description of the Crystal Palace in London 1851 as a "glass-covered vacuum".² Monrad had anticipated this event in his

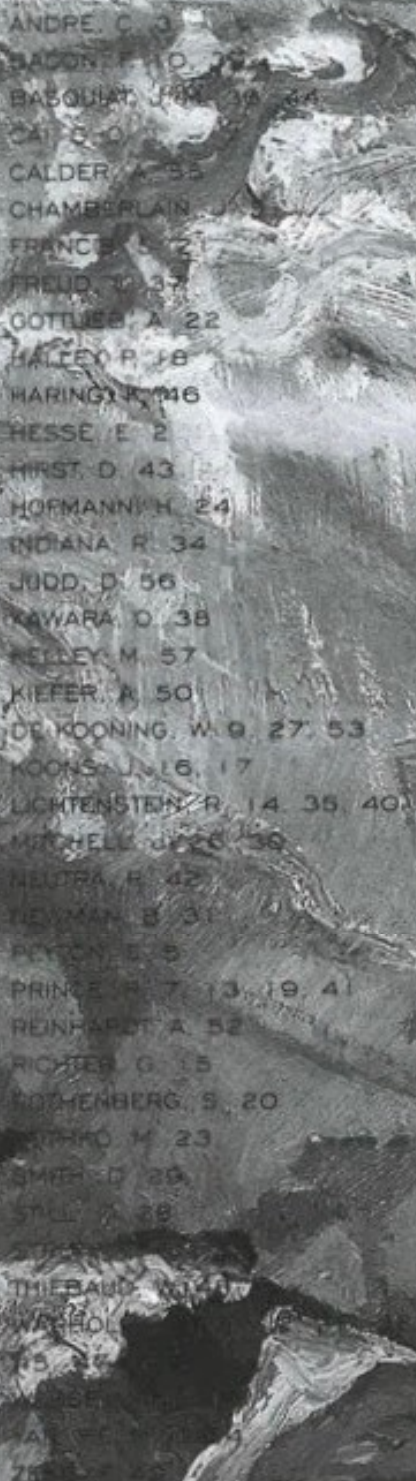
Twelve lectures on the Beautiful from the 1850s. Here he describes the architect as drawn between the spheres of the practical and the beautiful, with one foot steadily placed in the realm of the useful while striving to tread gracefully on the "sacred ground of pure and free beauty".³

This sacred ground is one regulated by economical as well as aesthetical judgment and the ground to which Christie's aimed at transplanting the *Kaufmann House* when offering it for sale not as high-end real estate but among the auction house's finest 20th century artworks. Lavishly presented in the catalog, the 'Neutra' that changed hands under the auctioneers club that night in New York featured among pieces by Bacon, Freud, Rothko, Hirst, Prince and Koons. Sarah Thornton has observed: "The catalogue is the auction house's main marketing tool. It's a full-color, glossy tome in on which the images on the front and back covers are part of the negotiations meant to entice vendors to consign their art with Christie's."⁴ In this catalogue a foldout of Julius Schulman's iconic black and white photos from 1947 evoked a glamorous Californian modernity while new shots documented the scrupulous restoration works performed by the current owners. To heighten the prominence of the object, 500 key clients were in advance provided with a special publication enclosed in a transparent Lucite box with a cork bottom mimicking the floors in the *Kaufmann House*, wrapped in a cashmere bag. The 'Neutra' was exhibited next to an Andy Warhol Campbell's Soup Can in a series of super-sized photographs in Christie's display windows facing West 49th Street at Rockefeller Center. A luxurious scale model by the stairway leading to the grand sales room compensated the absence of the actual object.

This persuasive insisting of the house as an artwork among fellow artworks reframed the *Kaufmann House*. From merely a piece of inhabitable architecture of a certain celebrity it was embraced with the passions and considerations of the art-collecting world, instigating an epistemological shift that catapulted the house into a province of collectible objects. Even though nothing might change psychically with the one-family house in Palm Springs, it was saturated with the aura of art and collecting and was lifted from a specific landscape into a global sphere of possible clients. On the occasion of the auctioning of another mid-century modern icon, James Zemaitis, head of Sotheby's 20th-century Design Department, announced in 2003 that we are putting Mies van der Rohe's *Farnsworth House* "on the market worldwide for all sorts of contemporary art and architecture enthusiasts to see it."

In the hands and fashioning of the staff at Christie's Department of Postwar and Contemporary Art, the *Kaufmann House* entered the "ambiguous zone" Irene Sunwoo has identified "between aesthetic object and real estate", a zone of palpable inversions.⁵ While auctions are said to treat art as exchangeable commodities, the performative act of auctioning a house as a piece of art disassociated the *Kaufmann House* from the mundane world of property trading towards the valuation processes of the secondary art market and the curatorial practices of the art world.

The phenomenon of auctioning architecture as art expands the field of publicizing, selling, collecting and displaying architecture. Auctioned as art the architectural object is gaining a new form of exposure that poses question of value in regards of heritage, historiography, and canonization.



ANDRE, C. 3
 BACON, F. 10, 29
 BASQUIAT, J. 16, 34
 CAI, G. 0
 CALDER, A. 35
 CHAMBERLAIN, J. 3
 FRANCE, S. 21
 FREUD, T. 37
 GOTTLIEB, A. 22
 HALLEY, P. 18
 HARING, R. 16
 HESSE, E. 2
 HIRST, D. 43
 HOFMANN, H. 24
 INDIANA, R. 34
 JUDD, D. 56
 KAWARA, O. 38
 KELLEY, M. 57
 KIEFER, A. 50, 1
 DE KOONING, W. 9, 27, 53
 KOONS, J. 16, 17
 LICHTENSTEIN, R. 14, 35, 40
 MITCHELL, J. 26, 36
 NEUTRA, H. 42
 NEWMAN, B. 31
 PEYTON, E. 5
 PRINCE, R. 7, 13, 19, 41
 REINFARDT, A. 52
 RICHTER, G. 15
 ROTHENBERG, S. 20
 RYTHKO, M. 23
 SMITH, D. 29
 STILL, A. 28
 THIEBAUD, W. 1
 WARHOL, A. 15, 27
 ZUCKERMAN, A. 1

The 1946 'Neutra', offered as a piece of art at Christie's high-profile 'Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale' in May 2007, appearing amongst fellow art works in the catalogue.

Model of the 'Neutra' in the entrance hall to Christie's high-profile 'Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale' in May 2007.

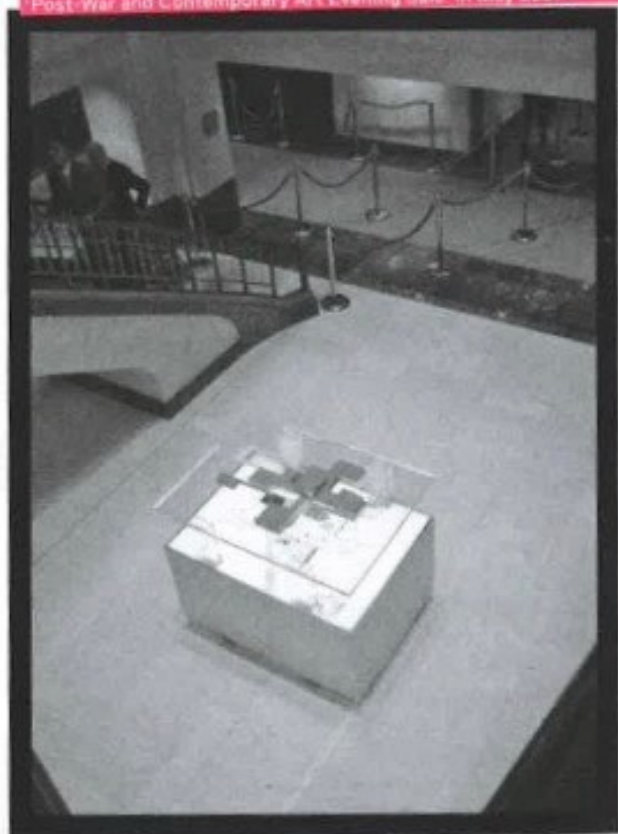


Photo: Max Lendings

History on the block

Recently, most auctioned houses have been celebrated 20th century landmarks and reverberated as such in excited reports in newspapers, glossy magazines and blogs. Obviously, the exposure of 'mid-century modern' by distinguished architects in the limelight of high-end auction houses enforces their fame and attraction. These sales have also produced new collectible ephemera such as Wright auction house's hyper-stylized catalog for Louis Kahn's *Esherick House* and Sotheby's catalogue for the *Farnsworth House* bound in metal with a transparent plastic cover alluding to a glass box and featuring appropriating quotes by architects such as Zaha Hadid and Richard Meier. Accordingly, the act of auctioning architecture serves as an effective marketing tool that will leave traces in the future historiography of modern architecture. It might, as such, be conceived as an architectural history on auction, or more dramatically: "It's putting civilization on the block," as Phyllis Lambert said to the *New York Times* on October 4, 2003, prior to Sotheby's auctioning of the *Farnsworth House*.

The 1949 *Rockefeller Guest House* might serve as an overture to the interrelation of auctioning and collecting architecture. Designed by Phillip Johnson and commissioned by Blanchette Rockefeller, later the Museum of Modern Art's president, it was intended for the display of its patron's art collection. Embedded also by biographical circumstances in museums, exhibitions and collections, the converted midtown Manhattan carriage house was donated to MoMA in 1958. In 1989 it was purchased for \$3.5 million by the London art dealer Anthony d'Offay at Sotheby's and resold in 2000 in Christie's 'Masterworks: 1900 - 2000' for more than \$11 million - tripling the lowest estimate - to the then MoMA chairman, Ronald S. Lauder. "We felt a masterpiece house would be the perfect addition for this sale," said Lars Rachen at Christie's: "At first, we thought perhaps a Frank Lloyd Wright." The *Rockefeller Guest House* represents an economical success story in the trajectory of the auctioned house. "With an estimate of \$2 - 3 million, the *Esherick House* is a true collectible work of art: smart, conceptual, serene, and transcending," auctioneer Richard Wright tempted potential bidders. Accompanied by a catalogue presenting new shots by the then 95 years old Julius Shulman it sold for \$3.2 million at Wright's in 2006. However, Louis Kahn's 1961 little house in Chestnut Hill in Philadelphia failed to sell for its lowest estimate of \$1.9 million in Chicago on May 18 2008. It finally sold in 2014 for \$900,000. Marcel Breuer's 1949 *Wolfson Trailer House* in upstate New York drew a \$1 million minimum bid at Wright's in 2005 from a buyer who had never seen the goods he procured and who later backed out from the deal. The same year Paul Rudolph's 1953 *Umbrella House* in Florida was unsuccessfully offered at Sheldon Good & Company, who specialize in real estate auctions, with an estimate of \$1.2 million, and was returned to the regular real estate market.

These examples show that purchasing houses at auctions and maybe even to collect mid-century modern architecture is not a passion to be pursued only by the super-wealthy. While the prize achieved for the *Kaufmann House* more than doubled the record of the highest price ever paid for a comparable house in the same area, auctions don't necessarily make architecture more expensive than if sold as real estate. The same evening the 'Neutra' was consecrated as art under the hammer at Christie's, a Rothko sold for \$45 million,

setting the market value of modern architecture in some perspective. A Bacon triptych sold for \$86 million the same week the 'Kahn' in Chestnut Hill failed to sell for \$2 million.

Preserving by bidding

The practice of collecting, conserving, and curating full-scaled structures, as the real thing, also taps into heritage discourses. For example, the 'Mies' purchased by Lord Peter Palumbo from Edith Farnsworth in 1968 was introduced into a private transatlantic collection of masterpieces also including a Le Corbusier and a Frank Lloyd Wright. When this collectible appeared as lot 800 at Sotheby's 'Important 20th Century Design' auction in 2003, the *Farnsworth House* was instantly subjected to deliberations on the private house as a heritage object. Fear was aired that a new owner might "move the house away from its pastoral location in Plano, Illinois" and that the auctioning of private homes would inspire collectors to dismantle them.

One could easily imagine the scenario of assemblages of iconic modern structures in the family of open-air museum displays of the typical and vernacular. Or, one might envision, parallel to the busy international trafficking of art, that modern landmarks might be exported to other parts of the world. Preservationists have been worried that houses sold on auctions would attract buyers with alternative agendas: For instance, another Neutra house in Palm Springs from 1962 sold at Sotheby's for \$2.4 million in 2002 and was torn down 4 weeks later.

"Nothing really protects the house now from uncertainty - it could even be taken down and moved," Mr. Palumbo said to the *New York Times* on June 1, 2003, suggesting that the publicity stirred by auctions might protect his "timeless work of art" and that the market might act as a nimble force for preservation. In the end, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and the National Trust for Historic Monuments, in auction-house parlance, "won" the house. The conversion from a private collectible to the virtual collection of global heritage gave a historiographical twist to the house as object and icon - without its being moved. Christy MacLear, the former director of Philip Johnson's *Glass House* in New Canaan, run on behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, stepped up as a "big supporter" of the idea of selling significant 20th century architecture at auction: "It creates this unbelievable awareness about Modernism and enhances its value," she said to the *Wall Street Journal* May 17th, 2008.

"Houses are not portable the way paintings are," stated architecture critic Christopher Hawthorne of the *Los Angeles Times* on June 3, 2008, corroborating a centuries old topos. "There are cathedrals one would like to place in museums," exclaimed Napoleon, according to Victor Hugo, when visiting the Cathedral at Auch.⁵ "[B]uildings are made to remain fixed on the spot where they are originally erected, and are of such a scale that they cannot be collected together in any gallery, however large," James Fergusson, at the time manager of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham with the ten grandiose architectural courts, said on the occasion of the incorporation of the Architectural Museum into the new South Kensington Museum in 1857.⁷ When proposing an incredibly interesting (and unfulfilled) concept for a Norwegian museum of architecture in 1934, Harald Hals, head of the planning department in Oslo and the curator of innumerable architecture exhibitions echoed: "A building is

unsuitable as a museum exhibit. It cannot be moved around and be 'placed' as a piece of furniture, a painting or a sculpture, and is unreasonably space consuming. If several buildings were to form a collection it would soon expand every thinkable boarder".⁸

Some houses are, however, more portable than others. Shigeru Ban's 2007 prefabricated, truly nomadic Artek Pavilion made of recycled materials was displayed in Milan, Helsinki and Miami before it appeared at Sotheby's as "a masterwork" in 2007 where it gained half the price of its highest estimate of \$1.2 million. Economical transactions are one way of preserving ephemeral structures for posterity; spoils and fragments of architectural works of course often travel through auction houses. An extra set of lacquered steel doors and window panels from Jean Prouvé's *Maison Tropicale*, collected by the French antiques dealer Eric Touchaleaume, was auctioned by Christie's in New York in 2007 together with one of the houses – but as design, not as art.

Two of three prototypes of the *Maisons Tropicales* (1949 – 1951), dismantled in Brazzaville, Congo and Niamey, Niger and shipped back to France in 2000, might demonstrate how the metamorphosis of architecture into art unfolds on several levels. Shigeru Ban's low cost, sustainable, ecological, modular structures, designed to meet housing shortages and deplorable living conditions across the world, was surely introduced into new circles when Mr. Zemaitis of Sotheby's announced that "Hybrid collectors, that is to say, people with more than one collection, will appreciate the [Artek] pavilion as a place to display anything from modern paintings to vintage automobiles", as reported in *The New York Sun* under the headline "Need a Garage? Buy the Artek Pavilion" on June 13, 2008. Similarly, the Prouvé houses, designed as prefabricated, mass produced housing for French colonial officials in West Africa have – after meticulous restoration followed by a rhizomatic trajectory of exposition – fulfilled the re-labeling as "a piece of art," as Mr. Touchaleaume's house was baptized when offered at Christie's Spring '20th Century Decorative Art & Design' auction in June 2007. Lifted from 'outré-mer' to Western art centers, Joshua Holdeman at Christie's assured the readers of *Artdaily* on May 19, 2007 that "Christie's prides itself on being at the forefront of the 20th century collecting categories", and were delighted to "offer the people of New York City a chance to share in the excitement of having one of the greatest 20th century architectural designs in the heart of the city." "A good building," hotelier André Balazs, who acquired the house for \$5 million, told *Financial Times* on April 19, 2008, "does all the things art does, but it is much more profound and infinitely more complex because it embodies capital, politics and production." Prior to the auction of this edition, the *Maison Tropicale* was displayed by the Pont Alexandre III in Paris in 2006; then it meandered to another river and the Queensboro Bridge in New York before landing by the Thames and Tate Modern, where the painstakingly restored structure had its London audience believing they were witnessing a brand new replica. In 2014 another prefabricated Prouvé design from the 1940s popped up at Art Basel Miami Beach.

Also the smaller Prouvé house has proved to remain a flexible, itinerant object. It was installed at Yale University while in the possession of art collector Robert Rubin, parts of it in Paul Rudolph's A&A Building in 2005 before moving on to the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.⁹ Donated to the Centre Pompidou, the placing of this

'Prouvé' had an interesting effect of estrangement within the history of full scaled, architectural oeuvres in museums when squeezed in on the roof terrace under the Beaubourg's cantilevered restaurant facing the Seine. As this terrace is open only in the summer, visitors during the rest of the year would admire the *Maison Tropicale* through a glass wall from the inside of the gallery in a kind of inverted vitrine situation. As such it formed an opposite display setting in comparison with the mammoth vitrine encasing the Nubian Dendur temple at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as seen from Central Park, another full-scale structure that, along with a number of other Egyptian temples, was converted to museum items and portable collectibles due to cold war geopolitics and the building of the Aswan High Dam.¹⁰

Objects change value and significance by being moved. This is as valid for ancient structures as it is for modern architecture. The promotion of modern 'masterpieces' as collectible art harbors aesthetic, museological and preservationist implications. "It can be a controversial process, taking buildings away from their original setting, but in this case everyone was happy that it was being moved," Mr. Rubin commented to the *Guardian* on August 31, 2004 on the transposition of the wounded Prouvé-structure from war-ridden Congo as an act of salvage within a virtual, global heritage endeavor. Local Congo authorities, however, argued that the houses should remain in their intended place as part of colonial, architectural history. Later, Robert Rubin wrote: "Non-site specific, they are nonetheless inextricably bound up in the cultural memories of colonial Africa. As the two restored houses circulate, these layers of meaning continue to expand."¹¹

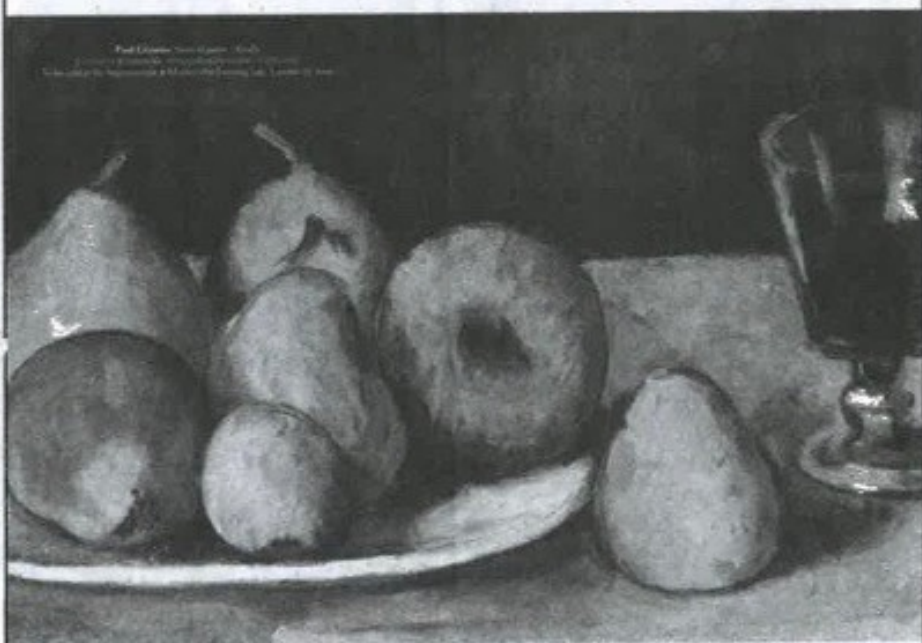
Auctioning the Parthenon

Calling the attention of "the lovers of Antique, Architects, and Others," a small advertisement posted in the *Times* of London on June 27, 1822 announced that the "valuable contents of the GALLERY OF CASTS, from the antique, the property of John Samuel Hayward, esq. "deceased" would be put up for auction at Mr. Christie's Great Room at Pall Mall the following day. Among the particularly valuable objects offered for sale were casts of the "Elgin Marbles, taken by favour, previous to the removal of the originals to the Museum." For a present-day reader, the attribution of these casts as the Elgin Marbles might appear slightly anachronistic, because when these first casts were made the marbles were not yet "Elgin's". The dismembered parts of the Parthenon only became 'the Elgin Marbles' after the auctioned casts were made. Lord Elgin had molds, and in turn, casts made from the temple already in 1802 while assembling objects at the Acropolis, and the casts that would be auctioned were circulated and collected before the marbles were shipped from Athens to London. The original temple fragments were turned into exhibits when purchased from Elgin by the British Parliament in 1816 and put on public display in the so-called temporary Elgin Room at the British Museum, then under construction in Bloomsbury. Thus, for contemporary readers scrolling the advertisements in the *Times* in June 1822, the dating of the casts offered at auction prior to this much-debated acquisition must have made perfect sense. Molded and cast in situ the pieces auctioned at Christie's were early and already rare appearances in what were to become a rich trajectory of increasingly perfected series of casts from the Parthenon.¹²

Sotheby's

EST. 1744

Paul Cézanne, *Still Life with Fruit*, 1895
Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 35 1/2 inches (62 x 90 cm)
The painting is held in the collection of the Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Paris.



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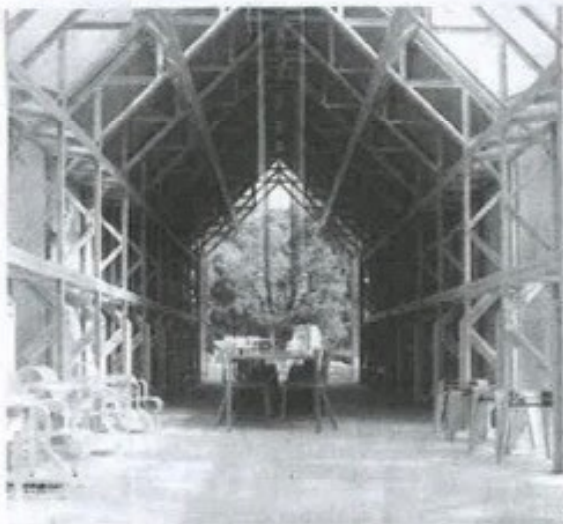
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AUCTION IN LONDON 7 JET

IMPORTANT AUCTIONS IN LONDON

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AUCTION 23 JUNE

Contemporary Art Evening Sale
AUCTION 1 JET

Old Master Paintings Evening Sale
AUCTION 7 JET



Artek Pavilion by Shigeru Ban, 1991. Photo by Shigeru Ban, 2003. Photo by Shigeru Ban, 2003. Photo by Shigeru Ban, 2003.

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A full-page New York Times advertisement from Sotheby's offering Shigeru Ban's Artek Pavilion, a particularly attractive collectible for "Hybrid collectors, that is to say, people with more than one collection".



Two pieces from of Parthenon frieze. Facsimils from the catalogue *Historic Plaster Casts from the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York* (New York: Sotheby's, 2006).

Pieces from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's discarded cast collection resurfaced at Christie's in London in 2012. In 2014 the same two pieces of the Parthenon frieze auctioned at Sotheby's in London 2006 featured as lot 133 at the "Forever Chic" auction at Christie's in New York, however offered without plaster provenance.



A year later the same auction house announced "a very extensive assemblage of architectural casts", this time of Roman specimens. The prospect that the sale would disperse an extraordinary collection stirred public worry and debate and caused Mr. Christie to assure "patrons and professors of architecture" that he was doing everything in his power to find a buyer that would purchase the collection whole and undivided, and preferably for public display. He was, he firmly assured a civic spirited London elite, actually willing to withdraw the collection from auction if he found the perfect buyer. The gentleman signing as "A Constant Reader", who referred to the auctioneer's "energetic address" in a letter to the editor of the Times on July 19, 1823, suggested that Parliament should secure the collection for the British Museum where it, together with the Elgin marbles, "would have formed a nucleus for one of the most splendid architectural museums of which the world can boast."

The two collections of casts auctioned at Christie's in the early 1820s were early manifestations of a phenomenon that should increasingly take on cultural significance. In fact, the anonymous "Constant Reader" distinguished himself as something of a visionary when picturing the constellation of the Elgin Marbles and the assemblage of casts from the finest Roman monuments as an architecture museum. Such a display would not only have formed a splendid, but actually one of the first modern architecture museums of a sort, without many predecessors. He was pointing towards a regime of display that would only make itself palpably present decades later.

These two episodes from a London auction house as reported in the press encapsulate an important moment in the history of architecture as circulating collectibles fit for curatorial operations. Notably, both sales present the works in question as architectural. Plaster casts of sculpture had of course been circulating for centuries while the phenomenon of casting full-scaled architecture first really gained volume and speed in the mid 19th century. Both auctions bear witness to the fundamental historicization of architecture that was about to take place and in which casts played a crucial part. The 1822 auction at Christie's is one testimony of architecture becoming a profoundly historical phenomenon, including the casts that were assigned provenance when traded in the London art market.

The same was about to happen with the Parthenon itself. If the Parthenon fragments – both the originals and the reproductions – landed in London as the ultimate expression of classical culture and remained the touchstone of excellence in the galleries of the British Museum and in the reception of antiquity, classicist ideas of timelessness were about to be severely undermined. In this radical process of historicizing and temporalizing architecture, the proposal of co-exhibiting the Elgin Marbles and a collection of Roman monuments in an architecture museum reflects the budding will to periodize the galleries; with Rome following Athens and not necessarily in a narrative of corruption, decadence or decline. Eventually detached from both Athens and London, the multiplied and traveling Parthenon fragments as collectibles served less as a depository of ahistorical, universal principles than as part of series showing the historicity of architecture. The little ad announcing the earliest casts of the Elgin Marbles as precious collectibles, invested with taste, money and connoisseurship, reveals the origins of a fluctuating plaster Parthenon. The first orders for casts from museums and collectors abroad were placed at the

British Museum already in 1816, propelling different editions of the Parthenon into an international orbit of exhibition, still to be encountered all over the world.

Itineraries and provenance

When pieces from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's cast collection were offered for sale at Sotheby's in New York, February 2006, each lot was estimated to be worth \$1–2. The goods originated from what was envisioned to become "THE MOST IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF CASTS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD," as spelled out in capital letters in 1892, and indeed became an imposing collection of architecture.¹³ However, when casts fell out of vogue due to modernist aesthetics of authenticity, new conceptions of honesty, and an increasing obsession with originality, this collection was also channeled into oblivion and destruction, first to a warehouse under a 158th street viaduct in Manhattan and from the 1970s onward in another storage space in the Bronx. The catalogue for the auction presented breathtakingly beautiful photographs of the casts in storage, of spaces that trump the old trope of the museum as mausoleum, looking more like a veritable mass-grave of plaster monuments.¹⁴ In the 1970s some of the casts were excavated and slowly started circulating again to museums and schools in Europe and the US. The ones that found their way to Sotheby's in 2006, pieces selected by the advice of the most prominent archeologists, museum directors and art and architecture historians of the late 19th century, were described quite generically: "A large group of Classical through Renaissance elements and reliefs" (lot 49, sold for \$1,320), "A group of eleven Classical Frieze elements" (lot 72, sold for \$14,400), "A fluted classical column" (lot 115, sold for \$840), etc. Some of the works would have more precise titles, among them "A pair of panels from the east and north doors of the Florence baptistry by Lorenzo Ghiberti" (lot 119, sold for \$3,000) or "Two reliefs with riders from the south frieze of the Parthenon" (lot 169, sold for \$30,000). Sometimes a little bit of information was provided but not a lot. "A large figural relief from the Pergamon Altar" (lot 147, sold for \$7,800) came with the additional information "depicting a bearded man and a woman".

In October 2012 some of these casts resurfaced at Christie's, South Kensington, London. Art collector, party-planner and property developer James Perkins was selling his art collection out of Aynhoe Park in Oxfordshire, an estate remodeled by John Soane in 1798 who had draped the staircase with plaster casts. The catalogue played on the tradition: *Aynhoe Park – A Modern Grand Tour*. At Christie's the casts were inscribed with provenance as well as authorship, a rather rare occurrence in the world of plaster monuments. In addition to referencing the 2006 Sotheby's auction, many of the casts were marked "Historic plaster cast from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York" or "Almost certainly from the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York". More interesting was that some of them even attributed the lot for sale to the maker, the author, the *formatore* who had molded and cast the work offered to the market of collectors. The certainty is scaled. Lot 335 reads "A Collection of eight plaster capitals [...] Three capitals marked 'D. Brucciani & Co, London'"; lot 136 "Twelve sections from the Parthenon Frieze after the antique attributed to D. Brucciani & Co, probably late 19th early 20th century" (sold for £67,250); lot 336 "A Collection of seven plaster frieze [...] possibly by D. Brucciani & Co" (sold for £9,375).



The Metropolitan Museum of Art's plaster cast collection was originally procured in the 1880s and 1890s. Parts of it were installed at the Aynhoe Park estate outside London after being purchased at a Sotheby's auction in New York 2006.

Domenico Brucciani was the master plaster caster for both the British Museum and South Kensington Museum, and also sold casts out of an elegant gallery in Covent Garden and a number of sales catalogues. He is one of the 19th century *formatori* now about to gain celebrity status in his own right, and this recent auction proves how his authorship to the monuments increases their value.¹⁴ Brucciani was however one among many skilled *formatori* who were crucial for the invention and circulation of monuments; producing architecture as collectables and the core material for the late 19th century's fantasies of the perfect architecture museum. These collections could only be performed in plaster, allowing monuments from across time and place to be experienced "in one synoptical and simultaneous view," as Charles Newton of the British Museum and the excavator of the Mausoleum in Halicarnassus put it.¹⁵

The de-locating gestures of the auctioneer redefine architecture as an object of desire for private collections and public exhibition. The effort of turning architecture into art, from Christie's first auctioning of the Parthenon in 1822 to the transaction of modern houses as portable collectibles, expresses an ambition to curate cultural heritage on all levels; even something as conceptually unruly, huge and grounded as buildings.

- 1 Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, "A Conversation with Jean-Louis Cohen", *October*, vol. 89 (summer, 1999), p. 6.
- 2 Monrad, *Æsthetik. Det Skjønne og dets Forekomst i Natur og Kunst II* (Christiania: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1890), p. 151; Semper, "Science, Industry, and art: Proposals for the development of a national taste in art at the closing of the London industrial exhibition" (1852), in Mallgrave and Herrmann (eds.), *The four elements of architecture and other writings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 164.
- 3 "Monrad, *Tolv Forelæsninger om Det Skjønne* (Christiania: Det norske Studentersamfunds Forlag, 1859), p. 153.
- 4 Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, (New York and London: W.W. Norton 2008), p. 25.
- 5 Irene Sunwoo, "Taming the Farnsworth House", *Thresholds* no. 31, MIT Press 2006, p. 67.
- 6 Victor Hugo, *Alpes et Pyrénées, En voyage II*, 1843, p. 426.
- 7 James Fergusson, *On a National Collection of Architectural Art*, Introductory Addresses on the Science and Art Department and the South Kensington Museum, delivered on 21st December 1857, (London, 1857), p. 4.
- 8 Hals, "Et norsk arkitektur- og bygningsmuseum" *St. Hallvard* 1934, p. 4. For one initiative in which Hals was instrumental, see Mari Lending and Mari Hvattum, *Modelling Time. The Permanent Collection 1925 – 2014* (Oslo: Torpedo Press, 2014).
- 9 See Rubin, "Preserving and Presenting Prefab: Jean Prouvé's Tropical House", *Future Anterior*, Vol. 2, # 1, Summer 2005.
- 10 For the "salvage" of the so-called surplus temples that would have been flooded by the construction of the Aswan Dam and their relocation to museums in New York, Leiden, Madrid and elsewhere, see Lucia Allais, "Intagrities: The salvage of Abu Simbel", *Grey Room* 50, Winter 2013.
- 11 Rubin, "Maison Tropical. Jean Prouvé", in Barry Bergdoll and Peter Christensen, *Home Delivery. Fabricating the Modern Dwelling* (New York: MoMA, 2008), p. 113.
- 12 Ian Jenkins gives an account of the production and circulation of Parthenon casts in "Acquisition and supply of casts of the Parthenon sculptures by the British Museum, 1835 – 1939", *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, Vol. 85 (1990).
- 13 Special Committee to Enlarge Collection of Casts. *Report of Committee to Members and Subscribers, February 1, 1892*

(New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1892), p. 5.

- 14 *Historic Plaster Casts from the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York* (New York: Sotheby's, 2006).
- 15 For copyright issues in the world of plaster reproduction, see Mari Lending, "Traveling Portals", in T. Arrhenius, M. Lending, W. Miller and J. McGowan (eds.), *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2014).
- 16 Charles Newton, "Remarks on the Collections of Ancient Art in the Museums of Italy, the Glyptothek at Munich, and the British Museum", *The Museum of Classical Antiquities: A Quarterly Journal of Architecture and the Sister Branches of Classic Art*, vol. 1, no. III, July 1851, p. 226.