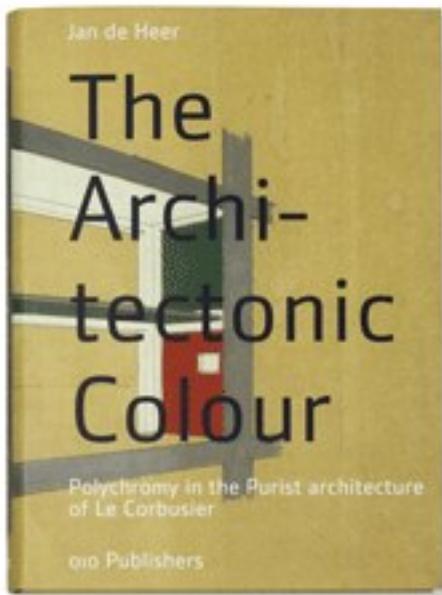


# The Architectonic Colour



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From 1918 onward, Le Corbusier, who was not only an architect but also a painter, was engaged in conceiving and generating the idea of Purism, an activity he undertook in conjunction with the painter Amédée Ozenfant. Not surprisingly, paintings were their first tangible products in this field. Their reflections on the relationship between form and colour led to the determination of the so-called 'large gamma': yellow and red ochres, earthy colours, white, black, ultramarine, and a few mixed colours derived from these. With the term 'the architectonic colour', Le Corbusier (1887-1965) referred to the profound link between this gamma and architecture.

This book is an account of a significant aspect of Le Corbusier's work. It is about the way in which he arrived at a distinctly personal architectonic polychromy in the early 1920s. His youthful works had been built in a traditional style, making use of local construction method and materials, and bearing the decoration he himself had created. However, with his Purist architecture, whose principles he formulated from 1920 onward and which are expressed in his architecture until 1927, he embarked upon a radically different course. His buildings were constructed in reinforced concrete, finished with a layer of plaster and then completely painted. The colours of this paintwork were taken from the gamma mentioned above, the architectonic colours. With his ideas on the polychromy of the twenties, Le Corbusier placed himself closer to Paolo Veronese, who painted the illusion of the landscape in the villas of Palladio, than to Theo van Doesburg.

After the rift between Ozenfant and Le Corbusier in 1925, the latter entered a new architectonic path and the system of Purist polychromy gradually disappeared from his new work. In the 1950s, Le Corbusier gave preference to natural polychromy - the colour of the material - above painted polychromy. Whereas polychrome painting in Purist architecture had once been an inevitable and total process, after the Second World War it was allocated a modest position as mere ornamentation.

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