

“Le Corbusier, the New Woman, and Domestic Reform”

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Woman has got there before us. She has brought about the reform of her dress. She found herself in this dilemma: to follow fashion and by doing so give up what modern technology--modern life--had to offer. To give up sport and, more materially, the chance of employment, which has given her a productive role in modern life and enabled her to earn her living . . . To carry out the daily construction of her toilet: hairdo, boots, buttoning her dress, she would have had to give up sleeping.

So woman cut off her hair and her skirts and her sleeves. She goes around bare-headed, bare-armed, with her legs free and she can dress in five minutes. Moreover, she is beautiful; she enchants us with the grace of her figure. . .

The courage, the enterprise, the inventive spirit with which woman has revolutionized her dress are a miracle of modern times. Thank you!

What about us men? A dismal state of affairs! In our clothes, we look like generals of the Grand Army and we wear starched collars! We are uncomfortable . . .

--Le Corbusier, Précisions, 1930

The kitchen becomes one of the essential rooms of the house.

--Le Corbusier, Oeuvre complète, 1929-34, 1935.

Mary McLeod’s lecture “Le Corbusier, the New Woman, Domestic Reform” will explore the relationship between Le Corbusier’s architecture and the emergence of the New Woman in France after World War I, examining how changing gender identities and social conditions (such as women working and the so-called servant crisis) affected Le Corbusier’s vision of domestic living in the 1920s. She will address the influence of Charlotte Perriand on the atelier’s designs, as well as the role of an emerging domestic reform movement in Germany and France (especially the writings of Paulette Bernège) on Le Corbusier’s view of modern living. One theme that will be considered is the new importance that the kitchen gained in his work in the late 1920s. The Salon d’Automne apartment of 1929 will be discussed as a pivotal project. As part of her lecture, she will show a short film of 1931, Pierre Chenal’s L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui, in which Le Corbusier presents three of his villas from the late 1920s.