

# *Esprit des lieux, es-tu là ?*

By Marion Vignal



- 1 — *Cosmogonie* by Studio GGSV, Genius Loci special commission for the exhibition *Genius Loci Maison Bernard*, Théoule-sur-Mer, June 2024
- 2 — Exhibition view, *L'Ange Volant*, Gio Ponti, Garches, October 2021. © Jérémie Léon
- 3 — Exhibition view, *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* by Ricardo Bofill, carte blanche to Samuel Nguyen, Noisy-le-Grand, June 2023 © Adrien Dirand
- 4 — *Dialogue du vent et de la mer, Les herbes rouges* by Safia Hijos, Genius Loci special commission for the exhibition *Genius Loci Maison Bernard*, Théoule-sur-Mer, June 2024 © Adrien Dirand

*Through a program of exhibitions that began in 2021 at Gio Ponti's villa L'Ange Volant near Paris, the non-profit organisation Genius Loci seeks to revive the spirit of emblematic and little-known architectural creations. Founder and curator Marion Vignal explains her approach, based on making the architectural work both the setting and the subject of each exhibition.*

Goethe liked to think of architecture as “petrified music,” with the stones of a structure playing a silent melody, its lines and volumes beating out a secret rhythm. Presenting an architectural work as the subject and setting for an exhibition could consist of plumbing its mysteries to reveal its innermost identity, reviving its harmonies to make them sing anew. Genius Loci's program is the result of my curatorial reflections on the form and challenges of the exhibition as a narrative medium and an emotional journey, born of the desire to create a dialogue among artistic disciplines with the architecture as the main protagonist. To bring the site to life, to power it, to “perform” it, the public is invited to explore a *mise en abyme* of its spirit and history through interactions with other works and artistic practices. The exhibition thus becomes a way to experience the space, interspersed with dialogues and encounters. Sounds, fragrances, sculptures, paintings, drawings, furniture creations, videos and

performances unite in a veritable orchestra of singular musicians and instruments, joining together, often for the first time, to accompany the viewer's experience to the rhythm of the architecture. Understanding an architectural work requires an awareness of the space, its context and its unique qualities. To accomplish this, it is essential to follow the protocol defined by its creator and to guide the visitor step by step through this gradual, intimate exploration of the site. Le Corbusier conceived “architectural walks” punctuated with surprises, sometimes even putting the visitor in danger on a steep ocean liner-style staircase or atop a dizzying height. Gio Ponti saw architecture as a series of tableaux, whereas Antti Lovag was obsessed with disorientation, the multiplication of viewpoints and perspectives. Inviting the public to experience a structure means, first of all, laying out a narrative, sensory path that captures the site's “intention” and identity as closely as possible.









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5 — Exhibition view, L'Ange Volant, Gio Ponti, Garches, October 2021  
 6 — Exhibition view Genius Loci *Maison Bernard*, Théoule-sur-Mer, June 2024

Visitors can then be drawn into the physical being of the place, giving them a sense of the theoretical principles upheld by these originators of modernity, each of whom, as Mies van der Rohe would have it, sought to translate their era into space. The site that they thus discover is not inert or frozen in the past, but transcended by the presence of a painting, a sculpture or an object that takes its place in the space like a performer. The works on display play their own score, blending their music with that of the structure.

As the creations join together, the exhibition becomes a kaleidoscope of images through which the “guests” can perceive the building at once as a whole and in fragments. Ponti theorized architecture as a crystal with a finite form and multiple facets. A matrix for the synthesis of the arts, the architecture intertwines the works in a secret counterpoint. ◇

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12.

7 — *Les Rayons* (Maison Bernard) by Xavier Veilhan, special commission by Genius Loci for the exhibition *Genius Loci Maison Bernard*, Théoule-sur-Mer, June 2024

8 — *Totems 12.74* by Thomas Devaux, Genius Loci special commission for the exhibition *The Auguste Perret Apartment*, Paris, October 2022

9 — *Miroir Alchemia* by Sophie Dries, Genius Loci special commission for the exhibition *L'Ange Volant*, Gio Ponti, Garches, October 2021

10 — *Les Espaces d'Abraxas* by Ricardo Bofill, Noisy-le-Grand

11 — Exhibition view, *The Auguste Perret Apartment*, Paris, October 2022

12 — *Sans 90 degrés Sky Mirror* by Mathias Kiss, Genius Loci special commission for the exhibition *L'Ange Volant*, Gio Ponti, Garches, October 2021









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