

# IN MEMORY OF

## Jean-Louis Cohen 1949–2023

We say *adieu* to Jean-Louis Cohen (1949–2023), who died unexpectedly on August 7, while he was in his country home in the Ardèche region, France.

Born in Paris in 1949, Cohen was trained as an architect at the *École Spéciale d'Architecture* before completing his doctoral thesis in 1985 at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* on André Lurçat, a communist architect whose work had fallen out of the canon. The problematic position that Lurçat occupied within the narrative of modernity with his works and his reputation for being a critical dissident among his avantgarde fellows, offers an early witness of the intellectual breadth that enabled the young Cohen to engage in unpaved directions. The publisher Mardaga (Liège) produced the book, titled *André Lurçat (1894-1970). Autocritique d'un Moderne*, in 1995. In 2018, a confirmation of Cohen's scholarly foresight came with the *World Monument Fund Award* assigned to the preservation of Lurçat's Karl Marx School in Villejuif, France.

From the very beginning of his Promethean career, Cohen positioned himself as a fervent advocate of a transversal reading of the 20th-century historiography, which resonated immediately in the project of creating a shared ground among scholars, professionals, writers, and critics for an engagement in the preservation of the architecture of modernity.

Since the first International Docomomo Conference in 1990, the aims expressed in its Constitution became a mantra that transformed our beliefs on how to respond to the worldwide challenge of decay and destruction of 20th century masterpieces and of the more ordinary and/or overlooked treasures.

Founding Director of the *Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine* in Paris (1997–2003), under the aegis of

the *Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication*, Cohen was among the first in Europe to envision architecture as the ground for a research center, where collections could enhance the knowledge of the built environment, expanding its domain to interdisciplinary fields and embracing multiple diversities. In many respects, the Cité's program endorsed the two faces of the architectural domain—the past and the future—and identified its mission with the preservation of the modern heritage and the promotion of contemporary architecture.

Therefore, Docomomo International would offer an innovative response to that mission, which resulted in the decision to move its headquarters from Eindhoven (the Netherlands) to Paris, followed by the election of a new chair, from Hubert-Jan Henket to Maristella Casciato. The new leadership became operational at the Institut Français d'Architecture (then on rue de Tournon) in September 2002. *The Direction de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine* (DAPA) at the French Ministry of Culture generously provided the annual budget for the activities (secretariat, Journal, biennial conferences, network and logistics among which the International Specialist Committees) that Docomomo had launched. Dr. Émilie d'Orgeix was selected, after an open call, as secretary general.

Cohen, who had followed Docomomo's development since its foundation, attached great importance to its international reach from Paris. From the very first months after the new secretariat moved in, he took a keen interest in the Docomomo Journal and the creation of its new layout, which he wanted to be completely renewed and in full color. He was involved from the very first issue published in Paris and participated throughout the 16 issues printed between 2002 and 2010 (nos. 28-41). His vision of the Docomomo Journal was clear: he saw it as a major tool

for linking and cohesion between the various chapters, open to cross-cutting themes likely to create bridges between different expressions of modernism, with a format more accessible than that of an academic journal. Throughout the years, Cohen supported the development of the Docomomo chapters and supervised the successive relocations of the international headquarters from the Institut français d'architecture (2002-2003) to the Palais de la porte Dorée (2003-2007), and ultimately to the grand Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine at the Palais du Trocadéro inaugurated in December 2007. Even when "ousted" from the Cité's project under a right-wing administration in 2003, he remained careful to convey to the new Direction the importance of Docomomo to the Cité's international policy. He then kept on following with great attention our endeavors and safeguarding campaigns. He was always among the first to rejoice in Docomomo's successes, such as the fruitful discussions led with Renzo Piano regarding the *transformation* of the Ronchamp chapel hill, or the obtaining of the status of "NGO with official operational relations with UNESCO" in 2008.

In 1994, Cohen moved to NYU, where he held the Sheldon H. Solow



01 Jean-Louis Cohen/Amos Gitai, Double Portrait, © Amos Gitai, Paris, 2022.

Chair in the History of Architecture at the Institute of Fine Arts. In 2013, he was the first architectural historian to be invited to the Collège de France in Paris as the international chair on Architecture and Urban Form.

Many adjectives have been used in the past weeks to describe his prolific academic, curatorial, and pedagogical engagements, all of which were marked by a plurality of themes extending to global geographies. Cohen was a leading architectural historian, with an interest spanning from architecture and urban history of the 19th to 21st centuries; he will be remembered as such by colleagues, friends and critics, as well as a multitude of students.

In a recent interview he said of himself: "I am a multitasking character and I work on many parallel projects, which are inscribed in different temporalities." Most recently, he had been curating two exhibitions, one in Porto on the work of Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, and one at Shanghai's Power Station of Art, titled *Paris Moderne, 1914-1945* Art - Design - Architecture - Photographie - Littérature - Cinéma - Mode.

Jean-Louis Cohen belonged to the first group of scholars who inaugurated the Getty Research Institute Scholar Program in the fall of 1985 under the theme "Aesthetic Experience and Affinities among the Arts." Cohen never stopped

experimenting with that subject. Most recently, Cohen was in the midst of researching and writing the second and third volume of *Frank Gehry: Catalogue Raisonné of the Drawings*, with the first volume, covering the years 1954-1978 published in 2020.

His bibliography is protean and includes more than fifty books, published in many countries and translated in several languages (see <https://www.ifa.nyu.edu/people/faculty/cohen.htm>).

Jean-Louis, your warm presence, affection and gentle smile will be missed worldwide.

Maristella Casciato  
Émilie d'Orgeix

## IN MEMORY OF

### Maija Kairamo 1935—2023

On a summer day in June 2023, our dear Docomomo friend, the elegant architect Maija Kairamo (born Santaholma) passed away.

She was born in the Osterbotinan harbor city of Oulu Finland in 1935. Together with her first husband, the architect Erkki Kairamo, she ran a practice until 1968. From 1963 to 1998 she worked for the Museumbureau of the Finnish state. In that capacity, Maija contributed tremendously to the protection and restoration of key Finnish icons of Modernity and continued her efforts after her retirement until 2015 - as a volunteer for the Alvar Aalto foundation-. Her most important contribution was undoubtedly as secretary general of the highly complicated restoration project of the Alvar Aalto library in Vyborg (Viipuri). Until 1945 this town was located in south-east Finland, and since then belongs to Russia. For this organizational, financial and technical miracle the project was awarded the Europa Nostra Award and the Knoll Modernism Award of the World Monument Fund. Maija was also

awarded the Order of the Finnish Lion, 1st class.

Maija's presence in Docomomo started right on the first day of our founding conference in Eindhoven, the Netherlands in 1990. Since then, we enjoyed her ever-present smile and optimism, as well as her energy and participation in our endeavors.

Together with her occasional Argentinian tango partner Jorge Gazaneo, they formed the stars of the tango competition in Sliac, Slovakia at the 4th international Docomomo Conference. Maija was one of the organizers of the 12th international Docomomo Conference in Finland in 2012. She contributed with several lectures and articles, participated in many round tables, and formed a vital liaison between Docomomo and ICOMOS. In 2016 in Lisbon, former Docomomo Chair Ana Tostões presented Maija with the Docomomo Award for all her contributions and hard work in reaching our goals.

Dearest Maija, always wearing something Finnish blue, we will sincerely miss the everlasting joy and energy you brought to the Docomomo family. Thank you so much on behalf of all of us.

Hubert-Jan Henket



01 Maija Kairamo honoured with the Docomomo Award 2016. © Docomomo International, 2016