

Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli

A passion for Jean Prouvé
From furniture to architecture
The private collection of Laurence and Patrick Seguin

The Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli presents *A Passion for Jean Prouvé*, an exhibition devoted to the furniture and architecture by the French designer Jean Prouvé from the collection owned by Laurence and Patrick Seguin.

Laurence and Patrick Seguin discovered the work of Jean Prouvé, in the late 1980s, through his furniture designs. They were immediately struck by the unique aesthetic of these pieces, where the artistic skill lies wholly in imperceptible technical mastery devoted to enhancing the strength of the materials. While at the time very few people had even heard of Jean Prouvé, their enthusiasm for his captivating lines was immediate, a revelation that became a true passion.

The couple then began to take an interest in Jean Prouvé's work as a whole, of which the furniture is only a part, going on to discover his architectural designs. With the idea that "there is no difference between constructing a piece of furniture and constructing a building", Jean Prouvé applied the same design approach to both fields, basing all of his work on it.

From the opening of their gallery in Paris in 1989, Laurence and Patrick Seguin began to work in earnest promoting the creations of Jean Prouvé, with the result that the most important international collectors and the most prestigious museums now have works by the French architect and designer in their collections. Indeed today Jean Prouvé is held to be one of the key exponents of twentieth century design.

Laurence and Patrick Seguin are now presenting a number of works from their private collection for the first time: around 40 pieces by Jean Prouvé, most of which are prototypes or extremely rare, from the armchair designed for the University dormitory of Nancy in 1932 to the light armchair created for the University of Antony in 1954, to the furniture produced for Africa.

The same principles of functionality and rational fabrication that the designer applied to furniture often destined for the public sector, can also be found in Prouvé's architectural designs: the same solid structures feature clever mechanisms for assembly and organisation that enable both the furniture and the constructions to be easily moved, disassembled and modified.

The Maison Metropole (8x12 meters) is now to be mounted for the first time on the Lingotto track. In 1949 this aluminum construction won a Ministry of Education competition for "mass-producible rural school with classroom and teacher accommodation": a masterpiece of nomadic housing, followed the portico principle patented by Prouvé in 1939. The Ateliers Jean Prouvé built two of them, one in Bouqueval, near Paris, and the other in Vantoux in Moselle, which will be on show in Turin.

Taking four people three consecutive days to assemble, a stop-motion film will be made of the construction process, with video footage streamed over the internet (on the Pinacoteca website).

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JEAN PROUVÉ | METROPOLE ALUMINUM HOUSE | 26.2x40 Ft | ca. 1949
Provenance: France



Jean Prouvé (1901–1984) was a twentieth-century pioneer in the innovative production of furniture and architecture. Son of one of the founders of the Ecole de Nancy and godchild of Emile Gallé, he was imbued with the creative philosophy of a group whose principal aim was an art/industry alliance offering access to all.

Determined to be a man of his time, Prouvé explored all the current technical resources in metalworking, soon abandoning wrought iron for bent sheet steel: in the thirties he produced metal joinery, his early furniture, architectural components and knockdown buildings, all in small series.

Of the opinion that "in their construction there is no difference between a piece of furniture and a house", he developed a "constructional philosophy" based on functionality and rational fabrication. Free of all artifice, the resultant aesthetic chimed with the doctrine of the Union of Modern Artists, of which Prouvé – with Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand – was a founder member.

The same principles were applied to the making of furniture – often intended for the public sector – and to the architecture of the postwar boom. Astute assembly systems for hardwearing structures meant that furniture and buildings alike could be readily dismantled, moved about and modified.

The Prouvé blend of avant-garde spirit and humanist concerns has lost none of its relevance. The originality of his different periods is repeatedly rediscovered, from the first items for the University dormitory in Nancy in 1932 through those for a similar facility in Antony in 1954; the furniture for Africa; and the knockdown postwar schools and "little architecture machines" of the sixties. Working with the best architects, Jean Prouvé left his stamp on many famous examples of twentieth-century building, most of which are now classified historic monuments.

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Jean Prouvé
Metropole aluminum house, 1949



Winner of a 1949 Ministry of Education competition for a "mass-producible rural school with classroom and teacher accommodation", the Ateliers Jean Prouvé built two of them, one in Vantoux in Moselle and the other in Bouqueval, near Paris.

Like the school, the accommodation followed the portico principle patented by Prouvé in 1939 and used in a range of postwar programs, notably in the housing field. The Métropole House had been finalized in 1948. Adaptable to any site, it came in two sizes, 8x8 meters and 8x12 meters. The second of these, displayed at the Home Show in Paris in 1950, was the teacher's house. Its all-steel structure comprised two load-bearing portal frames which defined the interior space while leaving total freedom for the layout. The envelope used double-sided facade panels with integrated sash windows and shutters retracting into ribbed aluminum housings. There was also a glassed-in winter garden and a roof of juxtaposable aluminum roofing slabs. User comfort was given close consideration: the interior was easy on the eye, notably thanks to the use of wood, and temperature control went well beyond the standard specifications of the time.

Despite Prouvé's keenness to become involved in housing production on a mass scale in the early 1950s, ultimately only fifteen examples of the Métropole House were built, mainly as part of the "Sans Souci" housing estate at Meudon-la-Forêt.

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Catalogue

The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue in Italian and English published by the Pinacoteca Agnelli.

Press office

Pinacoteca Agnelli | Silvia Macchetto | T+39 3406350241 ufficiostampa@pinacoteca-agnelli.it

Galerie Patrick Seguin | Nicolas Bergerot | T+33147003235 nicolas@patricksequin.com

Tickets 10€ adults | 8€ groups, over 65 | 4€ schools and children 6 to 16 years; free entrance 0 to 6 years.

Ticket Office inside 8 Gallery from ABook Lingotto | on track top level - 4th floor | closes 6.15 pm

Opening Hours 10.00 am – 7.00 pm | Closed Monday

Guided tours on request | Tel. +39 011 0062713

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