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Galerie Patrick Seguin presents Jean Prouvé's Bouqueval School in the Tuileries Garden

By Jose Villarreal



Jean Prouvé, L'École de Bouqueval, 1949. Courtesy of Galerie Patrick Seguin.

PARIS.- On the occasion of the FIAC, Galerie Patrick Seguin presents the Bouqueval School in the Tuileries Garden from October 18th to 24th.

After making temporary and demountable houses for war victims in Lorraine at the end of World War II, the Ateliers Jean Prouvé committed to the French government's reconstruction program, involving not only housing, but also infrastructure, notably schools. Prouvé saw prefabrication as the optimal technical and economic solution to the postwar situation. He perfected a system he had patented in 1939 and then improved during the War, featuring a metal skeleton using axial portal frames, combined with various modular facade panels.

This construction principle was Prouvé's response to the Ministry of Education's 1949 competition for «a mass-producible one-room rural school with teacher accommodations.» The specifications called for buildings that could be easily mass-produced with quick and easy assembly on any kind of site. The Ateliers Jean Prouvé was among the winners of the competition and in May 1950 was given an order for two prototype units: one for the small municipality of Bouqueval, near Paris, and the other requested by parliamentarian Raymond Mondon for the village of Vantoux, near Metz.

With its big glass doors, extensive roofed play area and covered access balcony that also served as a sunshade, the 24x8 meter classroom had the look of an open-air school. The grid created by the pressed steel portal frames provided free-flowing volumes and rational arrangement of the open play area, classroom, workshop/dining room, toilet facilities, and cloakroom.

The two school buildings were delivered in the fall of 1950. The Vantoux School and its furnishings have been classified as Historical Monuments since 2001.

Galerie Patrick Seguin asked Ateliers Jean Nouvel / HW Architecture to consult on the development and setting up of the Bouqueval School. This adaptation, designed in harmony with the existing materials, allows for full appreciation of Jean Prouvé's structural system.

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. 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.