



MUSÉE DE PRÉHISTOIRE
D'ÎLE-DE-FRANCE
RETOUR SUR 600 000 ANS D'HISTOIRE

PUBLICS

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The Île-de-France Prehistory museum opened to the public in Nemours in 1981. It was designed by internationally renowned architect Roland Simounet (1927-1996). It is a resolutely modern building, with luminous architecture, erected in a protected natural site.

A museum in the woods

A building created in the forest



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The museum is located in picturesque woodland where there is a variety of trees - pine, oak, birch, hornbeam, hazelnut, acacia ... - in the middle of a sandstone blockfield. In the spirit of the prehistorians of the time, this natural site, which is a southern extension of the forest of Fontainebleau, is reminiscent of late prehistoric landscapes.

Above all, Roland Simounet privileged integration of the building into the forest. To achieve this, he used the natural slope of the land and used rough concrete of which the texture and colour matches the park's sandstone. This was how he managed to create continuity between the building and the site. Today, the weathered concrete blends with the surrounding vegetation and the park's ancient rocks.

Architecture also brings the forest into the museum: tree-lined patios extend the surrounding woodland creating a dialogue between the interior and exterior wooded areas. This play of transparencies opens the visit towards the outside.

"I think you have to generally respect the site. That doesn't mean we must hide but instead we should take into account the lie of the land, the vegetation, a certain number of things into which the building must fit. And once the whole is perfect, the genuineness of the architecture becomes apparent."

Roland Simounet

Between concrete and light

A play of transparency



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The beauty and coherence of the building are due to the extreme simplicity of the floor plan: a square is the basic module. The impression of unity is strengthened by the harmony of materials and colours.

The monumental lobby is accessed by a single door. From there, a ramp leads the visitor to the temporary exhibition area and the permanent exhibition rooms. All the exhibition areas are spread along the natural slope of the land. These successive spaces are interconnected by ramps.

Natural light enters from all sides: through the large windows of the facades, the garden patios and the roof windows. The play of transparency and light guide the visitor from one room to the next, whatever the time of day or the season.

Staged prehistory

A modern museography



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Roland Simounet also designed all the museographic elements. The museography was intended to be as discrete

et as possible, leaving all the space for the exhibits.

The visit to the museum is chronological. It starts around 500,000 years ago with the first traces of the presence of Man in the region and ends at the end of the Gallic period. It is split into two parts, on either side of garden-patios which present the flora of the different prehistoric periods. This dual route is based on the juxtaposition of main rooms showing the everyday life of prehistoric populations, and secondary rooms designed on the study gallery model showing sets of objects arranged by site.

By creating a dialogue between spaces, objects and nature, the museum building gives a particularly modern image of prehistory and museums. It has the "Museum of France" label for the value of its collections.

A 20th century heritage

A historical witness



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This building is considered by some historians of architecture as Roland Simounet's most accomplished work. It is a remarkable demonstration of modernist architecture that durably influenced the architectural design in the second half of the 20th century. As such, it is a listed historic monument since 2002. The French Ministry of Culture and Communication has also awarded it the "20th century heritage" label. It is the only building in Seine-et-Marne to have this status.

The museum is also an illustration of the change that began in the 1970s in the landscape of French museums: because of the State's action in the regions, thanks to the newly created regional directorates of cultural affairs (DRAC), many local authorities undertook renovations or created cultural infrastructure. The project leaders then called on the best architects to create spaces to become showcases of local, regional or national culture.

Roland Simounet, a renowned architect

Internationally recognised works



Roland Simounet
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Born on August 31, 1927 near Algiers, Roland Simounet studied architecture in Algiers, then at the National School of Fine Arts in Paris. His work, which is part of the modernist school of architecture, is marked by strong social concerns that resulted in the creation of many apartment housing projects for the poorer population in order to reduce slums.

He began his construction activity in 1951 and created his first agency in Algiers in 1952. In 1954 and 1955, he was a housing adviser for the City of Algiers. In 1956, he built the Djenan el-Hasan housing project, a true show of building skills on a very steep slope and, in 1960, a large estate of 700 affordable housing units in Noisy-le-Grand. At the same time, he worked on reducing barrios in Venezuela.

He opened an agency in Paris in 1963. He then built many affordable housing projects in Cergy, Evry, Paris and Saint-Denis, as well as schools, university premises (university residence of Madagascar in Antananarivo) and the Marseilles National Dance School.

But it was his museum projects that brought him international fame: the Museum of Prehistory of Île-de-France, which opened in 1981, the Villeneuve-d'Ascq museum of modern art (1983), currently the LAM, and the conversion of the Salé Hotel into the Paris Picasso museum (1985).

Roland Simounet died in Paris on February 10, 1996. His last project, an apartment building for the city of Paris, was completed two years after his death.

His works are internationally recognised and he received several prestigious awards for them: the National Grand Prix of Architecture in 1977, the Medal of Honour of the International Academy of Architecture for all of his work in 1982 and, in 1985, the Equerre d'Argent for the Picasso Museum.