GALERIE JOCELYN WOLFF

FIAC 2021

ISA MELSHEIMER

SOUTH WALL / GARGOYLE
2018



Isa Melsheimer
South Wall / Gargoyle , **2018**
Inv.# MEL/S 114
reinforced concrete, glazed ceramic

180 x 460 x 120 cm
unique



Isa Melsheimer
South Wall / Gargoyle , **2018**



Isa Melsheimer
South Wall / Gargoyle , **2018**
Inv.# MEL/S 114



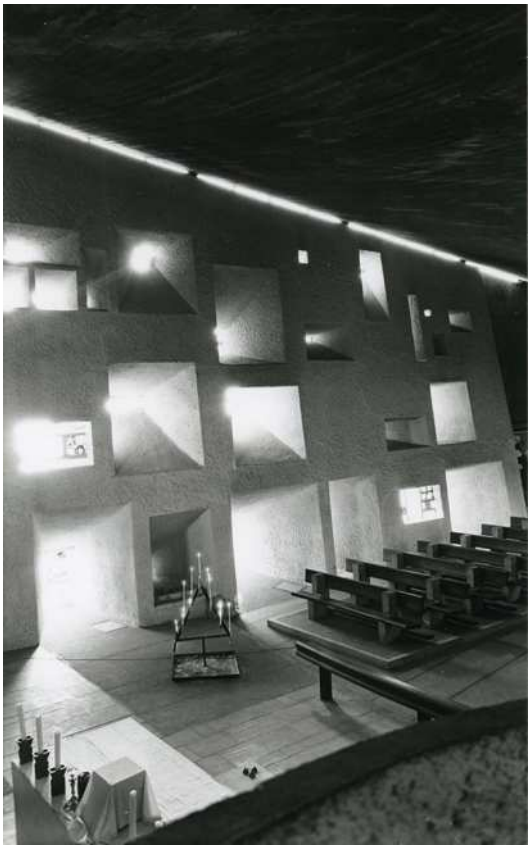
Isa Melsheimer
South Wall / Gargoyle , **2018**
Inv.# MEL/S 114

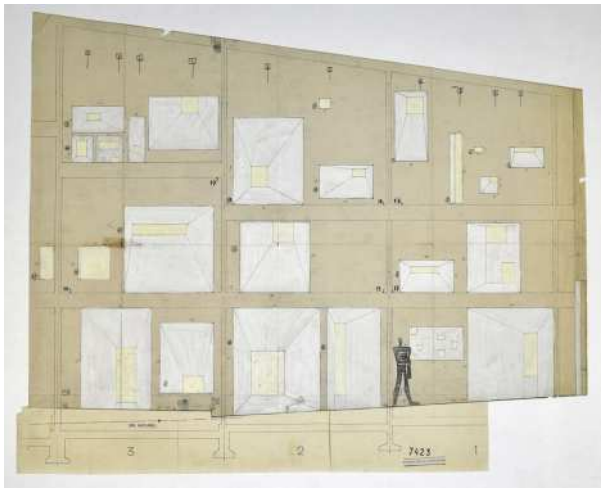


Isa Melsheimer
South Wall / Gargoyle , **2018**
Inv.# MEL/S 114

The source of inspiration for the work entitled "South Wall / Gargoyle" (2018), created by Isa Melsheimer's for her solo exhibition "Rain" at CRAC Montbéliard (2018) is the Notre-Dame-du-Haut chapel in Ronchamp, built in 1955 by Le Corbusier.

The "south wall" in the title of Melsheimer's work thus refers to the south wall of Le Corbusier's chapel and, in particular, to the precise moment when it was under construction: during her research, the artist was able to consult archival images of the structure under construction and she remained fascinated by the interior/exterior relationship articulated by the openings in the concrete of the façade.

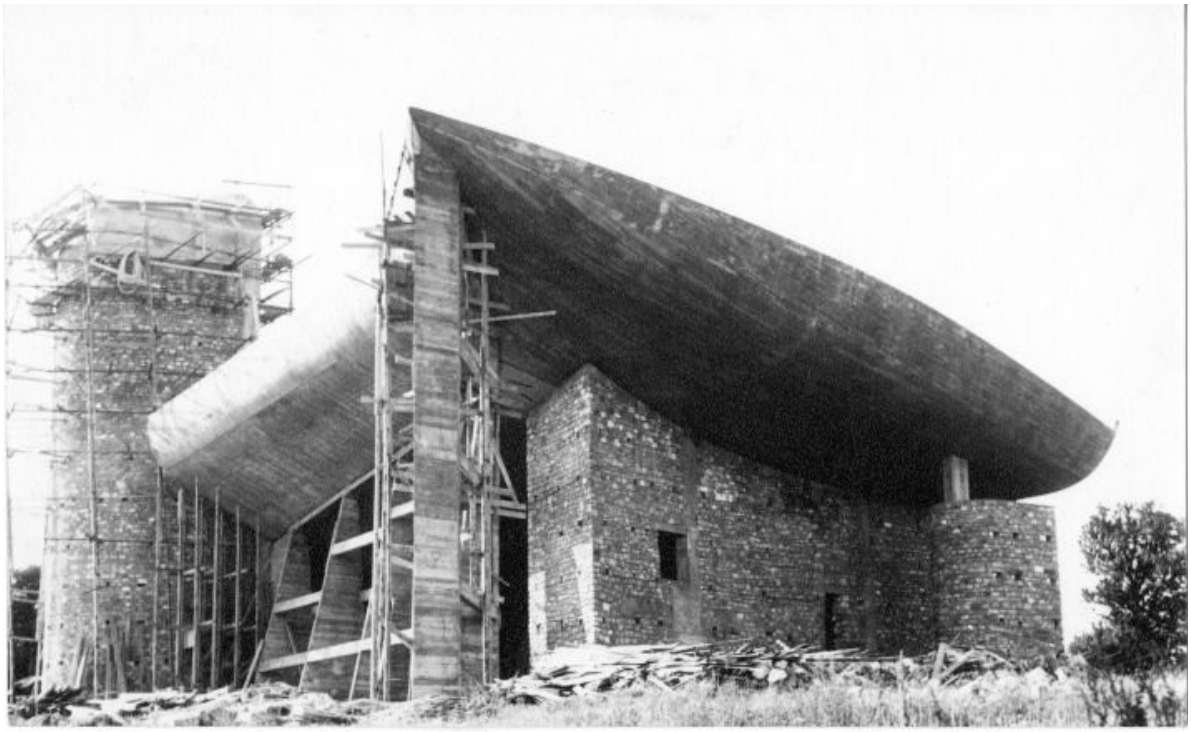




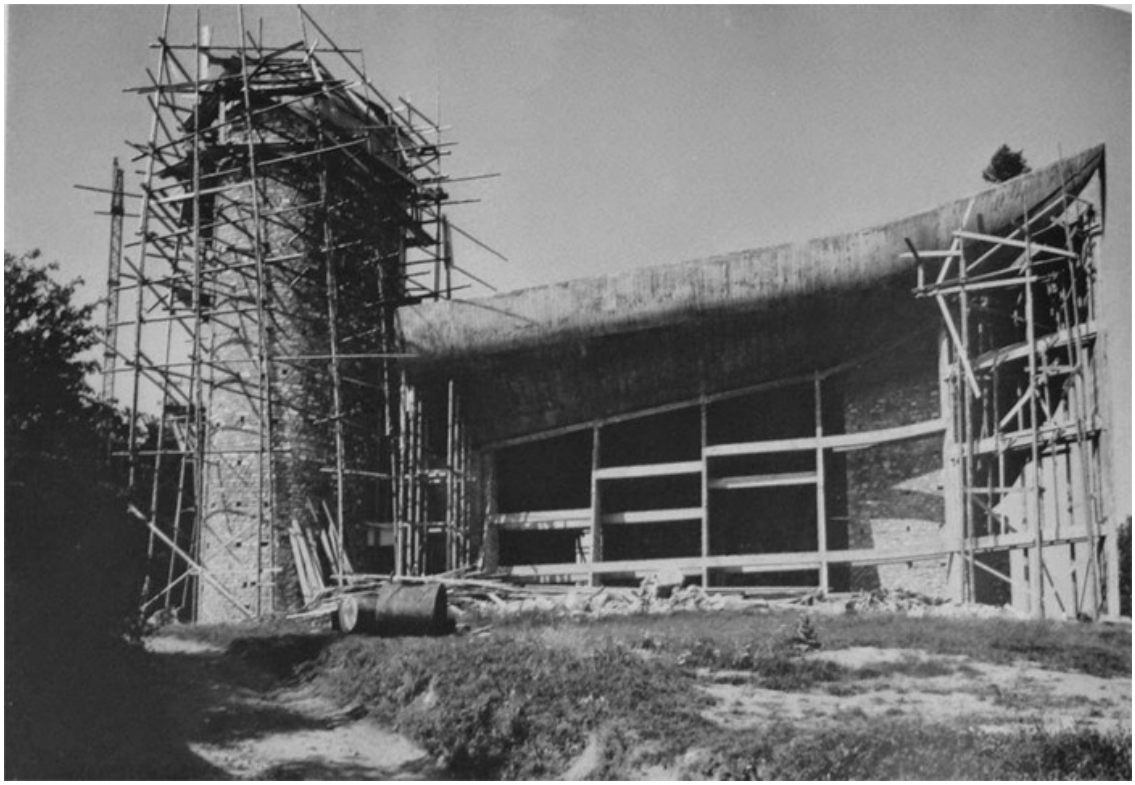
Marie Maertens describes the implications of the project in the text entitled "From the Scale of Architecture to the Intimacy of the Body" written at the occasion of Isa Melsheimer's show at CRAC Montbéliard:

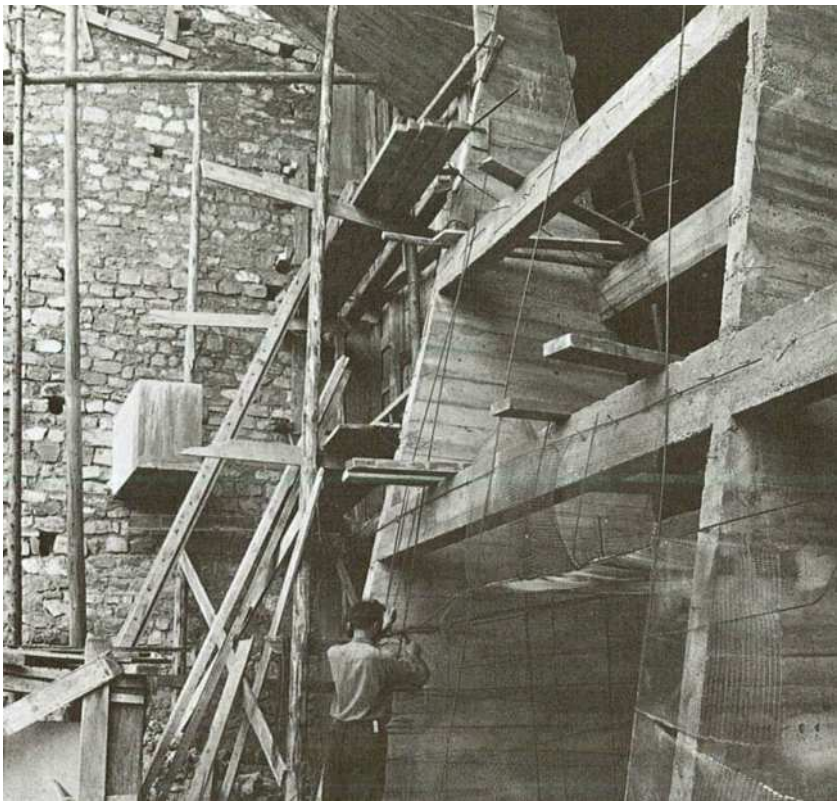
« Recognizable from its concrete frame beckoning many comparisons – from a seashell to a figurehead – the chapel, in the architect's mind, looked like a crab shell. "Le Corbusier kept every single thing," says Isa Melsheimer, "drawings, pieces of paper [...] So there is plenty of material. I have sifted through its, trying to understand the link between the outside and the inside of the building, or the plan itself. The Virgin Mary statue is another fascinating feature. You notice it before you enter the chapel, and it looks over the faithful once inside the building. In the end, I focused on the building's structure and the reinforced concrete pillars. I will create models in a large installation. Like Le Corbusier and his Modulor, many of my works relate to the size of my body, such as my height, or the length of my arm."

In addition to the Ronchamp chapel's structural foundations, a number of smaller details have fascinated the artist at Notre-Dame-du-Haut, such as the gargoyles. She likes to repeat the word in French, and has studied the history of the term, noting the more functional meaning of its German counterpart,"Wasserspeier," in which we may perceive the act of pouring water. But the "gargoyle" refers to mythology, the Middle Ages, and to the interstice between reality and fantasy. Creating her very own gargoyle, Isa Melsheimer makes a connection with the theme of masks, which she revisited during her career, for instance in Wasser Ballet fÙr Marl, oscillating between the grotesque and derision. Another engaging feature she noted in Ronchamp was the antinomy between the edifice's obvious sense of spirituality and Le Corbusier's atheism at the time he worked on the site. "A letter to his mother has been discovered. He wrote to her very often," she adds. "In this particular letter, he said the Devil was hiding in the corners of the church and that he had to be careful [...] Eventually, this architect, while doing an extremely serious work, was able to bring on a sense of irony. I have had a religious upbringing, and I like to play with the idea of the Devil–maybe, I have to say, with some sort of fascination toward the Church's power and domination." Equally enticing is the paradox at play between the architecture's rigorist modernism and the phantasmagoria conveyed by the deformed figures. Just like children who like to scare themselves by summoning imaginary things... Moreover, the artist insists that all the keys are not to be given in advance or imposed in the exhibition space, where each visitor comes with their own background. Utopia does not exist, and this fact is intrinsic to the very notion; and yet, briefly, collectively, we can still to immerse ourselves in other narratives ».



The south wall of Ronchamp chapel under construction (the interior skeleton structure inspired the shape of Isa Melsheimer's "South Wall / Gargoyle" cement elements)







Isa Melhseimer, "South Wall / Gargoyle", 2018, details (exhibition views at CRAC, Montbéliard, 2018)



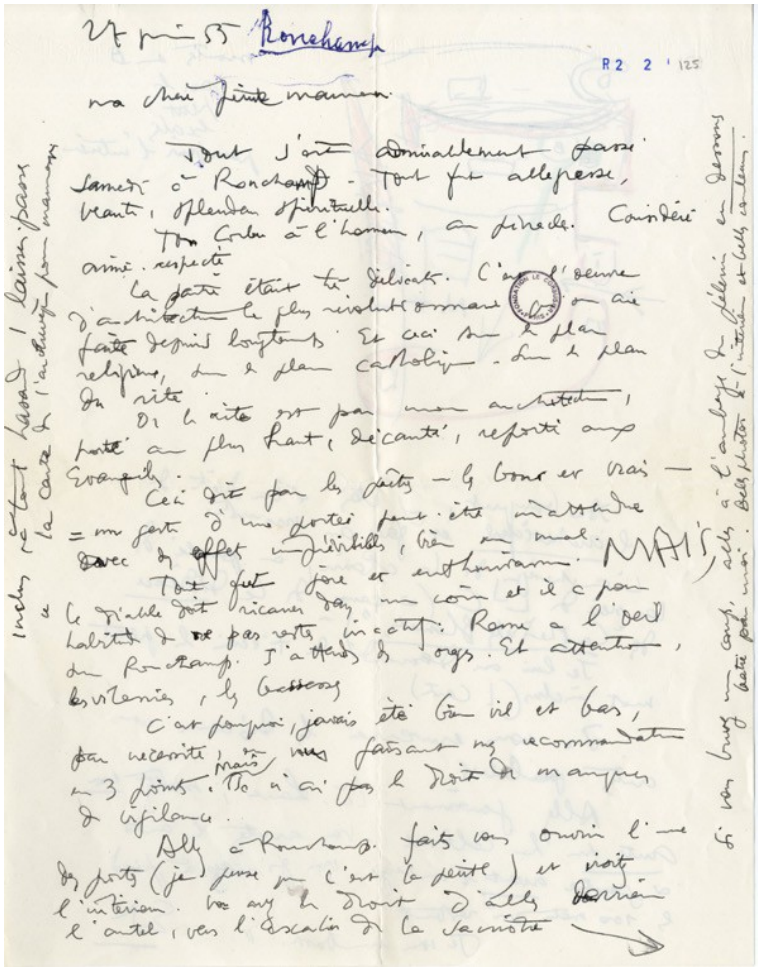




Gargoyles

When gargoyles began appearing on churches throughout Europe in the 13th century, they served as decorative water spouts, engineered to preserve stone walls by diverting the flow of rainwater outward from rooftops. The word gargoyle derives from the French *gargouille,* meaning "throat."
The typical shape of the gargoyle is that of a devil, a demon, a dragon, a monster with wings or the back decorated with a crest.

On the west façade of Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Le Corbusier placed his gargoyle in the shape of an omega (or animal nose), perhaps in a superstitious gesture towards the "devil" he spoke of to his mother in a letter in which he described the chapel to her "(...) Everything was joy and enthusiasm. BUT, the devil must be cackling in the corner, and he has a habit of not sitting still.
In "South Wall / Gargoyle" Isa Melsheimer takes this form and translates it into a series of ceramic elements open at the ends and crowned by almost mobile-like ridges.
The gargoyle of Notre-Dame-du-Haut pours rain water into a basin, the form of which Isa Melsheimer has taken up in another piece of hers entitled "Citerne" made out of glazed ceramic and presented with a gouache (which is also part of the piece) representing a view of Notre-Dame-du-Haut.



Letter Le Corbusier wrote to his mother about the chapel in Ronchamp



details of Le Corbusier gargoyle at Notre-Dame-du-Haut





details of "South Wall / Gargoyle" ceramic elements





details of "South Wall / Gargoyle" ceramic elements



Le Corbusier's gargoyle (on the top) and basin





Isa Melsheimer
Citerne , 2018
glazed ceramic, gouache on paper

ceramic: 65 x 80 x 90 cm
gouache: 42 x 56 cm
unique

Inv.# MEL/S 115



Isa Melsheimer
Citerne , 2018

Inv.# MEL/S 115



Isa Melsheimer
Citerne , 2018

Inv.# MEL/S 115