

3/ Functional sensationalism



Kitchen of Madame Méziat. The cutting board covering the sink.
Paris, France (75)

0074 Renovation of a kitchen and
bathroom in a Parisian apartment
Cost of construction: 15,000 euros
Net floor area: 9 m²
Private client
Date of completion: February 2009

All-trades contractor:
Interior Design Development,
Mr. Joachim Maarek
9,500 euros

Interior woodwork:
Pierre Sanz
5,500 euros

While order and constructive rationalism are useful in the structuring of our environment, they are by no means all that it requires. Whatever the degree of precision that we wish to achieve in the determination of form by function, a space of play will always persist. The function that an object addresses, however complex, cannot ever exhaust the possibilities of its form. Otherwise, there would be only one fork, one knife, one chair, etc., today, and we would not be witness to the commercial success of their endless renewal.

The inflection of a curve, the ratio of proportion, the choice of material, will always be variables and not truths for our objects. The modern movement cheated. While the Villa Savoye did indeed replace old-fashioned construction methods with techniques that enabled to optimise "sun, space and greenery", reduce the influence of support points and so on, conversely, it is through a kind of entirely superfluous technological expressionism that this villa looks like a ship.

Wherever the requirements of function fade, the modern movement chooses to have the object's form state that it is efficient, precise and pure. Why does it do so, if not to try to convince us of the perfection of an object? To convince itself of the idea that the world is regulated, ordered and mastered.

*In the eighteenth century, the wax sculptor Clemente Susini made anatomical wax models that are exemplary in this respect. The Venere de Medici has the body of a Venus whose belly is removable. The Venere sventrata is a disembowelled Venus with her insides all outside. Georges Didi-Huberman comments: "The experimenter or medical student could methodically, calmly, pass through the limits of its flesh, open it up to the heart and to the secret of the matrix." (Ouvrir Vénus, p.106). **The anatomical function of these doctors' models was fully operational, and yet this "scientific" object was not devoid of the human drama involved in opening up a woman's body. Unlike the lecture theatre écorchés of the natural sciences, these wax anatomies were not deprived of sensuality. The suspended expressiveness of the subject, the smoothness of the material, the***



Venere sventrata, 1781 - 1782
Clemente Susini



Bathroom of Madame Méziat, the steps / storage units, the shower and the enclosed flushing system Paris, France (75)



Bathroom, the enclosed flushing system Paris, France (75)

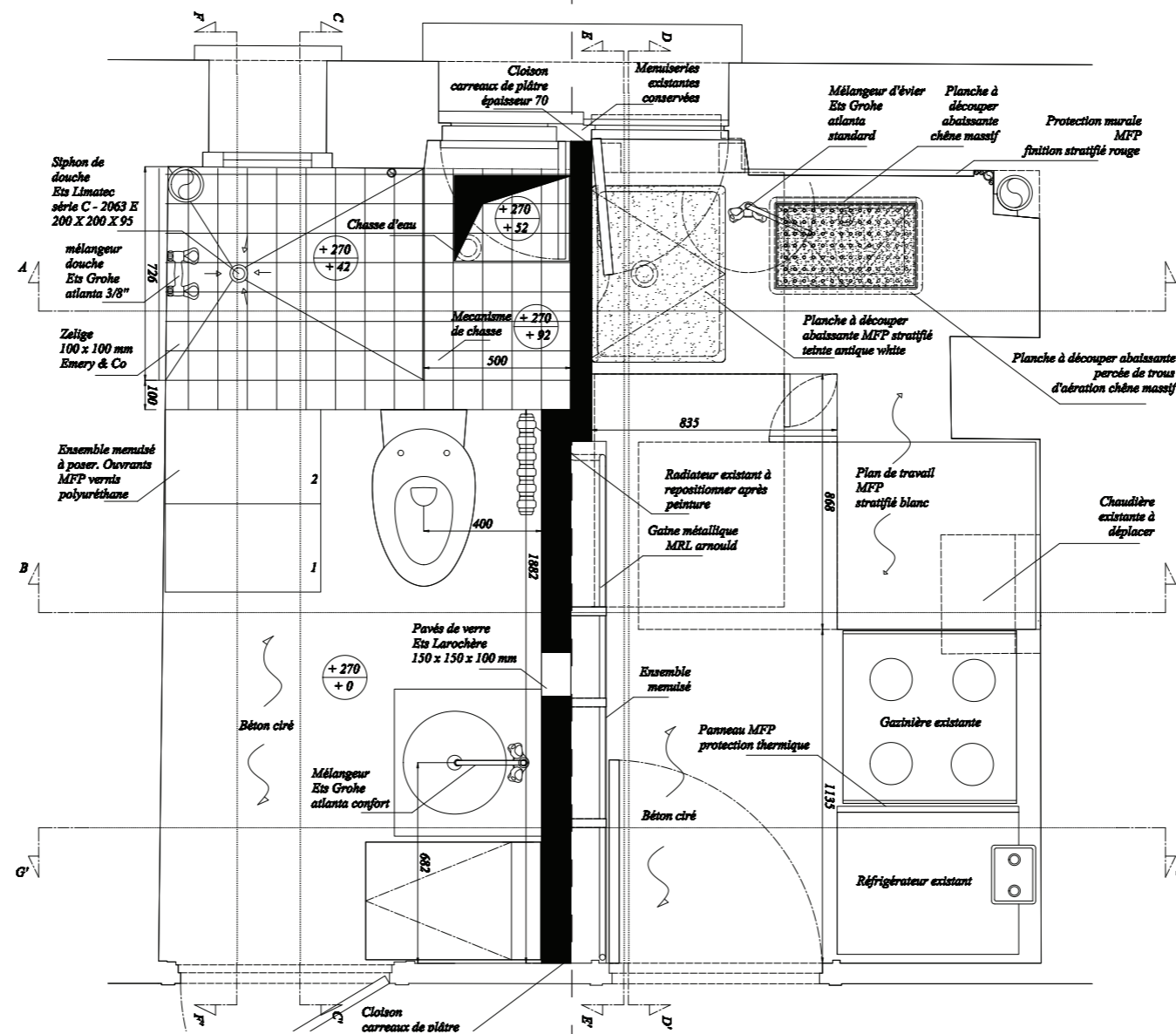
Bathroom, arrangement of the partition wall transparencies Paris, France (75)



attention to the pubic tuft, and the thick, unruly mass of hair cancel out any possibility of seeing it simply as a physiological mechanism. It is the goddess of love that is being opened up rather than an anatomy being dissected. To my mind, these sculptures plot out the future of a carnal rationalism. Whereas the modern movement chose to drive home the point of technical precision well beyond what was necessary, Susini seized upon this space of play to express the tragic relationship of beauty to its organs, to confront the viewer with the oneness of sensuality and its plumbing.

Thus, a kitchen or bathroom, these so-called technical rooms, might not have to be built according to the optimisation of movement and the alienating hyper-determination of uses, but based on an appraisal of Man's articulation to his nutritional and hygienic practices. While it is horrible to open up beauty to discover the formless viscera within, it is equally disturbing to observe how the ingestion and digestion of food nourish the most beautiful skins on human bodies, or how contemporary Western Man's almost obsessive concern for cleanliness can only apply to the surface of bodies without being able to reach these organs packed inside.

It happens that Madame Meziat's existing bathroom and kitchen are twin spaces: two symmetrical rooms separated by a partition that splits a window equally. In fact, the bathroom is a recent addition. In this Haussmannian-style building full of order, symmetry and careful distribution, the toilet space did not exist. The kitchen had been cut into two equal parts to accommodate the bathroom. Thus it was a thin veil that separated that which everything separates in terms of use. A place of eau de cologne, ablutions, mirror-gazing and the intimate to the left. Roasting, boiling, frying, marinating to the right. The "clean chain" keeps the toilet area separate from the kitchen area. In terms of civilisation, the distance between these two spaces is very strongly maintained: hygiene is, of course, involved in this distance, but so is eroticism. The skin is clear, soft and desirable, underneath all is hollow, oozing, unknowable.



Plan of the bathroom and kitchen Paris, France (75)



Electricity veins and exhaust gas arteries Paris, France (75)



The drying rack covering the second sink in positions closed, open, and drying dishes Paris, France (75)

Rather than accommodate "what was left of function" in order to give these two rooms a style, the decision was made to base the entire design on a discomfort, an uneasiness contemplating relations between the inside and the outside of the body. Two architectures were built on this tension: one milky, soft and smooth; the other, worked by the body. And it was this "unfunctional", metaphorical, gratuitous starting point that gave rise to proposals for savings and functional operations. The bathroom is a continuous skin of tile and polished concrete. This skin opens up to make room for a water tank exposed to the sky. A flush that can use piped wastewater. Kitchen storage units that push into the bathroom space appear as curves, protuberances due to the presence of a body on the other side of the skin. The kitchen, in hues of flesh and bone, and built of organic materials, is a sum of working organs. The sinks are hidden under wooden blocks (one is a chopping board and the other a drying rack). The electrical veins are visible, thereby dispensing with the need to embed the wires and plaster over them. The meanders of this jugular act as a railing for bottles and dishes or bar from which to hang pots and pans. Under the sink, the back of a drawer thickened with insulation opens onto the old larder that juts out on the facade. The outside penetrates one meter deep inside the apartment, thereby enabling to keep food fresh in the kitchen...

Founding the logic of this architecture on the tensions between the intimate and the interior; between taste and distaste, between Apollonian nudity and Dionysian formlessness, opened up possibilities of finding economic solutions on the site and imagining uses that had not existed before, whereas a purely accounting-based logic would not have led to such finds.



3D simulation of the kitchen before construction Paris, France (75)

The realized kitchen, shown here in "opened" position. Below, the exterior ventilation drawer Paris, France (75)

