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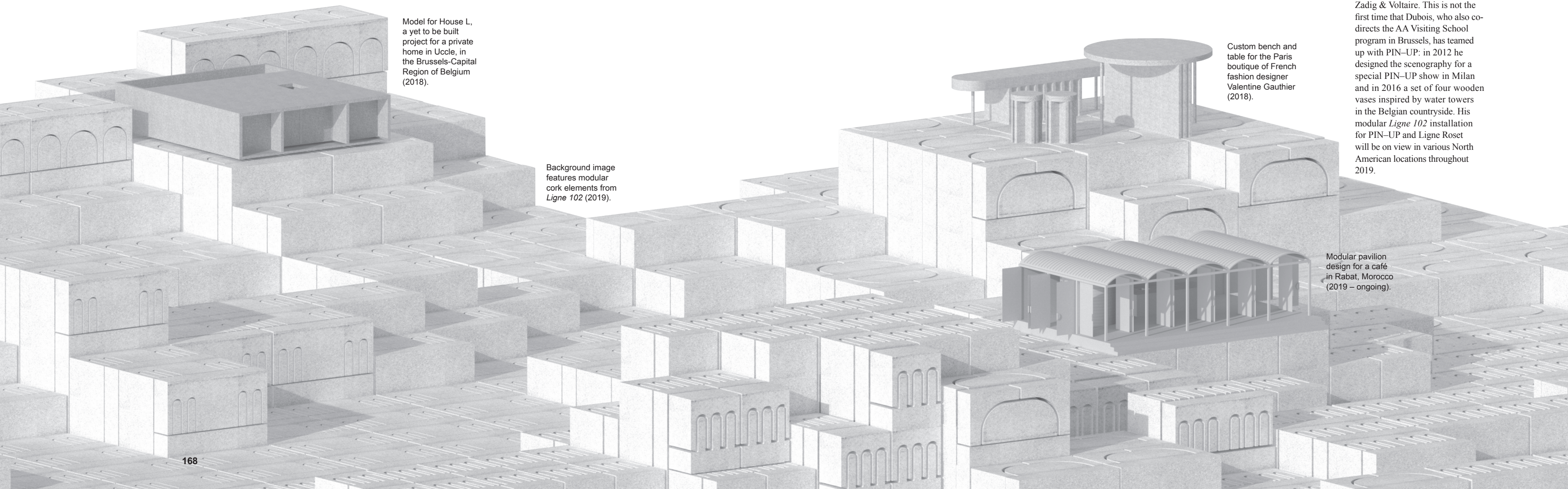
Dreams of Modularity: Bernard Dubois's *Ligne 102*

Text by Daniel Sherer

Ligne 102, a series of modular objects designed by the young Belgian architect Bernard Dubois, inhabits a world suspended between solids and voids that exchange places, where straightforward architectural tectonics encounter shifting elements of combinatory design, and the most hard-edged geometrical forms are conjugated with the most muffled, aural, and auratic of all construction materials: cork. In *Ligne 102*, Dubois deploys strategies of modular composition that simultaneously adopt and undermine normative conventions. These strategies are derived from a restricted, seemingly arbitrary, but deeply encoded repertoire of historical precedents. Exhibiting resemblances that cut across inherited, albeit discontinuous, narratives of architectural history — Alberti's Palazzo Rucellai, the pictorial universe of Giorgio de Chirico, Ricardo Bofill's La Fábrica, or Eduardo Chillida and Luis Peña Ganchegui's Plaza de los Fueros in Vitoria — they register compelling points of intersection between spaces and times from the past whose reanimation is made visible, constructs that emerge in the design process, and functions evoked by both.

The formal (and historical) precedents inherent to *Ligne 102* are decomposed to yield basic geometric forms, fragments of architectural discourse that are generic in themselves, without any truly individual features. These coded, yet also neutral, elements are then combined to form perforated walls, floors, desks, and chairs, each with a memory trace of their architectural origin embodied in their tectonics.

Belgian-born architect Bernard Dubois combines a keen interest in architecture's rich history with a contemporary design sensibility and a rigorous eye for precision. After graduating a decade ago from Brussels' École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre, he honed his skills working for a number of different architects before founding his own Brussels-based office in 2013. A year later, the self-described "system-based thinker" was a co-curator of the Belgian Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale, with an exhibition analyzing over 100 domestic interiors in Flanders and Wallonia. Among Dubois's current and completed projects are a villa in Uccle, Belgium, a café in Rabat, Morocco, as well as notable retail projects all over the world for an illustrious roster of clients that runs the gamut from A, like Aesop, to Z, like Zadig & Voltaire. This is not the first time that Dubois, who also co-directs the AA Visiting School program in Brussels, has teamed up with PIN-UP: in 2012 he designed the scenography for a special PIN-UP show in Milan and in 2016 a set of four wooden vases inspired by water towers in the Belgian countryside. His modular *Ligne 102* installation for PIN-UP and Ligne Roset will be on view in various North American locations throughout 2019.



Model for House L, a yet to be built project for a private home in Uccle, in the Brussels-Capital Region of Belgium (2018).

Background image features modular cork elements from *Ligne 102* (2019).

Custom bench and table for the Paris boutique of French fashion designer Valentine Gauthier (2018).

Modular pavilion design for a café in Rabat, Morocco (2019 – ongoing).

With respect to *Ligne 102*, Dubois's practice is rooted in two hypotheses: first, that constituent geometrical elements of design are wholly contingent to the spaces they occupy, and second, that they can become the actual, tangible building blocks of functional units, and can define their essential, if always flexible, parameters. These design environments and their accompanying functional objects, made up of a shifting array of arches, pillars, bridge-like structures, trusses, pylons, beams, and support systems, are poised between memory and anticipation, between a vision of oneiric transformation and eminently reasonable logics of fabrication. Though fixed for our viewing, *Ligne 102*'s uniquely formed environments and objects can be decomposed and recomposed at will.

What Dubois has created with *Ligne 102* is a variable ensemble of interior scenographies motivated by a deep historical sense and a logical repository of constructive elements. In this way Dubois produces ephemeral yet also memorable configurations. Though muffled, these designs speak of just such a dream of the decomposable past as a new blueprint for the recomposable present, reversing our usual expectations about the echoes in the chambers in which our daily lives are played out, as we remember objects and experiences past as well as dream of what might just be around the recomposable corner.

It is not only that Dubois thereby repositions Marcel Proust's project of literary memory with each shift in *Ligne 102*'s

apparatus of flexible geometrical elements; he also shifts the rules of the contemporary design game by introducing fragments of syntax from the historical narratives of architecture, mixing up what we once thought linear, fixed, and established. More precisely, Dubois recalls and refashions the memory-generating image of Proust's famous cork-lined room, so that it is able to encompass all of architectural history in a relatively small workspace. *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Proust's canonical collection of novels would have been unthinkable without that nearly mythical cork-lined chamber, a hermetically sealed refuge for the neurasthenic, long-winded writer. (Its address, 102 boulevard Haussmann, is of course echoed in the name *Ligne 102*.)

By allowing potentially all of us access to the cork-lined room, *Ligne 102* makes possible a new order of memory in the fields of architecture and design. As in Proust's novel, an epic dimension of space and time rubs elbows with the most closely observed and seemingly insignificant details, so that when the two levels come together, new forms of meaning are produced. In this way individual and collective planes of memory meet in a single design strategy, providing a new space for their sudden redefinition. Like a renewed erotic fable of the love between objects, not without Surrealist overtones, Dubois places us in a metaphysical arena of conjunctures where every form of attraction and repulsion becomes possible, where new objects form, reform, and decompose in a choreography of jostling reconfigurations.

Ligne 102 is a collaboration between Bernard Dubois, PIN-UP, and French design company Ligne Roset. Production was made possible thanks to Amorim, the world leader in the cork industry for over 130 years.

Geometric display module for Spanish leather accessories designer Isaac Reina's Paris boutique (2018).

Dr. Daniel Sherer teaches history and theory of architecture at Princeton University School of Architecture. His areas of research include modern receptions of the Classical tradition, Italian Modernism, Italian Renaissance and Baroque architecture, contemporary architecture, historiography and theory, and contemporary art, frequently in relation to architecture. Last year he curated the exhibition *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City*, at Princeton University School of Architecture.

House X, an unbuilt home designed for a single-family in Ottignies, Belgium (2015).

Series of vases made from palisander wood and inspired by the shapes of Belgian water towers. Designed for PIN-UP/Sight Unseen Offsite, New York (2016).

bernarddubois.com
ligne-roset.com
amorim.com

Background image features modular cork elements from *Ligne 102* (2019).