

"House of the Future". Light and minimal plastic housing (1956-1974) :

history, conservation, prospective and imaginary



Internationale Kunststoffhausausstellung (IKA), 1971, Lüdenscheid. From left to right: the Rondo House by Angelo and Dante Casoni, the Futuro House by Matti Suuronen, and the Bulle à Six coques by Jean Benjamin Maneval, named Orion House © All rights reserved

General presentation

On the occasion of the restoration of a *Futuro* house by architect and designer Matti Suuronen, acquired by Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines in 2023, the Museum of the City of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, the Versailles National School of Architecture (ENSA Versailles) and the University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines (UVSQ) are organizing a study day devoted to forms of light and minimal plastic housing at the turn of the 1960s–1970s.

From the late 1950s until the first oil crisis of 1973, the rise of plastic materials paved the way for experimentation with light, modular and mobile architectural forms. In 1956, René-André Coulon and Ionel Schein presented the first “all-plastic house” at the Salon des Arts Ménagers in Paris. The following year, the *Monsanto House of the Future* opened at Disneyland in California: conceived as an attraction, it offered the general public a prospective vision of individual housing on the threshold of the 21st century.

Over the following decade, architects, designers and manufacturers worked to give concrete form to what was still an architectural utopia, developing prototypes suitable for mass production. In France, research on plastic housing and attempts at industrialization were numerous and were disseminated through architecture magazines and exhibitions. In 1964, Jean Benjamin Maneval designed the *Bulle à six coques*; in 1965–1969, Pascal Häusermann conceived the *Maison Spatiale Noverly*, followed by the modular *Domobiles* series in 1971. That same year, the AUA agency presented the prototype of its *Tétrodon* in the courtyard of the Louvre. The Algeco company launched its prefabricated housing module, the *Algeco 2002*, in 1969.

On the international scale, experimentation oscillated between “paper architecture,” prototyping and mass production. Archigram’s *Living-Pod* (1967), Wolfgang Feierbach’s *Kunststoffhaus FG2000* (1968) and Angelo and Dante Casoni’s *Rondo House* (1969) remained at the stage of project or prototype. The *Futuro House* met with a different fate: in partnership with the Polykem company, Matti Suuronen managed to produce around a hundred units from 1968 onward, which earned him specific commissions — including one from the Swedish army. Building on this initial success, together with Polykem he envisioned a second model of mobile plastic house: the *Ventura House* in 1974.

While these projects explored the reduction of domestic space to a “habitable minimum” centered on the individual, they also contributed to a broader reflection on urban forms, questioning the relationship between the housing cell and the urban organism, according to logics of modular growth, aggregation and continuous evolution. Carried by the currents of radical architecture and Japanese metabolism, these prospective reflections would go on to inform the proposals of Arthur Quarmby, Kisho Kurokawa and Daniel Grataloup.

The 1970s, however, marked a decline in these experiments. The 1973 oil crisis, the difficulties of industrialization and the mixed reception of the *Internationale Kunststoffhausausstellung der Welt* (IKA) in Lüdenscheid in 1971 all contributed to the gradual abandonment of the all-plastic housing model.

Taking this circumscribed yet prolific moment of experimentation as its starting point, this study day aims to examine the place of light and minimal plastic housing in the history of architecture, while also considering the fate of these experiments, their heritage status as objects marking an era and a cultural sphere with contemporary legacies, and their influence on present-day architectural imaginaries and prospective thinking.

Themes of the study day:

1. **Place of light and minimal housing in the history of architecture.** This first theme proposes to situate these experiments within a conceptual and technical history of architecture, analyzing these projects at the intersection of several key notions: housing unit, habitable minimum, mobility, modularity, prefabrication, mass production and industrialization.
2. **Media coverage and modes of reception.** Proposals may address the media through which these experiments were disseminated or popularized: professional journals, architecture magazines, novels — particularly science fiction. What images and discourses shaped the media reception of these experiments, including among the general public? Television documentaries or news reports may also serve as sources for study, among others.
3. **Policies of conservation, restoration and promotion.** Plastic housing has met with varied fates. Long neglected, it is now enjoying renewed heritage interest. Its materials, as well as its hybrid status — straddling the line between object and architecture, between *unicum* and mass-produced architecture — raise specific issues: methods for restoring contemporary materials, the degree of intervention or restitution, conditions of display (*in situ*, outdoors, indoors), protective measures, and modes of mediation and promotion.
4. **Current architectural prospects and artistic imaginaries.** Although experiments in light plastic housing rarely found the conditions for widespread adoption, they have nonetheless left a lasting mark on architectural and artistic imaginaries. Contributions may address contemporary reinterpretations of these experiments in literature, the visual arts or architecture.

Selected bibliography

Architecture d'aujourd'hui. n° 115, July–August 1964.

Architecture d'aujourd'hui. n° 124, February–March 1966.

Architecture d'aujourd'hui. n° 148, February–March 1970.

Architecture d'aujourd'hui. n° 162, June–July 1972.

Architecture et industrie : passé et avenir d'un mariage de raison. Paris: Centre de création industrielle, 1983. 260 p.

COHEN, Jean-Louis (dir.). *AUA : une architecture de l'engagement, 1960-1985*. Paris: Carré; Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine, 2015. 318 p.

GRAF, Franz (dir.); DELEMONTEY, Yvan (dir.). *Architecture industrialisée et préfabriquée : connaissance et sauvegarde = Understanding and conserving industrialised and prefabricated architecture*. Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2012. 435 p.

KRONENBURG, Robert. *Architecture in motion: the history and development of portable building*. London; New York: Routledge, 2014. 318 p.

MELIS, Liesbeth (ed.). *Parasite paradise: a manifesto for temporary architecture and flexible urbanism*. Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003. 186 p.

MIGAYROU, Frédéric (dir.); MOIMAS, Valentina (dir.). *Aerodream : architecture, art, design et structures gonflables*. Orléans: Éditions HYX; Metz: Centre Pompidou-Metz; Paris: Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine, 2021. 293 p.

Petites machines à habiter : home sweet mobil-home ou l'habitat léger de loisirs. Le Mans: CAUE 72, 2004. 210 p.

QUARMBY, Arthur. *The Plastics Architect*. Liverpool: Pall Mall Press, 1974. 2008 p.

RAGON, Michel. *Histoire mondiale de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme modernes*. 2nd ed. Tournai: Casterman, 1971–1978. 3 vol.

RAGON, Michel. *La cité de l'an 2000*. Tournai: Casterman, 1968. 205 p.

SAINT-PIERRE, Raphaëlle. *Maisons-bulles : architectures organiques des années 1960 et 1970*. Paris: Éditions du patrimoine, 2015. 192 p.

SCHWARTZ-CLAUSS, Mathias (dir.); VON VEGESACK, Alexander (dir.). *Living in motion: design und Architektur für flexiblen Wohnen*. Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2002. 272 p.

TOPHAM, Sean. *Move house*. Munich; New York: Prestel, 2004. 143 p.

WILLEMIN, Véronique. *Maisons mobiles*. Paris: Éditions Alternatives, 2004. 191 p.

Guidelines for submission and selection of paper proposals

The study day will take place on **April 21 and/or 22, 2027** in Montigny-le-Bretonneux (78180).

Paper proposals must include:

- a summary of the proposed paper, not exceeding 1 page, along with its title;
- a curriculum vitae;
- a biographical note of 8 to 10 lines.

Papers may be presented in **French or English**. At least a partial command of French is desirable in order to take part in discussions and debates.

Proposals should be sent as a single PDF file containing all documents **no later than September 30, 2026**, by email to the following address: anna.magnien@squ.fr

Selected proposals will be included in the study day's program as **individual papers** (20 minutes maximum) or as **round tables**.

Following the study day, publication of the proceedings, in print or digital form, is being considered. Speakers will be invited to submit their contributions in written form, according to a format to be specified later.

Coverage of expenses:

Meals will be covered by the Museum of the City of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines. Applicants experiencing difficulties funding their travel are invited to inform the organizers.

Scientific committee:

Eliza Culea-Hong, architect, teacher-researcher, associate senior lecturer (HCA and TPCAUI) – ENSA Versailles

Franck Delorme, deputy head of the collections department / archives center – Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine

Anna Magnien, heritage curator, director of the Museum of the City and Heritage of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines

Caroline Moine, professor of contemporary history, director of CHCSC – UVSQ / Université Paris-Saclay

Éric Monin, professor at ENSAP Lille, researcher at LACTH

Ivanne Rialland, professor of contemporary literature, deputy director of CHCSC – UVSQ / Université Paris-Saclay, coordinator of the interdisciplinary research group SCult – Université Paris-Saclay

Nathalie Simonnot, research engineer, director of LEAV – ENSA Versailles

Organizing committee:

Catherine Delplanque, academic partnerships and research officer – ENSA Versailles

Ana-Mariana Rochas-Porraz, humanities and social sciences research project manager – UVSQ / Université Paris-Saclay

Lucie Sauvageot, head of cultural outreach and public engagement – Museum of the City and Heritage of Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines