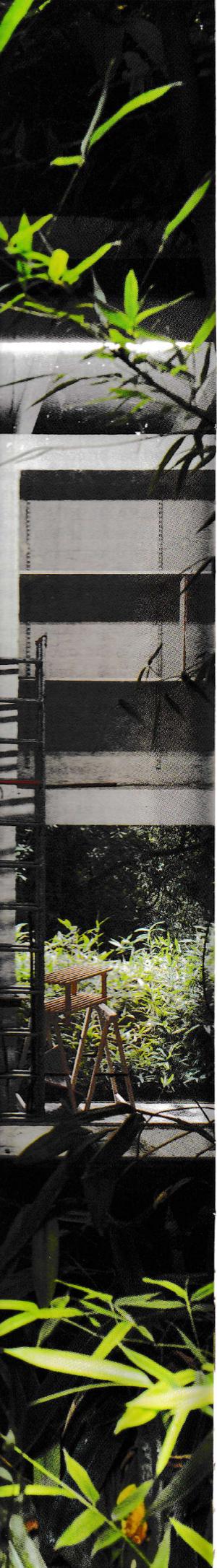


Artists in Architecture. Re-Activating Modern European Houses



Strebelle House

what attention forms



Between the Brussels municipalities of Uccle and Linkebeek, at the end of a narrow, uphill, cobblestone road, partly hidden under vegetation, rises a modernist house-cum-studio (*maison-atelier*) built for Olivier Strebelle (1927-2017), one of the most prominent post-war artists of Brussels. Strebelle lived and worked at the house for 60 years. Beyond his ceaseless activity that resulted in a large oeuvre of sculptures, Strebelle was known for his good looks and charisma. Throughout his lifetime, Strebelle House was a hub for discussion and work. From April 2019 onwards, the *maison-atelier* now more or less perpetuates this impetus, in its new incarnation as a residency for artists. It is now called *Studio-Garden Verrewinkel* and is a non-profit organisation managed by its director Julie Brunel, a generous hostess who is a specialist in modernist architecture. This new function fulfils Strebelle's wish that artists be hosted at the house after his death.

In 1949, Olivier Strebelle, barely 22 years old, bought a sandy parcel of land next to the Verrewinkel wood in the countryside where he had grown up. In 1955 a house and ceramics studio¹ were built on this plot. In 1958, as the scale of his sculptures continued to increase, an additional sculpture studio was constructed.

Several things stand out, such as the multiple levels of floors and heights, and the fact that studio and house are one. Everything is mixed: public and private life, creation and daily life. "The construction of the house was a collective intelligence that emerges from a collaboration between several architects/friends: André Jacquain (1921-2014), Oliver's brother Claude Strebelle (1917-2010) and Victor Mulpas (1928-1984)," says Julie Brunel, "Some interior furniture, such as the closets, the doors and the kitchen, was designed by Jules Wabbes (1919-1974). The building reflects simplicity, lightness and free circulation. The rectangular house is characterized by a succession of functions, one after the other, in a line. Through these elements, this *maison-atelier* bears

witness to the vivid interest Strebelle had for Japanese architecture."

"The panoramic windows at the east of the house function as a kind of television screens, for enjoying sunrise and the peaceful natural landscape," says Ms. Brunel. They establish a unity between the art outside and the art inside "au point que l'on ne sait plus où commence celui-ci ni où finit la demeure, tant ils sont imbriqués l'un dans l'autre."² (to the point that we do not know where the outside begins, nor where the living space ends, that is how far they are imbricated into one another) They also allow for a large space where light can enter into several, separate spaces: the dining room (the former first sculpture studio, where the colossal *Cheval Bayard* sculpture was once installed); the main living room; the bedroom (with a futon - a Japanese traditional style of bedding - on a tatami mat) and the bathroom (with an undulating bathtub sculpted by Olivier Strebelle). Also striking is a large, concrete ridge beam, visible over the length of the house, connecting the dining room and the main living room with the kitchen and a corridor. "La grande poutre est l'ordre. Les sculptures sont le désordre, la vie. Merveilleux conflit."³ (The beam creates order, in contrast to the sculptures that stand for disorder, for life. A wonderful conflict.)

1 Nowadays, there are no ceramics to be seen in the house anymore. "At a certain point Strebelle denied being a ceramist. The geometric shapes decorating a low wall at the entrance of the house, for example, were made in ceramic, but Strebelle chose to conceal them by covering them with white paint," says Julie Brunel.

2 LECHIEN-DURANT F., *Olivier Strebelle au jardin*, Musée Van Buuren: Rétrospective 1960-2000, Éditions Delta, Bruxelles, 2000, p. 11. Quotation from the conference of Olivier Strebelle *Le prix des rêves*, 1991.

3 JACQMAIN A., LOZE P., *Entretien sur l'architecture*, Eiffel Éditions, Brussels, 1988, p. 32.



Between the Brussels Linkebeek, at the end of a road, partly hidden under a house-cum-studio (made by Olivier Strebelle (1927-2017), one of the war artists of Brussels. Strebelle lived in the house for 60 years. Beyond his work, he resulted in a large oeuvre. Strebelle is known for his good looks. In his lifetime, Strebelle House was a work. From April 2019 onwards, it is more or less perpetuated as a residency for artists. The Garden Verrewinkel and its director, who managed by its director, is a specialist in the new function fulfils Strebelle's wish. In 1949, Olivier Strebelle bought a sandy parcel of land next to the countryside where he had a house and ceramics studio. The scale of his sculptural work. Several things stand out on different floors and heights, and they are one. Everything is mixed with art and daily life. "The collective intelligence that exists between several architects (1921-2014), Olivier's brother (2010) and Victor Mulpas (2010). "Some interior furniture and the kitchen, was designed in 1974). The building reflects the circulation. The rectangular succession of functions. Through these elements

The new sculpture studio was half buried in the garden. Julie Brunel explains this was conceived as “a sexual gesture that can be read as a way of penetrating the landscape.” Largely inspired by vegetal and mineral forms, Olivier Strebelle brought plants, trees and rocks from around the world to his house and planted them in the garden. A remarkable steel-blue *Cedrus atlantica Glauca Pendula* from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco stands in a small Japanese garden in front of the house. The graceful, weeping branches partly cover the copper roof of the house, making it a charming element, which is visible from several angles.

(Building) bodies

“I think that the questioning of architecture through dance leads us to think about how we want to design spaces, practice them and modify them.” (Jacques Ligot) In July 2019 Paris-based architect Jacques Ligot stayed at Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel) for a two-week residency. Based on a profound interest in the relationship between dance and architecture, Ligot has been working for several years on tools and exchanges between the two disciplines, in a theoretical and practical way, in Paris and São Paulo, Brazil. He also wrote a research essay *Dance as an architect*. Interested in the idea of working on “how people transport and rebuild” their living spaces, he invited Eimi Leggett, Mooni Van Tichel and Timothy Nouzak, three dancers who are currently engaged in a research master at P.A.R.T.S. (the Brussels-based school for contemporary dance founded by choreographer and dancer Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker). They experienced and recorded the atmosphere of the architecture of Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel). Living in the *maison-atelier* generated a form of attention oriented by the practice and experience of the users. Leggett, Van Tichel, Nouzak and Ligot investigated the uses and limits of the architectural spaces of Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel), by studying the lines, shapes, structures and circulation in the *maison-atelier*, which was built for

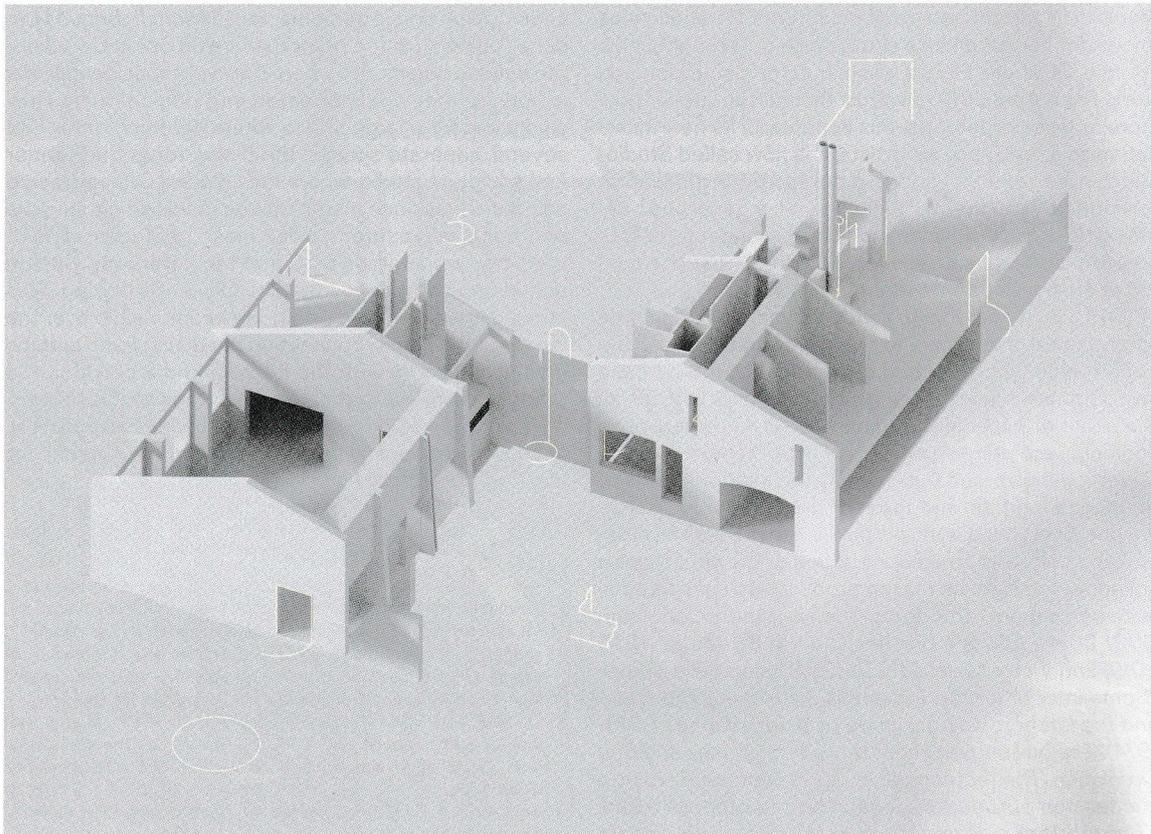
the specific gestures of the sculptor Olivier Strebelle. They questioned the building's memory. As certain uses of the premises were no longer applicable, they interpreted the space for other uses. They looked for a way to capture, transport, reconstruct and re-activate the architecture of Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel) on the same scale in another place. The result is a 20-minute-long performance entitled *what attention forms*, in which they create new gestures. The bodies ‘draw’ the house and install simple, sculptural objects that refer to specific reference points/nodes in the architecture of Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel).

During the vernissage of the exhibition *Artists in Architecture* at BOZAR, on Tuesday, November 12, 2019, the three dancers will do a performance in the monumental Horta Hall. Their bodies will make the architecture and scale of the Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel) visible within the limits of the Horta Hall, the receptive space. Their choreographic language can be seen as a form of confrontation/negotiation with the majestic art deco hall. The performance is also a way to share the non-public Strebelle House, in its new lease of life as *Studio-Garden Verrewinkel*, and to make it indirectly accessible. For the duration of the exhibition, a scale model of the artist's house will be on display, including miniature versions of the sculptural objects, as a lasting memory of the performance that will take place during the vernissage.

Sofie Crabbé
art and photography historian and theoretician, art critic, curator and writer

The historical facts relating to Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel) originate from a live interview with Julie Brunel conducted by Sofie Crabbé on October 11, 2019, at Strebelle House (Studio-Garden Verrewinkel) in Uccle, and the article CHANCEL V., LE MAIRE J., ‘Le sculpteur et l'architecte. La maison et l'atelier d'Olivier Strebelle par André Jacquemain’, in: *Brussels Patrimoines*, n°026, April 2018, pp. 77-85.

Jacques ligot, *maison 0.1*, 4800*2700px, courtesy of jacques Ligot, © Antoine Trapp and Jacques Ligot



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