

RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ATELIER BRANCUSI

1992 – 1997 Paris, France

Built twenty years after the Centre Pompidou and IRCAM, the Atelier Brancusi is the third piece of the composition built around the Plateau Beaubourg. At the start of the seventies it was an anonymous parking lot and today it is one of the most vital and beloved places in Paris .

Born in Romania in 1876, Costantin Brancusi walked all the way to Paris in 1904 to devote himself entirely to sculpture. Shortly before his death, in 1957, he decided to leave his works to the French State – in particular his collection of 137 sculptures – on condition they would all be kept in their original location, exhibited in the same sequence in which the Romanian artist had placed them in his studio in the Impasse Ronsin in the 15th arrondissement. The studio was later threatened with demolition by plans to restore the city blocks around the Montparnasse station.

Brancusi always considered the arrangement of the sculptures inside his studio a decisive factor in his art. He placed them in “mobile groups,” constantly moving them in search of an ever more refined composition. In the 1920s the studio in the Impasse Ronsin was gradually turned into a true exhibition space by demolishing some walls in order to free two large rooms, to which he later annexed two further spaces. In the last years of his life, Brancusi stopped sculpting new pieces, concentrating exclusively on the arrangement of the sculptures present in the atelier. It was such a delicate equilibrium – in which the position of each piece was decisive – that Brancusi chose not to exhibit any more outside his studio and, whenever he had to sell a sculpture, it would immediately be replaced by a plaster copy in order not to disturb the balance of the composition.

The pavilion designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop presents the exact measurements, volumes and lighting conditions of the four rooms that made up the studio in the Impasse Ronsin, where the composition of the statues was meticulously reconstructed. However, the blind side walls have been replaced by glass screens that, surrounded by a ring-shaped path, enable the atelier to be presented in the museum. From the flat metal covering rise two large saw-tooth roofs facing north, carefully controlling the constant and non-reflecting natural light shed on the sculptures

The atelier is sunk on a lower level than the Plateau Beaubourg, set symmetrically in relation to the IRCAM premises. The building is surrounded on three sides by walls of heavy stone blocks, contrasting with the slender steel ties of the nearby Centre Pompidou. A walled garden flanks the entrance staircase, creating a further diaphragm between the interior of the studio and the square. These architectural choices create an atmosphere of suspension, a sense of isolation when one walks inside the atelier, as if to create a quiet and sheltered interior, just a stone's throw from the festive confusion enlivening the Plateau Beaubourg.