

Another Architecture

N°62 June – July 2016

MARK

Light

+

Colour

+

Volume

The world of Dominique Coulon

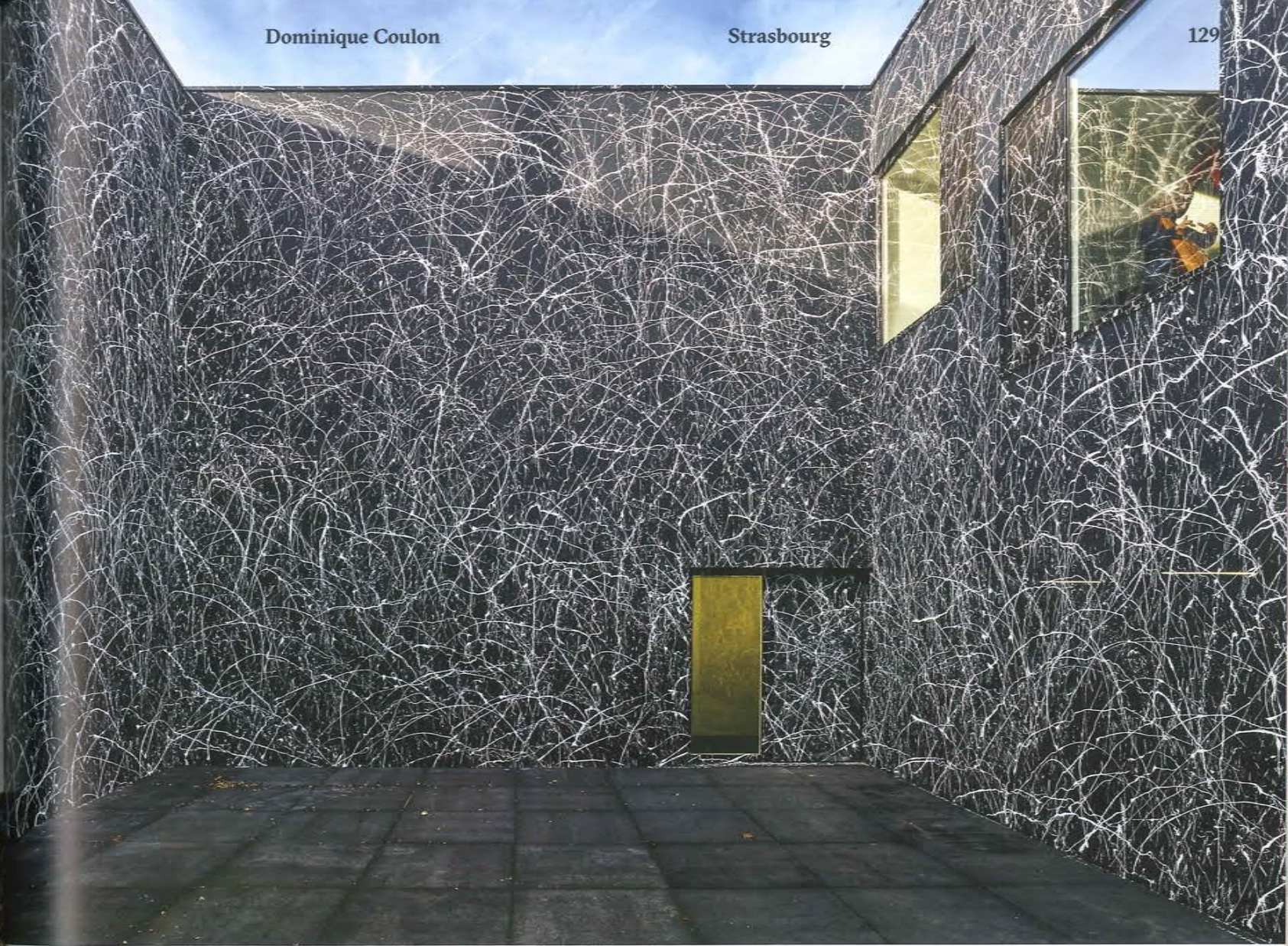
+ How to house refugees

+ A portrait of Vietnamese architect Vo Trong Nghia

+ Interviews with Gustav Peichl, Billie Faircloth and Julien De Smedt



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In the courtyard, the splatter-painting technique recurs, with the tones reversed.

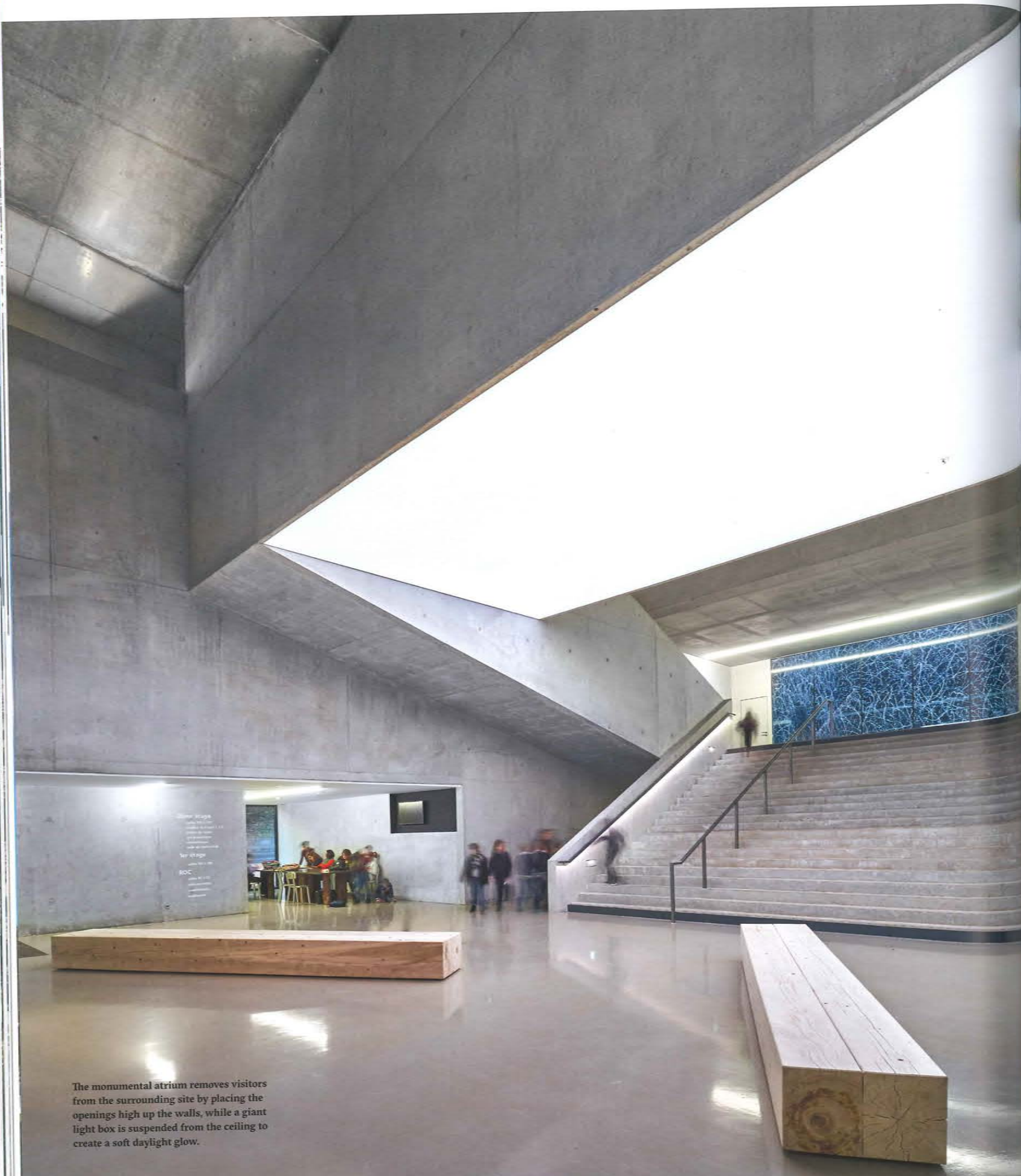
Henri Dutilleux Conservatory of Music, Dance and Dramatic Arts Belfort–France 2015



Wooden beams, panelling and flooring create a warm atmosphere in the auditoriums.

On the edge of town, demarcating the boundary between built-up and green areas, the conservatory appears as an amalgamation of solid concrete volumes with an unexpected surface. Splatter-painted in two shades of blue in the style of Jackson Pollock, the patterned skin suggests both plant growth and veined marble. It catches the light to lend the concrete monolith an enigmatic, shimmering presence. The building contains two auditoriums, a theatre, a dance studio, a library, classrooms, administrative offices, and a host of studios with extremely varied volumes and areas (the acoustics of each studio are designed to suit one specific instrument). The volumes seem to fit into each other like a puzzle, with empty areas hollowed out of the compact mass creating relationships between different levels.

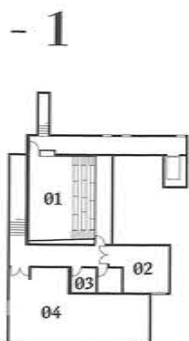
'It may be a little baroque'



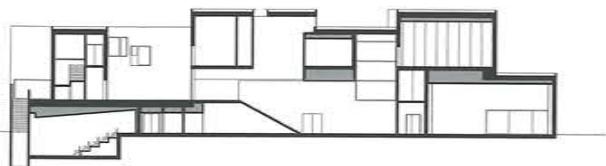
The monumental atrium removes visitors from the surrounding site by placing the openings high up the walls, while a giant light box is suspended from the ceiling to create a soft daylight glow.



The cantilevered dance studio, which faces the countryside and the local Belfort Lion, a monumental sculpture by Frédéric Bartholdi, creator of the Statue of Liberty, has the building's most extensive views.



Long Section



- 01 Auditorium
- 02 Heating room
- 03 Technical rooms
- 04 Ventilation rooms
- 05 Atrium
- 06 Forecourt
- 07 Entrance
- 08 Reception desk
- 09 Classroom
- 10 Meeting room
- 11 Office
- 12 Drum classroom
- 13 Study room
- 14 Air handling unit
- 15 Group practice room
- 16 Terrace
- 17 Courtyard
- 18 Dance studio
- 19 Library
- 20 Changing rooms
- 21 Drama classroom

the visitor and generate spaces that can be enjoyed from different angles. I often use concrete as a building material – it's very dominant here in France. My favourite is the cast-in-place concrete that gives a fairly monolithic aspect. I prefer monolithic pieces, because I'm not convinced that connected volumes work with my architectural compositions. So my material approach could be compared to that of Swiss architects. And apart from a few exceptions, like the curved glass walls of the Thionville Library, for which we asked for help from a specialist consulting firm, everything is designed here in the office.

With Belfort Conservatory, it seems you're exploring new kinds of expression.

Yes, I like to experiment with new materials. It may be a little baroque because it isn't essential, but my interest is in creating visual and corporal sensations. The circulation is particularly important, as it is made up of dynamic spaces in which I employ a complexity of form, material and light. The working spaces, meanwhile, are more static and treated in a sober manner in order to facilitate their use. At Belfort, the programme imposes numerous rehearsal studios, treated in white but enjoying broad views of the surrounding landscape.

As for the façades, I wanted them blue. Instead of stained concrete or a too-bright glaze, I sought a softer effect, which we achieved with a Jackson Pollock-like drip painting technique. Two art students, my son Max Coulon and Gabriel Khokha, splattered two shades of blue onto a white background to achieve the final result, which is fascinating – the impression differs enormously depending on how close or far away you are. What is interesting, and also extremely rare for this area, is that the building hasn't acquired any graffiti at all. For the patio, the tones are reversed with a black background. The technique also recurs in the lobby as an artist's canvas.

Is sustainability a feature of your projects?

Yes: our latest buildings, the school complexes in Colombes and Montpellier, are even positive energy – they produce more energy than they consume. The complex in Colombes is in an eco-village where wood was recommended – actually, we're the only ones to have used it, as rough pieces of oak on a grey background. Here, the site did not help the comfort of use. The best orientation is north towards a garden, while in the south the building is closed as it faces a tram maintenance centre. The possibilities were tight. We decided to focus our efforts on the courtyard, using geometry

and bright colours (orange, pink, red and grey) to enliven the lobby and canteen. Colourists helped us to tailor the choice of colour palette to enhance the children's behaviour. I appreciate this kind of collaboration. In a similar vein, I introduced Claude Bonnet, a neuroscientist, to the Strasbourg architecture school. He offers another angle on the perception of space. His scientific arguments are leading to an interesting evolution in the students' designs – and our own.

There are few residential buildings in your oeuvre. Is this by choice?

Not at all. In France, you're invited to take part in competitions that match the programmes you have already done – in our case, sports facilities, theatres, kindergartens, schools, conservatories and so on. So, unfortunately, this doesn't give us much opportunity to access this type of programme. We would like to do more. One of our latest projects is our own office, three interlocking levels with a rooftop terrace looking out on Strasbourg Cathedral – a masterpiece in the history of architecture. —

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Simone Veil School Complex *Colombes–France* 2015

A key feature in the new Marine eco-village in Colombes, this complex, uniting a kindergarten and a primary school, is built on four levels. Although dense, it is not monotonous: a number of hollows enliven the façade and the outline of the building. These highly coloured porous areas allow light to flood into the classrooms, which open up in two different directions: vertically, by means of generously sized patios, and horizontally, through outdoor extensions such as playgrounds, terraces and a garden. After dark, the elevated sports hall lights up the square and street like a lantern. Colour, light and form create great spatial diversity within the schools, and the circulation is conceived in terms of sequences that characterize the identity of each place. The architecture of the building becomes an educational tool, stimulating the development of the young pupils.



The richly textured façade of the Simone Veil School Complex features rough oak stakes on a grey background, spliced with segments of colour.