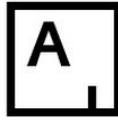


GAGOSIAN GALLERY



In New York, Jean Prouvé and John Chamberlain in Steely Dialogue

Hannah Gregory



What unites a French modernist architect and an American assemblage artist? Metal and an emboldened interest in mass production, suggests “Chamberlain-Prouvé,” the eighth collaboration between the Paris-based Galerie Patrick Seguin and New York’s Gagosian Gallery.

The latter’s West 24th Street space currently hosts a series of John Chamberlain’s assemblages, which manipulate the machine-made into crumpled piles of twisted steel, alongside reconstructions of two of Jean Prouvé’s demountable houses, whose stark structural core is also constructed from the sturdy alloy.

Both Chamberlain and Prouvé seize the “strength and suppleness” of metal, which for the latter seemed to offer “unlimited possibilities: cut up, then bent, rolled, and welded, it let you create all the profiles you needed [...] from straight lines to angles to curves.”

The steel spine of Prouvé’s *Ferembal Demountable House* (the former office of a French tin goods manufacturer, originally built in 1948) has a sculptural presence beyond its functional purpose. A corridor of ivory frames, like inner geometric portals, divide and center the space. Prouvé developed such temporary architecture after the destruction of World War II, which necessitated urgent and economical building. Reassembled in 2010 in the Tuileries gardens in Paris after a restoration by contemporary architect Jean Nouvel, here the house is contrasted with Chamberlain’s crude metallic sculptures.

For more than 20 years, Galerie Patrick Seguin has collected Prouvé's demountable houses, which range from 172 to 2054 square feet in size, and whose technical virtues of prefabrication are now recognized as a pivotal achievement in 20th-century architecture. Prouvé was not too proud to make use of the efficiency of mass production in his architecture and interior design—for this pragmatic approach enabled a strong social conscience around his work in postwar Europe.

The asymmetrical *Temporary School of Villejuif* (1956), with pillar box-red legs supporting a cantilevered wooden roof, was designed as an easily dismantable school house. The structure's movable components remain relevant to the design of temporary architecture today.

Not only do Prouvé's designs stand as modernist icons, their adaptable quality is of renewed importance for contemporary architecture, which must embrace modular, flexible design in order to respond to the challenges of building amid economic and ecological crisis. Prouvé's demountable housing, like his furniture and industrial design, emerges as elegant and efficient in equal measure.