



Engraved In My Memory

THE HANDSHAKE

The harmonious partnership and friendship between Le Corbusier and me can scarcely be described in words. All that I have attempted to express in a few lines in the form of anecdotes can be surmised from „The Handshake“, the photograph of 16 April 1960 that shows us greeting each other in front of the airplane. The secret of the rapport, the friendship between Le Corbusier and me is to be found in that moment. Every time that we shook hands during each of our discussions, he reinforced his trust, his respect, his friendship. That handshake still grips me 50 years later.

2015 Heidi Weber, Anecdotes

On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the death of Le Corbusier in 1965

ENGRAVED IN MY MEMORY

The recollected anecdotes in this collection that marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Le Corbusier are testimony to my seven-year work partnership and friendship with him. These anecdotes paint a picture of Le Corbusier, the man and the artist I had the fortune to know.

Heidi Weber



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The handshake

Engraved In My Memory

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I

A MONSTER OF PERSEVERANCE

Proof of "first drunkenness"
(whisky and white wine in mezzanin)
A "House of Men"
"invented" by Heidi Weber,
(monster of perseverance,
devotion and enthusiasm)
-My friendship for Heidi Weber
Zurich, 25.11.60
her victim
Le Corbusier
Zürich, 24.11.1960

Juste de la
"J'accuse" (whisky et vin blanc)
Mezzanine)
"invented" par Heidi Weber.
(monster of perseverance & devotion and enthusiasm)
- mon amie à Heidi Weber.
Zurich 24/11/60
La victime
Le Corbusier.
24/11/60

For Le Corbusier I gladly changed my habit of only serving non-alcoholic beverages. For once I offered alcohol and, especially for Le Corbusier, his beloved whisky. It was a relaxed, cheerful atmosphere and Le Corbusier himself was in a splendid mood. His inscription to me embodies this relaxed atmosphere. To abandon the thought of giving up the realisation of the museum in the light of tremendous problems and huge financial worries, including the risk to lose everything, this inscription also entailed the necessity for me to become a “monster of perseverance”. Being a “monster of devotion” was the essential condition for being able to work with a genius like Le Corbusier. A “monster of enthusiasm” also required selflessness. The enthusiasm for Le Corbusier’s work enabled me to persevere for so many years until today. I was born with this gigantic willingness to persevere and it was trained in small steps for all these years of my long and healthy life.

2

THE FIRST TRIP TO LE CORBUSIER

I gave away my beloved car, a Fiat Topolino for my first original work by Le Corbusier — a small collage. As the proud owner of this original, I imagined myself to be the richest woman in the world. My desire for an oil painting had led me to one of his friends, who told me that at the time Le Corbusier spent all of August at Cap Martin. With a phone call, a meeting was arranged and I was on the first plane to Nice the next morning. We met for the first time in the Restaurant Etoile de Mer at Cap Martin. It was as if we had known each other for a long time. During a wonderful meal with a magnificent view of the Mediterranean, I expressed my wish to acquire one of his oil paintings. He asked: „Combien vous voulez payer pour une peinture?“ *„How much are you willing to pay for a painting?“* I answered spontaneously: „Monsieur, j’ai dix milles Suisse francs à la banque.“ *„Monsieur, I have 10,000 Swiss francs in the bank.“* He was amazed by my reply. „Vous voulez vraiment payer tant que ça?“ *„Do you really want to pay that much for it?“*

3

CHICKEN OR BEEF?

After our first three-day encounter at Cap Martin in 1958, Le Corbusier escorted me to the small train station at Roquebrune, where a little footpath led along by the tracks. The personal accompaniment was particularly courteous and we waited together at the station for the train from Genoa that would take me to Nice and the airfield. As I got into the train, he said with a friendly smile and loveable intonation: „Téléphonez-moi, je suis à partir du 1er septembre de nouveau de retour à Paris, vous pouvez m'atteindre à mon atelier, 35 rue de Sèvres.“ *„Phone me, I will be back in Paris again after the 1st of September. You can reach me in my studio at 35 rue de Sèvres.“*

I could barely wait for the day, the 1st of September, and that morning, for once, I was in my studio-galley „mezzanine“ in Zurich on the dot of 9.

That was my first phone conversation with him after our three-day meeting. I was nervous, which normally I never am, but this second contact was very important for me. When I gave my name, he said with a positive voice: „Ah, c'est vous quand c'est que vous venez à Paris?“ *„Ah, it's you, when are you coming to Paris?“* „Demain, Monsieur.“ *„Tomorrow, Monsieur.“* Evidently, my answer pleased him as, with special emphasis, he said: „Alors, je vous invite à manger chez moi à la maison. Venez me chercher à 13 heures à mon atelier rue de Sèvres.“ *„Well, then, I'd like to invite you to dine with me at 1 pm in my studio at 35 rue de Sèvres.“*

Le Corbusier: „Que-est ce que vous désirez à manger? Un poulet ou une entrecôte?“ *„What would you like to eat? Chicken or beef?“*

„Chicken, Monsieur.“

4

ALL SOLD

Le Corbusier pledged me only a few works at Cap Martin.

Given my enthusiasm and admiration for his art works and my conviction that my clients would be delighted with them, he gave me three oil paintings and ten small-format original works: drawings, water colours, pastels. The exhibition aroused considerable interest and enjoyed extraordinary success.

During the exhibition, Le Corbusier called me constantly from Paris and asked: „Est-ce-que l'exposition a du succès?“ *„Is the exhibition a success?“*

His question surprised me somewhat. I answered cheerfully: „Oui Monsieur, il y a beaucoup de visiteurs.“ *„Yes, Monsieur, lots of visitors.“*

I was not aware that he was thinking about the sales success.

On one of the final days, there was another call from Paris and I was put through to Le Corbusier: „Madame Weber, est-ce que vous avez vendu quelque chose?“ *„Madame Weber, have you sold anything?“*

I was badly shaken because not one of his works had been bought. But I could not tell him the truth, so I held my breath for a second and answered in bad conscience because I had to lie: „Oui Monsieur, j'ai tous vendus!“ *„Yes, Monsieur, I have sold all of them!“*

I was not aware that commercial success was important to him. For him, it was more about the recognition of his works than money.

At this point, I was the only passionate collector of Le Corbusier's works.

I was, in fact, the purchaser of the complete works.

5

THE FIRST BUYERS

During my next meal with Le Corbusier in Paris he happily told me that he had called the Minister of Culture, André Malraux, and told him that an exhibition of his pictures had taken place in Zurich and all the works had been sold.

Only the Swiss understood his painting. I had to control my facial expression, given that I was the sole purchaser of the entire exhibited works. I knew, however, that my lie was an affectionate lie and not one in the true sense of the word.

Around two months later, he returned to the subject of the sales success.

„Madame Weber, il faut doubler les prix, c'était trop bon marché, c'est pour ça que vous avez tous vendu.“ *„Madame Weber, you will have to double the prices. The works were too cheap. That's why you sold all of them.“*

A friend must have suggested that to him.

I didn't bat an eyelid and said boldly: „Oui Monsieur, je suis d'accord.“ *„Yes, Monsieur, I agree.“*

I went back to Zurich, doubled the prices and, lo and behold, the buyers appeared. I was thrilled that finally I had some earnings.

6

A GENTLEMAN

During the first exhibition, an apparently important person, going by his appearance at least, entered my „mezzanin“ studio gallery. He presented himself as a major collector from Stockholm.

He was excited and impressed by his discovery of Le Corbusier's works and bought a small, original pencil drawing.

A few days before this visit, I had received the model for my planned concrete museum from Le Corbusier and had placed it on a pedestal.

I told him that I had given Le Corbusier the contract for the design of a museum and that this model represented his plans.

Shortly after this visit, the man attempted to meet Le Corbusier in Paris to win him over for a museum to house his collection in Stockholm.

During my next visit with Le Corbusier he mentioned that he had met a certain Mr Ahrenberg, a major collector from Stockholm, who had visited the exhibition of his work in my gallery.

With a questioning look, he said: „C'est un Monsieur très bien.“ „*He is a very fine man.*“

My answer: „Monsieur, je ne trouve pas.“ „*Monsieur, I don't think so.*“

Le Corbusier: „Heidi Weber, attention, vous jugez trop vite, c'est un Monsieur très bien.“ „*Heidi Weber, be careful, you judge too hastily, he is a very good man.*“

„Monsieur, je ne crois pas, mais le temps le montrera!“ „*Monsieur, I don't think, but time will tell.*“

For me, a tense, unpleasant atmosphere developed around this man.

7

NOT ONE OF MY BEST FRIENDS

During the many years of exhibition work throughout our partnership, Le Corbusier often said to me, with a melancholy undertone in his voice: „Vous savez, Madame Weber, il n'y a pas un des mes meilleurs amis qui aurait fait pour moi ce que vous faites, vous êtes la seule personne qui avait fait quelque chose pour moi.“

„You know, Madame Weber, not even one of my best friends would have done for me what you do. You are the only person who has done anything for me.“

I found these words encouraging and looked to the future.

But still I couldn't and wouldn't believe that of all his friends none was ready to muster the time and money for Le Corbusier to promote his ideas and works.



8

STOPOVER

„M. Le Corbusier prend un avion d’Air France pour les Indes le vendredi 15 avril, vol 682, faisant escale Zurich de 14 h 05 21 h 10. Il serait très heureux s’il vous était possible de venir le voir L’Aéroport.“ La Secrétaire J. Heilbuth.

„M. Le Corbusier is taking an Air France plane, flight 682, to India on Friday, 15 April, with a stopover in Zurich from 14.05 to 21.10. He would be very pleased to meet you at the airport.“ Die Sekretärin J. Heilbuth.

The 15th of April 1960 was an exceptionally beautiful day in Zurich. I was looking forward to his visit, even though it was only for a few hours.

I met Le Corbusier at the airfield. In those days, one could still go directly to the plane.

When Le Corbusier got out of the aircraft, we greeted each other with the trusting handshake captured in the photograph.

Le Corbusier had an unusually radiant smile as we shook hands.

I drove towards Zürichhorn Park at Lake Zurich, aware that we would spend only a few hours together.

I had an epiphany. I cannot explain how it happened. It was a sudden insight that I intuitively had to reveal to Le Corbusier during our walk by the lake.

After short time, he looked at me sceptically and asked: „Pourquoi vous me faites promener ici?“ *„Why are you walking here with me?“* „Monsieur, j’aimerais vous faire construire une maison-musée de vous dans ce parc.“

„Monsieur, I would like to build a museum of yours in this park.“ Le Corbusier was stunned: „Vous n’allez pas me dire que vous pouvez construire dans ce beau parc?“ *„You’re not telling me that you’re allowed to build in this beautiful park?“* And, after a short pause: „Non, je ne ferais plus rien pour les Suisses, les Suisses n’ont jamais été chic avec moi.“ *„No, I’m not going to do anything more for the Swiss; the Swiss were never kind to me.“*

At this exact moment, my answer was very, very important and right: „Monsieur, moi personnellement je n'investirais même pas 100 francs dans les Suisses, puis-ce que je voulais émigrer depuis que j'avais 14 ans, mais je suis conscient d'une chose, c'est que avec vous que je peux faire quelque chose de non Suisse en Suisse, quelque chose qui grossera les frontières.“ *„Monsieur, personally I would not invest 100 francs in the Swiss. Even as a 14-year-old girl I wanted to leave Switzerland, but I am aware that it is only with you that I can do something un-Swiss in Switzerland; something that will transcend Swiss borders.“*

My combative answer and my argument convinced him, and he replied in a voice filled with joy and enthusiasm: „Oui, vous avez raison, on le montrera ces Suisses!“ *„Yes, you are right, we will show these Swiss!“*

9

THE ÖPFELCHAMMER RESTAURANT

After our walk at Zürichhorn, we went to the Öpfelchammer Restaurant, an eatery at the Rindermarkt with a tradition that reaches back to the Middle Ages.

Over supper in this enjoyable atmosphere I was able to depict in more detail my motives for the planned museum. I told him that with my great success as an interior decorator I had earned a lot of money, but I never harboured the desire to own a villa and jewellery or to have a lot of money in the bank.

Rather, it was my wish and my conviction to do something meaningful with the hard-earned money. Namely, a building designed by him for his sculptural work, for his universal creativity; a unique building, a Gesamtkunstwerk — a total work of art.

Le Corbusier was very satisfied after the walk with my proposal and, I believe, really happy.

This day would be one of the most important for my future.

10

BACK TO STEEL

During our walk in April 1960, I told Le Corbusier of my vision to build a museum at Zürichhorn.

Three months later, he sent me coloured layouts and a model for a concrete structure. The model for a concrete building was beautiful but I was not really excited about it because I was convinced that the future did not belong to concrete. Six months later when he showed me another model for a building of steel and glass I was delighted. A museum made of steel meant prefabrication and modular construction. The design convinced me completely. About three months later during a meal Le Corbusier said: „Madame Weber, nous sommes retournés au béton parce que vous ne savez pas ce que vous risquer avec le métal. Le métal est plus difficile.“ *„Madame Weber, we are back to concrete as you are not aware what you are risking with metal. Metal is much riskier.“*

My response was unequivocal: „Monsieur, je suis très déçue, parce que j’aime l’idée du métal. La construction en métal est le future.“ *„Monsieur, I am very disappointed because I love the idea of metal. Metal structures are the future.“* „Je suis très conscient que n’importe comment je risque tous avec vous, alors fessons laquelle en métal.“ *„I am fully aware that I am risking everything with you. So, let’s make it metal.“*

He acknowledged my courage and my determination with a gentle smile as an expression of his happiness that I was prepared to risk everything for this building.

11

SMALL OR LARGE

In 1962, I was invited to an urgent meeting in the Building Department by three members of the city council. The reason: The manager of the department had received a visit a few days earlier from a professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich). Professor Roth was, as he constantly pointed out, a good friend of Le Corbusier.

Roth confronted the city councillors with an emergency motion: The city of Zurich should not grant planning permission to Heidi Weber for the building designed by Le Corbusier.

His counterproposal: The city of Zurich should give Le Corbusier a commission for a bigger building and not permit Heidi Weber's planned smaller structure.

This small interlude was not the result of evil intent (I hope), but it was a stupid, dangerous suggestion on the part of Roth.

The councillors were uneasy about my plans. Would I, a young woman, be able to make a building designed by Le Corbusier a reality?

„Gentlemen, I need to clarify my position; to express my personal view,“ I said.

„First: The professor is unaware, apparently, that a masterpiece, regardless how small, does not depend on the dimensions. Secondly: With this building, I am not preventing the city authorities from awarding Le Corbusier a large-scale contract. Thirdly: It is too late for a large-scale contract because Le Corbusier is over 70 and, unfortunately, in bad health.

Moreover, two Le Corbusier buildings would definitely benefit the city of Zurich.“

At the time, 1960, we women still lacked equality but, luckily, I was a divorced woman and no longer needed to provide a husband's signature. I am convinced that no husband would have backed such a huge risk. If I hadn't been divorced back then (1959), Le Corbusier's masterpiece would not be in the beautiful park at Lake Zurich today.

I completely convinced the councillors with my clear position statement.

I had thwarted the threat that the museum could not be built.

12

LIKE WILDFIRE

Le Corbusier's first visit to my exhibition, „Le Corbusier: peintures, tapisseries, dessins, lithos, meubles“, in February 1959 was a tremendous success. The news that the master would be present spread like wildfire through the city. The streets in the old part of the city where my exhibition rooms were located were completely filled with hundreds of interested parties and admirers of Le Corbusier.

A few collectors of his works (there weren't very many at the time) were also present and requested to be introduced to Le Corbusier. I informed him of this wish: *„Monsieur, your collectors would like to be introduced to you.“* „Heidi Weber, faites comme vous voulez, mais je ne veux pas voir ces gens là“ *„Heidi Weber, do what you want but I'd prefer not to see these people!“*

„Monsieur, these are people who don't have much money, simple people who love your painting, who have made sacrifices to purchase one of your paintings.“ „Bien, d'accord, pour vous faire plaisir, présentez les à moi.“ „Fine, if it pleases you, introduce them.“ His expression was tense, sceptical.

After I had introduced three or four people to him, his face relaxed and he turned to me with a smile and the words: „Heidi Weber, ça me rend très heureux de savoir mes enfants dans des bonnes mains chez vous.“ *„Heidi Weber, I am very happy to see that my children are in your good hands with you.“*

I could not have wished for more beautiful proof of his trust.

13

THE ERMITAGE HOTEL

On 2 November 1961, Le Corbusier came to Zurich for two days for the opening of my „Peintures grands formats“ exhibition in my „mezzanine“ studio gallery.

I reserved two rooms for him at the Ermitage Hotel, overlooking at the lake in Küsnacht.

He was very surprised when registering to see that I had booked two rooms for him and he asked me with an amused smile: „Pourquoi deux chambres?“ *„Why two rooms?“*

„Monsieur, j'ai pensé que vous allez avoir un plaisir de pouvoir peindre le matin dans la deuxième chambre avec le calme et la belle vue sur le lac, comme vous faites tout les matins chez vous à Paris.“ „Monsieur, I thought that it would please you if you could paint in the morning, as you do every morning in Paris, in the second room with this beautiful lake view.“

„I will collect you for lunch at 1pm, as in Paris.“

He was very pleased with my attentiveness.

I didn't tell any of his many Zurich friends or the press where Le Corbusier was staying.

A day before Le Corbusier's arrival, Professor Alfred Roth from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) called me and asked where he was staying.

He arrogantly said that I should inform him that would give a party for him in his house.

I replied that I couldn't say where Le Corbusier was staying.

But like it or not, I had to pass on Roth's invitation to Le Corbusier.

Le Corbusier was not very happy and replied somewhat annoyed: „Heidi Weber, faites comme vous voulez, mais je ne vais pas chez celui là.“ *„Heidi Weber, do what you want but I'm not going to his house.“*

14

CHERRY BRANDY

Le Corbusier loved simple restaurants. I once mentioned that the most famous bistro in Zurich was called Kronenhalle and all the celebrities dined there. I said: „Monsieur, il y a à Zurich aussi un très beau, vieux restaurant où tous les fameux et artistes, se montrent.“ „*Monsieur, there's a world famous restaurant in Zurich where all the celebrities and artists can be seen.*“ „Mais j'ai pensé que vous préférez un lieu simple dans la vieille ville.“ „*But I thought that you'd prefer a simple place in the old city.*“ Le Corbusier: „Heidi Weber, je sais très apprécier cela.“ „*Heidi Weber, I really appreciate this.*“

Therefore, I invited him to the Öpfelhammer, a unique place that has existed since the Middle Ages. He was completely taken by the atmosphere, the traditional Swiss food and the Zuger Kirsch cherry brandy.

This sensitivity, not to go to the Kronenhalle and show myself off with him, is an example of how extraordinarily important it was that I acted properly in each situation.

15

THE FIRST CHEQUE

1956, Paris: „On dit que je suis riche. Je n'ai pas un sou, je n'ai jamais eu de l'argent.“

1956, Paris: „*They say that I am rich. I don't have a cent, I never had money. I'm 68 years old, architecture has left me nothing, gave me nothing.*“

Given my enthusiasm for his painting and the successful exhibitions of his pictures in my ,mezzanin' studio gallery, I was always able to cheer him up with cheques.

In this respect, I feel that he was able to pay his loyal workers a little more now and again.

An incident: Mme Jeanne was a devoted, earnest, self-sacrificing woman, who managed his office in an exemplary manner for 20 years. He immediately gave Mme Jeanne, which is how Le Corbusier and his co-workers respectfully referred to her, my first cheque because in all the years he was unable to pay her a proper salary.

This lovely gesture on his part had an amusing sequel.

A posh childhood friend from Neuenburg, who had established a successful private bank, (I shall not name any names out of respect for his family), did not, of course, understand Le Corbusier.

He visited him in Paris and suggested that he would manage all his earnings in future. As I learned from the studio employees, Le Corbusier found this patronizing.

Infuriated, he said, „*I have managed my entire life without money in the bank,*“ and threw his old friend out of the office.

16

TAXI TRIP

After each meeting in his architect's studio in rue de Sèvres, most of which had to do with the construction of my museum, we always finished on the dot of 1 pm.

Subsequently, he would invite me to lunch in his penthouse apartment in rue Nungesser et Colis.

We hailed a taxi in front of the Grand Magasin du Printemps on der rue de Sèvres. Because there were thousands of taxis in Paris, none of the drivers recognized the famous old man.

Le Corbusier loved that.

No sooner would we be in a taxi than he would tell the driver, with apparent delight, the exact route.

I always recall this special anecdote.

Scarcely had the car driven off than the driver asked him: „Monsieur, pourriez-vous m'indiquer la route?“ *„Monsieur, can you tell me the way?“*

Le Corbusier, clearly surprised and rather amused, asked him: „Comment ça se fait que vous comme chauffeur de taxi ne connaissez pas la route?“

„How can it be that a taxi driver doesn't know the way?“

„Monsieur, j'ai travaillé dans l'usine d'automobile Renault mais avec ce misérable salaire je ne pouvais pas nourrir ma famille.“

„Monsieur, I worked in the Renault car factory but couldn't feed my family with the miserable wages.“

Le Corbusier was very moved by the man's statement.

Kindly and happily he directed him through the city and, full of sympathy for the man's plight, gave him a large tip at the end of the trip.

The driver was grateful, but he had no idea that this amiable old man was the world-famous master of architecture.

17

CONTROVERSIAL SELECTION

Selecting his works for the exhibition and catalogue in my „mezzanine“ studio gallery was a constantly intensive, fascinating, concentrated job.

I was aware that each work that I picked for an exhibition or sale was an extremely delicate matter for Le Corbusier. With a questioning gesture I took each single work, small or large, always carefully in my hand, and asked him hesitantly if he agreed.

Very often, he said: „Eh non, j'ai encore besoin de cet œuvre.“ „*I still need this work,*“ and I knew that the theme perhaps or the individual forms of the works were important for him and that he needed them later as an artistic basis for an oil painting, a tapestry etc.

I think I can say that only for my empathy he would not have worked with me for so long.

In every area of our partnership this empathy was always important.

18

THE WOODEN PANEL

A peculiar situation arose one afternoon in the middle of the studio. A provisionally placed table, a plywood panel on two wicker chairs, on top of which lay a mountain of notes, drawings and other works, gave the appearance of absolute clutter.

He actually worked using this table.

I said to him: „Mais Monsieur, vous ne pouvez plus travailler a ce table.“ *„But Monsieur, you cannot work at this table.“* „Oui, c’est malheureux, mais je n’ai personne qui m’aide à nettoyer ce table.“ *„Yes, it is unfortunate, but I don’t have anyone to help me clear the table.“*

I answered: „Monsieur, je peux vous aider.“ *„Monsieur, I’ll help you.“*

„Vous voulez vraiment faire cela?“ *„Do you really want to?“* A pleased smile spread across his face. *„Let’s start right now,“* I answered.

Using my fingertips, I carefully took each sheet, each small scrap, and gave him each one to examine closely.

When the panel was finally clear, I happily took a cloth to clean the table top.

Le Corbusier stood there and looked at me. His impish, chortling smile will forever remain in my memory, as will his words: „Madame, ce n’est pas tous. Enlevons cette plaque.“ *„Madame, that’s not all. Madame, let’s take this panel away.“* And surprise: it was exactly the same situation.

One day, when his table was overcrowded with works, he simply placed a new wooden panel on top and began the chaos anew.

These moments during our partnership were marked by a lovely and heartfelt harmony.

19

PROBLEMS WITH THE SWISS

During the years of planning permission debate in the Zurich city council, supporting voices along with very negative ones grew louder in the press.

Hoping that Le Corbusier would not learn of this, I told him nothing.

So when he said: „Madame, n'est-ce pas, vous avez des problèmes avec vos Suisses?“ *„Madame, is it true that you are having problems with your Swiss?“* I answered clearly and firmly: „Non Monsieur je n'ai pas de problèmes; tous va bien, les problèmes sont là pour les résoudre.“ *„No, Monsieur, I don't have any problems, all is well. Problems are there to be solved.“*



20

YOU ARE RIGHT

As I approached him in his small, private room (226 x 226 cm) in the rue de Sèvres studio, Le Corbusier's face looked unfamiliarly strained. Normally, the small table was covered with lots of files for our work. On this day, it was covered with cuttings of newspaper reports, articles from the Zurich press.

I was startled and knew at once that it was the negative reports Le Corbusier had been given, and from one of his so-called best Swiss friends, Professor Alfred Roth from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich). In an angry, strict tone of voice he asked me: „Vous qui dites toujours que tous va bien.“ „*You, who always say that everything is fine.*“ „Qu'est-ce que vous dites de ça?“ „*What have you got to say about this?*“ and he pointed to a mountain of newspaper clippings about the long battle for planning permission in the city council.

In this very delicate situation, I don't know how I managed to have the needed reply ready. In an energetic, definitive voice I answered: „*Monsieur, I found it completely unnecessary to inform you about my difficulties. The most important thing is that we both know what we want.*“

Relieved and with a gleam in his eye, he replied: „*Yes, you are right, we will show the Swiss.*“

In this awkward situation, I prevented the entire project from being declared a failure thanks to my clear-cut answer. And then I would have, disappointedly: „*Je ne ferai pas cette maison!*“ „*I won't complete the house.*“ And the worst thing about it is that I would never have recovered.

21

THE DIAMOND RING

I needed the approval of the city council for my idea to build a museum with Le Corbusier at Zürichhorn. In 1960, all seven councillors were pleasant, dedicated political personalities and I visited the seven gentlemen individually in the city hall.

Time was pressing as Le Corbusier's health was not very good. Quite deliberately, I had to use my youthful energy, including my female charm and diplomatic talents, to win over the men and get them interested in and excited about the project.

In the 1960s, we Swiss women did not have the right to vote and the administrative bodies were filled with men. It was difficult with the financial director and I had to play an unpleasant role. Given a project of this size, a financial director expected an elegant, wealthy-looking lady draped with jewellery. Firstly, I was still young, but above all I did not possess jewels or elegant clothes. I never wanted them. To play the desired part I borrowed a huge diamond ring and a gold bracelet from my girlfriend, who loved expensive jewellery. The financial director gazed wide-eyed at „my“ diamond ring.

I was ashamed of myself at this instant but I now had the seventh councillor on my side as a supporter.

22

MARATHON AGAINST TIME

The story got complicated when the construction permit for the 2,425-square-metre building came up for discussion in the city council. After the publication of some critical newspaper stories, negative voices grew loud. I was also well aware that Le Corbusier was no longer the youngest, so a marathon against time began for me.

I was driven by an inner power. I met three quarters of the councilmen in the city hall, some 75 in all, one after the other, over two or three months, every Wednesday.

Back then there were no women in politics and when it comes to the equality of women in Switzerland one can read about how my joyous, young-spirited self gave a short guest performance in politics in *Visionen und Taten – Aus dem Leben von Heidi Weber (Heidi Weber legt eine Bombe)*, „Visions and Deeds – From the Life of Heidi Weber (Heidi Weber plants a Bomb)“.

23

BAD MOOD

When I visited Le Corbusier in May 1963 at rue de Sèvres as usual, his secretary received me with a worried face: „Madame, you have arrived on a most unfavourable day. Monsieur Le Corbusier is in a very bad mood.“ I knew that something awful in connection with the museum project must have happened. He was always in good cheer in previous years and constantly looked forward to my visit.



24

SEAT QUARTET

When I first met Le Corbusier at Cap Martin in 1958, I rhapsodized about his furniture. These models, designed in 1928, were produced only as prototypes. No furniture maker was interested at the time in manufacturing them as a series.

In 1958, I was fully convinced that even after the passage of 30 years they had lost nothing of their modernity. I reiterated my conviction to Le Corbusier. The doubt in his face quickly gave way to delight: „Vous trouvez vraiment cela? Les gens disent que cela ne vaut rien, c'est du vieux jeux.“ „Is that what you really think? People say that they are worthless and old fashioned.“ My response: „Monsieur, je suis persuadé que vos quatre sièges sont jusqu'aujourd'hui les plus modernes et que les enfants vont vouloir les hériter.“ „*Monsieur, I am convinced that to your four pieces continue to remain the most modern and one day children will want to inherit them.*“

Le Corbusier appeared to be very happy with my appreciation of his furniture and immediately confided his trust in me with the words: „Alors, je vous donne les plans et vous pouvez les fabriquer.“ „*Well, I'm giving you the plans and you can produce them.*“

25

SEATING FROM ZURICH

When I was back in Zurich and had received the designs from him, I blissfully began to look for a suitable production space. To my great joy, I found a beautiful vacant space near my studio gallery „mezzanine“ that was part of a magnificent Middle-Ages building. As it happened, the previous tenant was the Salvation Army and I took that to be a good omen as certainly a lot of good had emerged from these rooms. I enjoyed dealing with the specifications for the first-class production of his four chairs and for the craftsmen, too.

I had to buy a sewing machine for leatherwork and a second one for the down clusters of the cotton cushions. I also needed a plucking machine for the horsehair (which was delivered in the shape of a braid) to tease it apart, and a special sewing machine for the leather crafting of the cushions for the cubical men’s armchair as well as the wide ladies’ armchair. For these two models, a craftswoman sewed clusters that were subsequently sewn by upholsterers on the prepared horse hair core.

I had to source foal hide from different suppliers for the chaises-longues. It was an enormous effort and very difficult to find fine hides of the look and quality needed. Calf skin for the „armchair with adjustable back“ — it was complicated to find first-class quality when it came to these hides.

Three months later, during his first visit to Zurich, I was proudly able to present to Le Corbusier my series adaptation of his four chairs from my first production of 25 items. He was impressed and very satisfied with my implementation of his designs.

For nine years, from 1958 to 1967, I produced the pieces in my small factory with great success and got orders from fans of his furniture around the world. But my small operation was not able to meet the growing demand and in 1964 I decided to assign my licence rights by sub-licensing the Italian firm Cassina in Meda to produce larger quantities. First, for Italy only. A year later, I extended the contracts for Europe and 12 months later for the United States. Cassina, is a big company, which meanwhile has earned hundreds of millions with the production and sale of Le Corbusier furniture, In the past they did not even mention my name, despite the fact that they got the licences and rights from me and that they signed several contracts with me.

The advertising displayed internationally claims: Cassina signed the contract for the worldwide rights during the lifetime of Le Corbusier...

The owners of Cassina had never seen nor spoken with Le Corbusier. He also never wanted to meet them personally. He left all the contract negotiations and quality checking of the production completely to me. It amazes me that in the past a company as large as Cassina would find it necessary to try to conceal the true background of this story in this way from the furniture and design world.

26

MY FIRST EXHIBITION

I organized my first exhibition in 1958 in my „mezzanin“ studio gallery: „Le Corbusier furniture displayed in the colours of his Salubra wallpaper.“

I had developed by own exhibition concept: 15 small, original pencil drawings presented in wooden box frames that he had designed. All the other surfaces were painted in his stark colours (Le Corbusier colour fan deck) blue, orange, dark grey and the monochrome walls were free of pictures.

I had large-format posters printed for this first exhibition and displayed throughout Switzerland.

My efforts (financial, as well) astonished Le Corbusier; and he thanked me most eloquently.



27

WOMEN IN A DRAWER

During our intensive partnership, Le Corbusier made the following confidential statement to me:

„Vous savez, Madame Weber, le problème de femme je l'ai classifié dans un tiroir quand j'avais 70 ans, parce que j'aimerais une jolie belle femme et ça serait injuste de ma part parce que je n'ai plus rien à offrir.“

„Do you know, Madame Weber, I put the problem with women in a drawer when I was 70, because I would have loved to have had a beautiful woman but that would have been unjust on my part as I don't have anything more to offer.“

His words confirmed that Le Corbusier was not just a great artist and architect but also a man of extraordinary stature.



28

LOVE AT SECOND SIGHT

Le Corbusier was annoyed that after I had organized several exhibitions of his pictures in my „mezzanine“ studio gallery I had never spoken to him about an exhibition of his sculptures.

For my part, it was only possible to exhibit and sell works when I was completely convinced by them.

I needed a certain amount of time with the sculptures as I could not find any way of „access“ them in the first two years.

One day, he said to me: „Madame Weber, Joseph Savina le sculpteur qui réalise avec moi des sculptures a des difficultés financières parce qu' il ne peut pas les vendre.“ *„Madame Weber, Joseph Savina, the sculptor I work with is in financial difficulty because he is unable to sell any of them.“*

He wanted me to focus intensively on selling them.

From one day to the next, the beauty and the complexity of his sculpture opened up to me and this was an extremely exhilarating experience.

I immediately organized an exhibition exclusively of his sculptures, which was very gratifying for me, and it also meant I could help his friend Joseph Savina. So I dedicated myself completely to the sales.

As an interior designer, I once furnished and converted two houses of two art-loving Zurich industrialists. I was able to interest the men in the sculptures and thanks to my conviction get each of them to buy a piece.

I was happy to transfer a significant sum of money to Le Corbusier and he was able to pay Joseph Savina for the first time. I had to pay him in advance for all the sculpture that I needed for the major Sculptures Le Corbusier-Savina exhibition.

Because there were only two collectors, I am now the happy owner of some of his most astonishing wood sculptures.

29

DIFFICULT FORMATS

As was the case with Savina's sculptures, Le Corbusier wanted me to focus increasingly on the production and sales of his tapestries. The problem was that their themes were no longer in demand. Therefore, he requested that I should do something to help the weaving mills so that they could survive. Le Corbusier felt that their salvation was to be found in the modern themes of his designs so my job was to get orders for the weavers.

I loved, and still love, Le Corbusier's creative wool murals, but from the start it was obvious that it would be very difficult to display and sell these large format hangings.

Le Corbusier designed no fewer than 27, which meant that he had created the patterns for the weavers in the form of a collage on paper in a 1:1 format.

After more than 55 years, it still gives me great satisfaction that I am able to please people around the world with exhibitions of my collection of Corbusier wall hangings.

At that time, I was also the only collector of the tapestries.

Le Corbusier called them tapestries for modern nomads, of whom I am one: „murales nomades“.

30

COME MORE OFTEN

I was always impressed by his orderliness during our meetings.

This wasn't just a word; he lived it.

His workday was strictly planned.

In the middle of our work, exactly at 5 pm: „Madame Weber, vous m'en voulez pas, je vous commande un taxi, j'ai encore autre chose à faire.“ *„Madame, don't be upset, I'm going to order you a taxi as I have something else to do.“*

With „something else“, he undoubtedly meant writing, reading, painting. This enormous discipline impressed me deeply and was the secret of his gigantic output, which was also reflected in his painting.

He always accompanied me to the taxi, opened the door for me and said goodbye with the friendly words: „Mme Weber, venez plus souvent à Paris, ça me ferait plaisir.“ *„Madame, you should come more often to Paris; that would please me.“* I answered with a smile: *„Monsieur, that would be a mistake I think.“*

Le Corbusier smiled: „Oui, peut-être vous avez raison.“

„Yes, you might be right.“

I consciously tried to maintain a 14-day rhythm to my visits. This was of great importance for our work relationship.

31

CLUELESS VISITORS

In the aftermath of many exhibitions of Le Corbusier's works in my „mezzanin“ studio gallery, visitors would often ask me: „What are all the things Le Corbusier has done?“

When I related this recurring question on the part of my gallery visitors, Le Corbusier thought for a brief moment, walked with his slow, heavy steps to his small desk and, very concentratedly, wrote with a goose quill: „Il n'y a pas de sculptures seul, de peintre seul, d'architect seul, l'évènement plastique s'accomplit dans une forme et une au service de la poésie.“ „There are not just sculptors; not just painters, not just architects. The metaphoric event takes place only in one form only that is in the service of poetry.“

I proudly cherish this expressive, handwritten original page.

Il n'y a pas de sculpteurs seuls,
de peintres seuls
d'architectes seuls
l'évènement plastique
dans une "FORME UNE" s'accomplit
au service
de la poésie.

32

MONSIEUR MOURLOT

During my first visit to Paris, I asked Le Corbusier: „Monsieur, il y a des jeunes architectes qui aimeraient acquérir une lithographie de vous. Où est-ce que je peux les trouver?“ „*Monsieur, young architects who would love to have one of your lithographs ask me constantly where can I find one?*“

Le Corbusier: „Il y’a des années que j’en ai faites quelques-unes mais ils ne se sont jamais vendues.“ „*I made a few some years ago, but they didn’t sell.*“

„Monsieur, si on ne les expose pas ils ne se vendent pas.“ „*If one does not exhibit them, they cannot be sold.*“

Le Corbusier listened with interest. After a short pause, he stood up, walked with his long, heavy steps to his small office and picked up the phone.

I eavesdropped on his conversation.

„C’est vous Fernand, ici est Corbu.“ „*Is that you, Fernand? This is Corbu.*“

Le Corbusier went on: „Mourlot j’ai ici une jeune fille de la Suisse, elle veut vous faire travailler.“ „*Mourlot, there’s a young woman from Switzerland here, who wants you to do some work.*“

Le Corbusier: „Je veux vous la présenter, je vous invite demain pour le dîner chez le chinois à l’angle du Restaurant La Coupole.“ „*I will introduce you to him tomorrow so I’m inviting you to lunch at the Chinese on the corner, Restaurant Coupole.*“

In the presence of Mourlot, Le Corbusier praised me as a reputable and energetic person and said he should work with me in the future.

Before we had drunk the coffee, I said to Fernand Mourlot: „*May I come to your printing shop now?*“ Le Corbusier and Mourlot were rather taken aback I took up the offer without further ado. (They probably had a relaxing afternoon in mind.)

Mourlot and I developed an excellent working relationship and produced several thousand sheets featuring some one hundred different subjects by Le Corbusier.

He was very happy because I became a very good customer and, as he later told me, I was one of the few who paid immediately.

My basement was continually filling with large boxes marked with the sender: Imprimerie Mourlot Paris.

I took the risk that the original lithographs would not sell, and I only sold them by means of a lot of work, exhibitions and catalogues.

Le Corbusier never gave any thought, not even during this venture, to how I would manage all this alone.

33

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS

When I went to see Le Corbusier two days before Christmas in 1960, my mother gave me a seasonal gift package for him. It was wrapped in simple Christmas paper, sealed with a wide ribbon and decorated with a fir twig.

My mother was a simple country woman. Worried about Le Corbusier, she knitted warm socks for him, „seeing that he doesn't have a wife to take care of him.“

I couldn't turn down my mother's wish to give the present to Le Corbusier as it was so well meant. So I brought him the gift.

Happily, he opened the little packet. He was surprised: „Je suis un jeune homme, je porte des chaussettes fines, mais c'est quand-même gentil d'elle.“ „I am a young man, I wear fine socks, but that is very sweet of your mother.“ Visibly moved, he added: „Je vais lui remercier.“ „I shall thank her personally.“

Fais le P. finies 1960

A la gentille maman de Heidi Weber.

Chère madame

J'ai été très touché de recevoir le si ~~de~~ beau cadeau que vous m'avez fait de vos propres mains : un tricot impeccable et élégant, une laine si douce que je n'ai pu résister à mille autres pareilles.

Pour fêter l'événement, la chaudière de chauffage central de mon immeuble, a eu la délicatesse de sauter ! Si bien que nous voilà, depuis dix jours, sans calories et le nez rouge. Mais mes pieds, désormais, se sentent de la mésaventure. Avec de telles chaussettes je pourrai partir au pôle nord, cet été !

Merci encore chère madame ; je vous salue la meilleure tante, comme d'habitude, vous avez la meilleure fille !

V. Le Corbusier

To the dear mother of Heidi Weber

Dear Madame

I was greatly moved to get such a lovely present that you made with your own hands for me. It is a perfect and elegant piece of knitting that cannot be compared to any other.

To celebrate the event, the central heating boiler in my building had the graciousness to explode, and so thoroughly that for ten days we have had red noses... but warm feet... With such socks I could travel to the North Pole in summer. Once more, thank you, dear Madame. I wish you the best of health. You already have the best daughter!

Le Corbusier

Le Corbusier in a stocking note to me:

Treasured Madame and friend, 9/2/61

here is a short word to your mother (I don't have her address). I will pick out a drawing as a present for her (soon).

In friendship

L-C

34

THE TRUE FACES

Again and again, he asked me: „N'est-ce pas, Madame Weber, s'il m'arrive quelque chose vous continuez votre travail de faire connaître mon œuvre picturale dans le monde?“ *„Madame Weber, if something should happen to me, you would continue your work of promoting my painting to the world, right?“*

With a determined voice, I answered: „Bien sur, Monsieur,“ *„most certainly, Monsieur.“*

After he had confided this worry at different times, I began to think about my promise in this regard. (Le Corbusier was, after all, over 70).

When he expressed this wish, I answered: *„Monsieur, on several occasions you have requested that I promote your painting should something happen to you. I think, perhaps, that we should record this wish in writing. Because, one day when you are no longer there, someone will definitely challenge this right.“* He looked at me thoughtfully and asked: „Qui va vous contester ce droit?“ *„Who would question this right?“*

„Monsieur, one will see the true faces of people when you are not present anymore.“

After a short silence, Le Corbusier: „Oui, peut-être vous avez raison, faites moi une proposition.“ *„Yes, perhaps you are right, make me a proposal.“*

A young, competent lawyer in Paris drew up a short, clear and simple contract. Le Corbusier signed it without hesitating.

This contract saved me later from losing my entire possessions, including the museum.

35

HOW THE GRANDE NATION DINES

1. Pastis: a French apéritif, 40 – 45% alcohol
2. Appetizer: a large plate of meat with salami, mozzarella etc. and a good bottle of white wine
3. Main course: steak, potato gratin with a full-bodied French red wine
4. One cognac
5. Caramel-soufflé
6. Coffee

Le Corbusier loved the lavish French grand dîner. This huge meal was, considering his age, too heavy and too rich. I was worried about his health. Cautiously, I tried to tell him that this kind of grand dîner was very unhealthy. Le Corbusier was not very happy with my remark.

His face was stony: „Vous avec votre végétarisme, vous venez toujours toute affamée chez moi.“ *„You and your vegetarianism and you always turn up to me starving.“* (I am 90 percent vegetarian). He devoured this kind of large meal twice a day. Without sport, without exercise, no one can digest that kind of heavy fare.

It was difficult and delicate for me to interfere in his private life. One day, an idea came spontaneously about how I could raise this controversial food issue.

On the occasion of such a dîner, I casually remarked: *„Monsieur, I read somewhere in a newspaper article that it is very unhealthy to eat too much at night before going to bed.“*

His expression revealed that he was not very eager. I continued to speak, as if I had said nothing important.

About two months later and during such a meal, Le Corbusier told me proudly: „Vous savez, Madame Weber, j'ai décidé, je ne mange plus le soir.“ *„Do you know, Madame Weber, that I have decided to eat nothing more at night.“*

I was very happy and relieved that my message had finally reached him.

However, I regret that this insight came too late.

Le Corbusier died far too soon at 78.

He had the disposition to have lived as did his mother to be more than 100. She had eaten according to the principle, „*above all, little and simple.*“

And since my 20th birthday, that has also been my tried and tested principle.

36

NO WOMAN WITHIN

During our last working meal in Paris before his departure for the holidays, Le Corbusier spoke again about the creation of the foundation and the related problems. *„Madame Weber, if something were to happen to me, would you continue to promote my painting throughout the world?“* My answer was always the same: *„But certainly, Monsieur.“*

After he had discussed the planning of a foundation many times with me, I began to have some serious thoughts. During a meal at home with him, I spoke about my ideas in relation to his creation of a foundation: *„Monsieur a plusieurs reprises vous m’avez parlées que vous allez créer une fondation pour héberger toute vos biens. Je me suis fait des idées et je pense qu’il serait peut-être indiqué que je sois membre de cette fondation pour pouvoir défendre une partie de votre œuvre importante, l’œuvre picturale.“*

„Monsieur, on many occasions you have told me that you are working on the creation of a foundation and that you will place your entire estate in the foundation. I have thought about that and I feel I can only protect the interests of your paintings if I am a member of the foundation.“

His unequivocal, awful answer: *„Non, pas de femme là dedans!“* *„No, there will be no woman within it.“* The words shocked me completely.

My somewhat harsh answer was filled with anger: *„Monsieur, vous êtes aussi seulement un homme.“* *„Monsieur, you are also only a man.“*

Le Corbusier was shocked with my words; he fell silent and there was a moment of stillness.

My remark remained unanswered. It did not escape me that he felt uncomfortable.

In this kind of awkward situation, he retreated into himself. Or, as he liked to say: *„il faut ruminer les choses“* *„to mull over things. It takes time...“*

He went on holidays on 1 August to Cap Martin, and I am still convinced today that he found the spare time to *„ruminer“* in his hermit’s hut, the Cabanon.

Unfortunately, he was unable to tell me his conclusions personally. He left our world on 25 August 1965 while swimming in his beloved sea at Cap Martin and everything was written in the clouds.

He told one person who visited him at Cap Martin that he was not very happy with the constitution of the intended foundation board and the foundation articles and that he would study and change everything anew after his return on 1 September. I am convinced that after his holidays he would have summoned me to Paris and that he would have corrected his wrong decision not to have a woman on the board of the foundation. He couldn't have anticipated – or had he anticipated? – that his legacy would be administered one day by French officials lacking in culture and understanding, totally without interest and love for his work.

Following the building of the museum, he was unable to initiate all his important plans with me, which was to my great spiritual and financial detriment.

37

FINALLY THE GREEN LIGHT

I experienced an odd feeling of unease at the end of July in 1965 while I was having serious problems with the foreman and the workmen on the building site. I needed to call Le Corbusier urgently, but he wanted to have everything in writing and didn't want to be disturbed on the phone. I knew that he would travel to Cap Martin on 1 August for the holidays. It was urgent so I had to bother him with my phone call.

When he answered, I said: „Monsieur j'ai plusieurs problèmes sur le chantier à régler. Je dois urgentement venir vous voir avec les divers chefs des entreprises de construction.“ *„Monsieur, I have lots of problems on the building site. The managers of the various construction companies and I need to meet you.“* „Heidi Weber, moi je fiche le gant en vacances, venez me voir après mon retour.“

„Heidi Weber, I'm going on holidays, visit me when I return.“ I was deeply shocked and resorted to a white lie: „Monsieur, je dois vous voir avant votre départ, parce-que la maison de métal n'a pas de travail.“ *„Monsieur, I need to see you urgently before your trip because the steel construction company hasn't got any work.“*

Le Corbusier: „Comment ça se fait, je croyais que les Suisses ont du travail.“ *„How could that be? I thought the Swiss had work.“*

„Bon, d'accord, pour vous faire plaisir, alors venez encore demain.“ *„Fine, to suit you, be here in my rue de Sèvres studio tomorrow at 11 am.“*

Like a general, I commanded all the managers of the construction firms to join me the next morning at 7.30 am on the first plane to Paris to meet Le Corbusier.

There were about 70 important details that had not been completed and which had not been signed off by him. I had made a list of the 70 and Le Corbusier was to check the details and correct them. It was a very long day, working through detail by detail. Le Corbusier went patiently through them and made, where necessary, corrections and undersigned all the plans, to my great good fortune, as would later transpire.

Afterwards, we went for supper to Mme Brunier's famous restaurant.

In parting, he said the following lovely words to me: „Maintenant vous avez le feu vert, maintenant vous pouvez y aller.“

„You have the green light now. You can get going.“

EPILOG

On 1 August 1965, Le Corbusier closed his studio in Paris and travelled to his Cabanon (cabin) at Cap Martin.

On 25 August, during his daily swim in Roquebrune Bay at Cap Martin, he left us for ever.

„We come from the sea and return to the sea.“ — Le Corbusier



