

## Schröderhuis (Netherlands)

No 965

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Rietveld Schröderhuis (Rietveld Schröder House)
<i>Location</i>	Utrecht
<i>State Party</i>	The Netherlands
<i>Date</i>	16 June 1999

### Justification by State Party

The Rietveld Schröder House "represents a masterpiece of human creative genius" owing to its purity of idea and concept, as well as its material, intellectual, and conceptual influence on 20th century architecture and its place in the history of civilization of this century. This also makes it "an outstanding example of a type of building which illustrates a significant stage in human history." **Criteria i and iv**

The Rietveld Schröder House is considered to be a manifesto of the *De Stijl* movement. Therefore it can "directly be associated with ideas and with artistic works of outstanding universal significance," considering the influence that the *De Stijl* movement had and still has on 20th century architecture and artistic life. **Criterion vi**

[Note This is a slightly abridged and modified version of the text in the nomination dossier.]

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

### History and Description

#### History

The Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht was commissioned by Mrs Truus Schröder-Schröder (1889–1985), designed by the architect Gerrit Thomas Rietveld (1888–1965) and built in 1924. Mrs Schröder lived in the house for some 60 years, first with her children, then in the company of Rietveld, and finally alone. During this long period some changes were made in the interior, resulting partly from the needs of the inhabitants, partly from the experimental character of the building itself. In the 1970s and 1980s, the building

underwent restoration, re-establishing its initial form in the 1920s. The building is now a museum.

The Rietveld Schröder House can be seen as the manifesto of the *De Stijl*, an influential group of artists and architects who took their name from a periodical founded in 1917 by Theo van Doesburg (C E M Kupper, 1883–1931). His widow published the last issue in 1932. The periodical was devoted to modern Neo-Plasticism, and it became the most influential voice for the ideals of modern art and architecture in the Netherlands. It invited contributions from the foremost artists of the time, including Hans Arp, Vilmos Huszar, and Piet Mondrian (Mondriaan), and architects C van Eesteren, J J P Oud, and Gerrit Rietveld. Some of the roots of *De Stijl* can be found in Frank Lloyd Wright's influence on architecture in the Netherlands in the early 1900s. The *De Stijl* group stressed "total abstraction" with respect to what was called "Neo-Plasticism."

After the destruction wrought in World War I, the members of the group sought for the universal, as the individual was losing its significance. Abstraction, precision, geometry, striving towards artistic purity and austerity, studying the laws of nature to arrive at what really is, determined the thoughts and creations of *De Stijl*. The members of the group first expressed their ideas mainly in paintings, then in furniture and architecture; Rietveld's furniture has been referred to as "*De Stijl* sculptures." The Schröder House was the first declaration of these ideas in a large scale, thus becoming the architectural manifestation of the group. The range of ideas generated by the group reached Germany, influencing the establishment of the *Bauhaus* in Weimar in 1919.

The Schröder House (Prins Hendriklaan 50a) was located on the edge of the city of Utrecht close to the countryside, at the end of a 19th century row of houses. It was built against the wall of the adjacent brick house. The area beyond the house remained undeveloped, because it contained 19th century Dutch defence lines, which were still in use at the time. The design and building of the house took place simultaneously. The few existing drawings and the scale model show that the design evolved from a fairly close block to an open transparent composition of evenly matched spaces composed of independent planes. Much of the design was determined on the construction site. This was the case also of the colours, particularly the shades of grey, which were repainted several times to achieve the desired quality and tonalities. The building was conceived as a manifesto from the beginning; Mrs Schröder and Rietveld commissioned a full photographic documentation of the architecture. Their intention was to make sure the new approach to architecture and living were presented to reflect their intended ideas.

The house developed along with its use. Anything that did not suffice or no longer suited was changed, particularly regarding pieces of furniture but also some materials in the interior. After the children left home, there were more radical changes: for example, in 1936 the kitchen was moved from the ground floor close to Mrs Schröder's bedroom upstairs and the ground floor was often rented. There were many visitors from the beginning. Around 1935, in order to get some privacy, Mrs Schröder asked Rietveld to design a small room to be built on the roof; this was later removed. In the early years, until 1932, Rietveld kept a studio in the house; from 1958, after his wife died, he came to live there until his death. In 1972, Mrs Schröder established the Rietveld

Schröder House Foundation, which later bought the house, and raised funds for its restoration. The exterior was restored in 1974, and the interior in the 1980s after her death.

#### *Description*

Gerrit Rietveld was first introduced to carpentry and furniture design in his father's workshop. In 1919, he came to know *De Stijl* and made attempts to express the ideas of the group in his furniture. He made the "Red-Blue Chair" first in an unpainted version in 1919, and in colour in 1923–24. In 1923 he created the famous "Berlin Chair." Reflecting the ideals of the group, Rietveld was no longer trying to build a typologically determined unity but rather a balanced whole composed of heterogeneous parts. The Berlin Chair could be considered a piece of three-dimensional "architecture." From this context was born the Schröder House, which came to express the ideals of the *De Stijl* group on a larger scale, becoming the manifesto and the climax of the movement. Here the concept of space is no longer elaborated as defined within a cube. As with his early chairs, Rietveld gave a new spatial meaning to the straight lines and rectangular planes of the various architectural and structural elements, slabs, posts, and beams, which were composed in a balanced ensemble. At the same time, each element was given autonomy while emphasizing the fluidity and continuity of space. Although the building has obvious artistic value, Rietveld gave much attention to functionality. The house was also experimental, and several elements were changed during the lifetime of Rietveld.

The Schröder House measures about 7m x 9m, and it has two floors, developing around a spiral staircase in the centre. The main structure consists of reinforced concrete slabs and steel profiles. Whilst the northern wall was built against the adjacent building, the house is open in the three other directions, also by means of balconies. It is painted in basic colours, red, blue, yellow, black, and white, as well as shades of grey (often referred to Mondrian's paintings). Unlike a traditional Dutch house, where rooms are accessible through corridors, this house was conceived by Rietveld in a flexible manner. There is no hierarchical arrangement of rooms in the floor plan. The upper floor is one open space around the staircase. It can be divided into three bedrooms and a sitting room by sliding panels. The partially fitted furniture is part of the three-dimensional composition of the interior, executed in the same colours as the exterior. On the ground floor Rietveld was forced to meet Dutch regulations in order to acquire a building permit. There five rooms are grouped around a small hall. The interrelation of the rooms can be sensed by the fanlights above the doors and by the recessed and staggered inner walls.

#### **Management and Protection**

##### *Legal status*

Originally private property, the building was acquired by the Rietveld Schröder House Foundation in 1970. Subsequently, in 1987, it was conveyed to the Central Museum of Utrecht.

The Rietveld Schröder House was listed in 1976 and is currently protected under the 1988 National Monuments Act. The area where the property is located is also under protection. The zoning plan of the area is under revision and the aim is to renovate the nearby Waterlinieweg so as to be less dominant.

##### *Management*

The responsibility of the management of the property is shared by the Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg, the Bureau Monumenten of Utrecht, and the Central Museum of Utrecht.

The Central Museum of Utrecht has an Activity Plan for the property, covering visitor management, surveys, and promotional campaigns. The reception of visitors is arranged in the adjacent building at Prins Hendriklaan, providing all necessary information and the presentation of the property, as well as being equipped for lectures.

#### **Conservation and Authenticity**

##### *Conservation history*

During the construction, Rietveld experimented with different techniques of rendering and different ways of achieving the desired combinations of colours, especially the shades of grey. At the beginning these were conceived as warm tonalities, but Rietveld himself later altered them slightly towards colder shades. The house also changed its use over time. As a result, Mrs Schröder and Rietveld together made modifications in the arrangement of the interiors and in the choice of furniture.

During World War II a lorry carrying ammunition exploded on the ring road not far from the house. All the windows were shattered and cracks appeared in the masonry of the south wall. The windows were repaired, but with some differences compared to the originals. The surroundings were also subject to changes, and a garage designed by Rietveld was added at some distance from the house. In 1963 the nearby ring road was raised to pass over the Prins Hendriklaan. As a result it was decided to conceal the house behind trees and bushes.

In 1973 a former collaborator of Rietveld, the architect Bertus Mulder, was commissioned by the Foundation to survey the condition of the building. As a result the exterior was restored in 1974 under his direction. This involved the repair of structural cracks, renovation of external renderings, and replacement of rotten wooden windows and doors, the steel skylight, and the roofing material. The exterior was repainted and the rusting steel structures of the balconies were cleaned and preserved. The garden was laid out and the fence rebuilt in 1983. The garden plan was by Mrs Schröder herself, who preferred plants that grow wild in the surrounding area.

On the occasion of this work, in 1974, the board of the Foundation discussed the fundamental principles of the restoration. Mrs Schröder was a member of the board and Bertus Mulder was also involved. The House was conceived as an expression of a new type of architecture and a new way of living and could be considered in the nature of a manifesto. It was believed that this historic significance had to be experienced in as much of its true meaning as possible. The decision was thus taken to restore the house as much as possible to its original state. The colour scheme was therefore referred to the original composition, consisting of white, black, red, yellow, and blue, and five shades of grey with the original contrasts, without the later tendency towards blue. Enough was known about Rietveld's use of these colours. The most delicate part was mixing the grey

tones; the painter who had worked with Rietveld mixed the greys on the spot just as Rietveld himself had had to do.

After the death of Mrs Schröder it was decided to restore the interior of the building between December 1985 and March 1987. This was done following the earlier decision by the board of the Foundation regarding the objectives of the restoration. Again it was necessary to remove the plaster rendering, especially in the upper floor, and to redo and repaint the surfaces as originally conceived by Rietveld in the 1920s. All the original furniture was restored and positioned as in the 1920s. Missing objects were remade on the basis of records and existing evidence. As a result of the works, the house is now in excellent condition and under regular care; the Central Museum of Utrecht and Bertus Mulder supervise the maintenance.

#### *Authenticity*

The Rietveld Schröder House was lived in as a house for 60 years and some changes were made according to the needs of its evolving use. Now it is a museum and it has been restored back to its original condition in the 1920s. The outstanding universal significance of this building can be seen in its being a realization of design concepts and ideas and a manifesto of the *De Stijl* movement. It is as such that this work of Rietveld has been recognized internationally, and that is why it has influenced the Modern Movement in 20th century architecture. The restoration of the interiors to their 1920s aspect is therefore justified in this case.

The building has maintained the authenticity of its design concept and its structure. The restorations of the 1970s and 1980s were done with great care, making every effort to preserve what was possible. Unfortunately, owing to the poor condition of some materials, it was necessary to replace the renderings as well as various fittings. The painting will need to be repeated every five years in the future as part of routine maintenance, based on the original colour scheme and the same workmanship as it was originally. Although there have been some changes in the context, including the new ring road built in the 1960s, the location of the building is still the same in relation to the row of town houses and the small park that formed its original setting.

In its essence, the Rietveld Schröder House satisfies the test of authenticity in relation to all required parameters.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Rietveld Schröder House in January 2000.

##### *Qualities*

The quality of the Schröder House lies in its having produced a synthesis of the design concepts in modern architecture at a certain moment in time. In this regard, it can be considered not only a manifesto of the *De Stijl* movement but also an icon of the Modern Movement in architecture. Part of the quality of the house is the flexibility of its spatial arrangement, which allows gradual changes over time in accordance with changes in functions. At the same time the building has also many artistic merits, and its visual image has strongly influenced building design in the second half of the 20th century. The interiors and furniture are an integral

part of its design and quality and should be given due recognition.

#### *Comparative analysis*

The Rietveld Schröder House is in many ways unique. It is the only building of its type in Rietveld's output, and it also differs from other significant buildings of the early modern movement, such as the Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier or the Villa Tugendhat by Mies van der Rohe.

The difference lies in particular in the treatment of architectural space and in the conception of the functions of the building. Many contemporary architects, including Le Corbusier, were deeply influenced by the Schröder House and this influence has endured up to the present. In fact its impact lies more in having provided incentives and ideas for the development of modern architecture than in producing a type of building. At that time its design was an entirely free and new approach to the relationship of living and architectural form. That is where the building has become an icon of the Modern Movement in architecture.

#### **Brief description**

The Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht was commissioned by Mrs Truus Schröder-Schräder, designed by the architect Gerrit Thomas Rietveld, and built in 1924. This small one-family house, with its interior, the flexible spatial arrangement, and the visual and formal qualities, was a manifesto of the ideals of the *De Stijl* group of artists and architects in the Netherlands in the 1920s, and has since been considered one of the icons of the Modern Movement in architecture.

#### **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and vi*:

*Criterion i* The Rietveld Schröder House in Utrecht is an icon of the Modern Movement in architecture, and an outstanding expression of human creative genius in its purity of ideas and concepts as developed by the *De Stijl* movement.

*Criterion ii* With its radical approach to design and the use of space, the Rietveld Schröderhuis occupies a seminal position in the development of architecture in the modern age.

*Criterion vi* The Rietveld Schröderhuis is a manifesto of the ideas and concepts of the *De Stijl*, one of the most influential movements in the Modern Movement in art and architecture.

ICOMOS, September 2000