

Rencontres Jean-Louis Cohen

Legacy and Perspectives

Call for Papers

December 16, 2025

Third seminar: The history of architecture and its sources

Fourth seminar: Teaching and Transmission

Launched in June 2025, the *Rencontres Jean-Louis Cohen* aim to shed light on the legacy and perspectives opened up by the research of the architect and urban planning historian who passed away in 2023. This call for papers concerns the third and fourth meetings, which will take place on September 11 and 12, 2026, in Paris.

The *Rencontres Jean-Louis Cohen*

By the scope of his work and commitments, Jean-Louis Cohen has had a profound impact on the history of architecture and urban planning, not only in France but throughout the world. As a historian of architectural modernity, he has endeavoured to study main figures, as well as more anonymous developments, without neglecting darker moments. Contributing to the rise of world history, he emphasized the international circulations that have fuelled the globalization of architecture. His research fields have ranged from Europe and North America to colonial Morocco and the USSR, with a constant concern for analysing the connections between these different contexts. Beyond these fundamental works, Jean-Louis Cohen has also forged an approach to history and concepts, as that of "interurbanity", seeking to characterize the complex transfers he was tracking between the world's cities. A prolific author and researcher, he has never ceased teaching and renewing the forms of transmission, whether through major exhibitions organized on different continents, the prefiguration of the Cité de l'Architecture in Paris, or the series of public lectures given as guest professor at the Collège de France.

Following the sudden death of Jean-Louis Cohen in 2023, we would like to take a look back at the legacies he passed on to us, and consider the perspectives he helped to open up for architectural history. Rather than organizing a tribute, our aim is to reflect collectively on the intellectual projects to which he has contributed, and sometimes inspired, leaving therefore his mark on several generations of researchers. What is the legacy of this historian's thought and action that inspires us today? How do we seize upon it to develop new avenues of research? And how can we also depart from it? These questions are intended to be retrospective, but also to look to the present and future of architectural history.

A series of six international seminars

The *Rencontres Jean-Louis Cohen* take the form of a series of international seminars held in Paris. Each of them is devoted to a theme that sheds light on an aspect of the legacies and perspectives opened up by his work. Proposals may focus on a particular aspect of Jean-Louis Cohen's production (books, exhibitions, teaching, etc.), on more methodological issues (concepts, approaches, sources, etc.) or on the work of researchers discussed in relation to his contributions. The *Rencontres* are open not only to people who have interacted with him, but also and above all to researchers with whom his work echoes.

In 2025, two seminars were held, each devoted to a different aspect of his work: #1. Mediation and dissemination (June 12, Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine) and #2. Interurbanity (October 3, ENSA Paris-Belleville). On the first day, researchers and witnesses examined two methods of disseminating research, namely books and exhibitions, as well as Jean-Louis Cohen's involvement in several international institutions, in particular the Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine — see the [program](#) : watch and rewatch online: [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#). The second seminar, organized around the concept of “interurbanity,” provided an opportunity to reflect on the theoretical construction of this notion, on the cities that shaped the global imagination and those that drew inspiration from them, as well as on certain contexts, actors, mechanisms, and figures in this transnational urban history – consult the [program](#) (video soon available).

This call for papers concerns the third and fourth seminars, which are devoted to closely related topics: the history of architecture and education. They will take place at ENSA Paris-Malaquais on Friday, September 11, 2026, and at INHA on Saturday, September 12.

The fifth and sixth seminars will focus on two themes that Jean-Louis Cohen has explored extensively throughout his career: Paris and the Paris region, on the one hand, and the relationship between architecture and politics, on the other. They will take place at ENSA Paris-la Villette and ENSA Paris-Est in the fall of 2027.

Third seminar: The History of Architecture and Its Sources

ENSA Paris-Malaquais, September 11, 2026

The history of architecture has undergone profound changes, and Jean-Louis Cohen has been a central figure in these changes, which continue to unfold. In 2015, he emphasized how “the field of architectural history has been fundamentally transformed since the last quarter of the 20th century, both in terms of its subjects and its methods.¹” Three years later, he reflected on the renewal of audiences and uses, but also of the modes of narration in this discipline². His career as a researcher and teacher also bears witness to his reflection on his sources and narratives.

Objects

In line with the dynamics that have shaped the humanities and social sciences, architectural and urban history has been marked by a broadening of its field of research. The focus on its most heroic figures has given way to a growing interest in its secondary actors, thereby renewing the canon of the discipline. The work of Jean-Louis Cohen and many other researchers has thus revealed a much more complex landscape than a historiography focused on clearly defined movements or figures perceived as isolated. The history of what is still sometimes referred to as the “Modern Movement” has been particularly transformed by these contributions, while the study of cultural transfers on a global scale, as well as resistance to modernization, has renewed analysis. This effort to broaden the scope of architectural history is currently continuing along other lines, whether in terms of “ordinary,” often anonymous

¹ Jean-Louis Cohen, « Les nouveaux horizons de l'histoire de l'architecture », in *id. (dir.), L'architecture. Entre pratique et connaissance scientifique*, Actes de la rencontre du 16 janvier 2015 au Collège de France, Paris, Éditions du Patrimoine/CMN, 2018, p. 84.

² See Richard Klein (dir.), *À quoi sert l'histoire de l'architecture aujourd'hui ?*, Paris, Hermann, 2018, p. 48-51.

buildings, the variety of forms of power that architecture serves, or the environmental dimensions of the act of building.

Sources

Alongside the renewed questions that animate the history of architecture, whether driven by art historians or trained architects, the sources used by researchers have also changed and continue to evolve. In this regard, Jean-Louis Cohen's work was characterized by his ability to handle a wide variety and, above all, an immense quantity of sources, transcending national and disciplinary boundaries while overcoming linguistic barriers. In addition to the “classical” sources of architectural history, such as the buildings themselves, archives, publications, and graphic documents, information from oral history (thanks to existing documents or ad hoc interviews) has been added, while materials from spheres such as politics and technology have enriched the corpus studied. These sources continue to evolve, particularly as a result of the changes brought about by digital tools, which give researchers easy access to very large databases, while the files produced by architects and other actors are themselves becoming sources that now need to be studied. What is the current disciplinary challenge posed by sources and tools for writing the history of architecture?

Narratives

The evolution of objects and sources in architectural history has logically been accompanied by changes in the narratives that are proposed. Jean-Louis Cohen's work is once again symptomatic of these developments. While he himself has practiced the well-established genre of monographs, devoting works to André Lurçat, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and more recently Frank Gehry, he has also worked to compose more cross-cutting analyses, often focused on international circulations. At the same time, he has tried his hand at the genre of the grand synthesis, which culminated in 2012 in *L'architecture au futur depuis 1889*. In doing so, several questions arose, for him as for many others. How can the monograph genre be renewed, particularly in light of new questions about the notions of author and authorship? How can histories centred on national scenes be constructed while integrating the dynamics of world history? Is it still possible to compose broad panoramas at a time when the proliferation of works continues to multiply fragmentary insights? To what extent are emerging objects, questions, and methods giving rise to new narratives³ ?

Fourth seminar: Teaching and Transmission

INHA, September 12, 2026

Jean-Louis Cohen's teaching career spans fifty years and has taken him to a wide range of institutions, from schools of architecture and urban planning in France to New York University's Institute of Fine Arts and the Collège de France, where he was a visiting professor from 2014 to 2021. Throughout his career, the teaching of architectural history has undergone a transformation, and more broadly, the transmission of this knowledge beyond the academic world has changed.

Teaching methods

Traditionally taught in the form of lectures, architectural history is now being taught in a variety of ways, which Jean-Louis Cohen has explored. While lectures in amphitheatres remained at the heart of

³ See his conference « L'Histoire de l'architecture au début du IIIe millénaire : nouvelles perspectives », Paris, Cité de l'architecture et du patrimoine, 2023 : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMqS2lorkHY>

his teaching and lecturing activities, he also embraced teaching formats and co-construction of knowledge such as seminars, which played a major role in his research output, from EHESS to New York and Princeton Universities. At the same time, he was able to reach audiences beyond architecture and art history students through public lectures, such as those he gave at the Collège de France, which are available online⁴. How did pedagogy and teaching formats in architectural history evolve during the 20th century and beyond?

Doctorate

Aware of the importance of structuring research in architectural history, Jean-Louis Cohen played an active role in developing the doctorate in architecture. In France, this commitment led to the co-creation, with Monique Éleb and Yannis Tsiomis in 1991, of an inter-school postgraduate program: the Diplôme d'études approfondies (DEA) "Le projet architectural et urbain". This program proved decisive in guiding several generations of young graduates toward doctoral studies and in integrating postgraduate studies into the curricula of national architecture schools. Jean-Louis Cohen made a major contribution to the training of researchers and new teachers by supervising dozens of doctoral theses in several countries. While debates on architectural research remain lively, how can his work be situated within this evolution, and how can it shed light on the questions currently being raised about postgraduate studies in schools?

Practices

The place of architectural history teaching in the institutions where it is present has been constantly redefined, both in architecture and urban planning schools and in art history departments. Jean-Louis Cohen was keen to engage in dialogue with his academic peers, of course, but also with practicing architects and those involved in the act of building, such as politicians. However, he also regularly warned against the recurring temptation of an "operative" history, which would be instrumentalized by practice rather than obeying its own rules. How have the relationships between project teaching and history teaching, or between architectural history and art history, evolved? Is it still necessary to distinguish between teaching history and teaching architectural theory? How can the growing interest in heritage issues and intervention on existing buildings be an opportunity to expand the uses of history?

Schedule / Required components

The proposals, in French or English, should include a title, an abstract (3000 signs), five keywords and a biography (500 signs). The thematic *Rencontre* to which the contribution relates and the format envisaged will be specified (20-minute presentation, 5- to 10-minute testimony, organization of a round table). The file submitted must be in PDF and named as follows: LAST NAME_First Name_JLC Meetings 2026. It should be sent until Monday March 30, 2026 (included), to the following address: rencontresJLC@gmail.com

The *Rencontres* cannot cover participants' travel and accommodation expenses. Participants may request funding from their laboratory or institution. Doctoral students or recent graduates who do not receive support from their team may request an exemption from the organizers.

⁴ <https://www.college-de-france.fr/fr/chaire/jean-louis-cohen-architecture-et-forme-urbaine-chaire-internationale/events>

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