

THE **FLEURY COLON** ENTRY FROM  
**a** DICTIONARY of  
the **Avant-Gardes**

SECOND EDITION

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**COLON**

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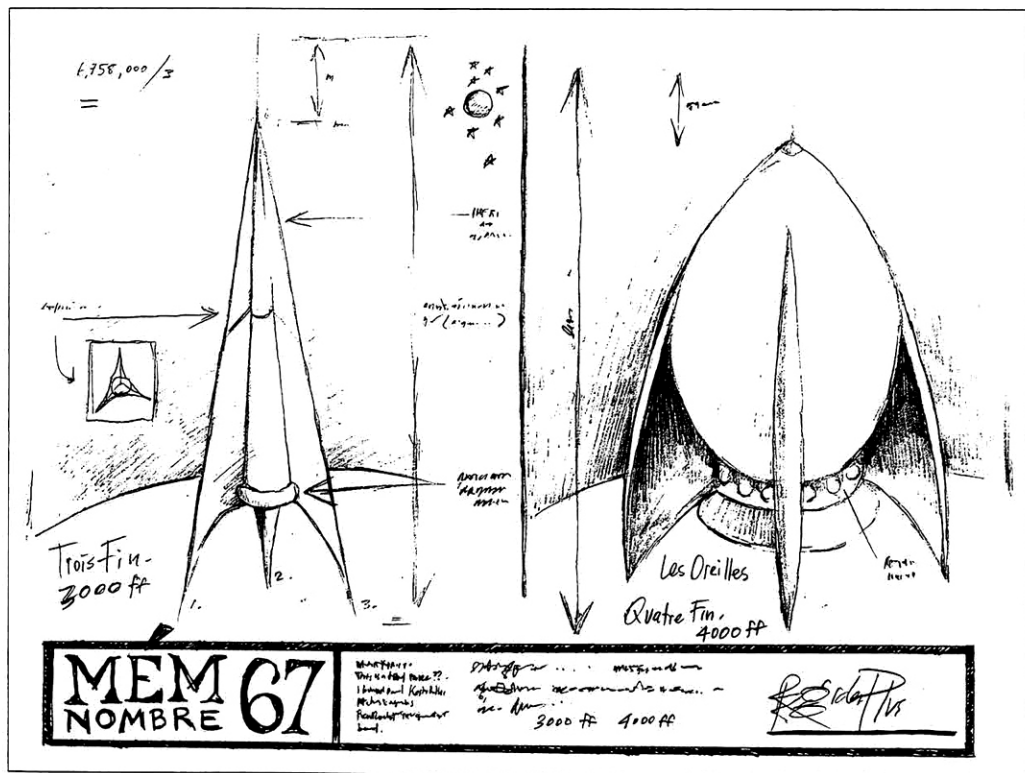
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**COLON, Fleury**

(9 September 1905–21 May 1964).

This enigmatic French architect carried reductionist architectural doctrines to new heights by isolating the decorative finial, or épi, that usually adorns the top of a gable, canopy, or pinnacle in French architecture, thus making

the finial his ultimate form. Educated at L'École d'Architecture (Paris), Colon was one of many gifted graduates employed in the construction of the Maginot Line. Eager for exciting architectural challenges in postwar Paris, Colon was drawn to Isidore Isou's Lettriste ideology wherein art, according to Isou, has two characteristic phases: ampic (expansion) and "chiseling" (deconstruction). Colon saw Isou's doctrine as further justification of his own theory to dismiss traditional structure and to focus solely on the finial. But the ideological tryst was shortlived. In a fierce café debate, Colon accused Isou of expanding his ego and nothing else. Isou's followers retaliated by



Fleury Colon, Plan for MEM, Nombre 67. Courtesy L'Archive de Colon, Montreal.

accusing Colon of "intention to collaborate" with the Vichy Government, citing his failed proposal to design train station shelters shaped like finials.

Bruised by the politics of LETTRISM, the architect manqué relocated to Montreal in 1950 and changed his name to Regarder Plus (To Look Further). Colon acquired financiers, and established an artistic commune in the wilderness northwest of Montreal, wherein his application of the finial was finally realized. Although similar in some regards to R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER'S Dymaxion Deployment Unit, Colon's Max Épi Maison (MÉM) was finial-shaped, stood 25 feet high, and was made of pewter. This commune consisted of 16 of these spire-like MÉMs standing in a teepee-like cluster on the edge of a meadow. Amidst the dense Canadian forest and without the artificial light of the city, Colon became enamored with the stars and turned MÉM 3, his studio, into an observatory complete with telescope. Convinced he could see Sputnik in orbit above the tops of the pines, Colon hurled himself into the most peculiar of his finial-related obsessions: Aeronautics. Blueprints and sketches for hundreds of finial-shaped missiles and rockets adorned the inside of his studio/observatory. Colon wrote volumes of letters petitioning the Canadian Space & Aeronautics Commission (CSAC) with the hope of gaining funding for the finial's aerodynamic possibilities. Small finial-fuselage test models were built from scraps of pewter while Colon anxiously awaited access to CSAC's wind tunnels. But his pleas for assistance met with bureaucratic indifference. The letters slowed to a trickle.

Colon cloistered himself inside his MÉM developing a morose dementia for the night sky. It was clear, even to the commune, that Colon's cause was failing. Death can be impressive, even to the avant-garde, and Colon's demise was no less ironic. Alarmed commune members looked on as the aging architect, with the intention of cleaning his telescope lens, scaled the MÉM Observatory

using a new system of ropes and pulleys. A pulley snapped, and Colon fell, impaling himself on a small dog-house shaped like a finial.

—Michael Peters

**Writings:** *The Finial Automaton; The Collected Writings of Fleury Colon and Regarder Plus* (1936–1964). Ed. Jean-Jacques Cory. Nice, France: La Banque d'Écrits, 1968; *Le Petit Épi; Un Manifeste Fétu*, with sketches, notes, blueprints, & related ephemera (1942–48). Ed. Maurice Fragonette. Paris, France: Faux-Semblant Livres, 1971; *Regarder Plus: The CSAC Letters*. Ed. Thomas Knowlton, with sketches, blueprints, and photos. Toronto: Red Leaf Editions, 1974.

**Plans:** Fleury Colon, *Finial-Fuselage 3000–4000 Series #67* (preliminary sketches), 1961.

**Interpretation:** C. Miasma. *Theory and Design; The History of the Finial*. Montreal: Worthington Publishing Collective, 1978

## COLOR-FIELD PAINTING

(c. 1950).

The idea is to use color apart from drawing, apart from shape, and apart from shading, until it acquires a purely visual status. However, in contrast to monochromic painting, most color-field work involves at least two colors, which prompt surprising retinal responses, such as ambiguous figure-ground reversals, usually along the sharply delineated border between the colors. The last fact prompted the epithet "hard-edge abstraction," which is also used to describe this style of painting. One master is Ellsworth Kelly (1923), who was also among the first to paint on nonrectangular canvases. Since many post-World War II color-field painters had worked in camouflage during the War, the military must have taught them strategic tricks about color relationships that afterwards were turned to esthetic uses. In my living room is a Suzan Frecon (1941) painting, in which a deeply repainted black