



# Never Modern

Irénée Scalbert and 6a architects

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Irene Scalbert

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- First publication on the work and philosophy of London-based 6a architects
- 6a architects have realised a number of award winning projects for art museums and galleries

In this exceptional book on the London based studio 6a architects, architecture critic Irénée Scalbert looks at the role of narrative, history, appropriation and craft in the work of Tom Emerson and Stephanie Macdonald. The book traces an architectural approach avoiding style, signature, theory and even concept in favor of metis, an ancient form of intelligence combining “flair, wisdom, forethought, subtlety of mind, deception, resourcefulness, vigilance, opportunism, varied skills, and experience.” Structured around notions of situation, intervention, making, comedy, bricolage, chance and anthropology, the text is mirrored in a visual essay of archive photographs, artworks, film stills and recent projects by the practice. **6a architects** were founded in London in 2001. The practice has developed a reputation for award winning contemporary art galleries, educational and residential projects in sensitive historic environments. Recent projects include the critically acclaimed extension to the South London Gallery (New London Architecture Award 2011 and Civic Trust Award Commendation 2012), Raven Row, contemporary art gallery in Spitalfields, east London (RIBA Award 2010) and the new Fashion Galleries at the V&A opened in May 2012 (nominated for the Mies van der Rohe Award 2013). 6a architects won the Schelling Medal for architecture 2012.

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At Raven Row 6a found a guide in the design of 18th-century furniture. Prior to the invention of gas lamps, the ability to move a chair or a desk near a window or close to the fire were important. The proximity of light and heat were determinative.

Occasionally an entire activity was accommodated in a single piece of furniture. In a writing desk, for instance, paper, quills, ink, blotter were all assigned a specific place. Furniture was light, mobile and adjusted to situations. Hence, with the exception of the kitchen fittings that needed to be connected to plumbing and power, 6a made a rule that no furniture was to be fixed. As in Arte Povera, their form was to be obtained from the material and from the use. Tables, benches, cases were made as thin and as light as possible.