

EILEEN GRAY

20 FEBRUARY – 20 MAY 2013

What remains of Eileen Gray's work today consists of some unique pieces, some incomplete archives and a great deal of mystery. Born in Ireland in 1878, Eileen Gray is generally considered as either an iconic interior designer of Art Deco, or an emblematic architect of Modernism. While her work has often been analysed in the light of a break between Art Deco and Modernism, the retrospective at the Centre Pompidou looks back at the way it developed, in view of presenting an overall picture of her achievements. Painting, lacquer work, interior design and architecture were all areas in which Gray expressed her considerable sensibility. In the spirit of "Gesamtkunstwerk" (* page 5), she is now perceived as a total creator.

Gray's works were initially praised to the skies by the Avant-Gardist critics of the Twenties, then fell into oblivion, and only began to arouse interest again in 1968 thanks to the writings of the historian Joseph Rykwert. In 1972, the sale of couturier Jacques Doucet's collection restored her to her rightful place in the decorative arts; in 2009, that of the Pierre Bergé and Yves Saint Laurent collection placed her among the pantheon of designers. And yet Gray never wanted her work to be of lasting importance. 'Her art,' wrote Jean Badovici, 'is not, as has been said, a cerebral art. On the contrary, it is the expression of a sensibility that thrills to the rich new forms of a new life, and arises from a powerful, spontaneous impulse.'

THE ART OF LACQUERWORK

Eileen Gray discovers the art of lacquerwork at the turn of the 20th Century, while she is still a student of drawing and painting at the Slade School of Fine Art in London. Fascinated by the pieces in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, she decides to learn the technique of this material with D. Charles, an artisan-restorer in the Soho district. A short time after settling in Paris in 1906, she meets lacquerwork craftsman Seizo Sugawara, with whom she would perfect her training. In 1910, the two unite their skills and work together at 11 Rue Guénégaud; their collaboration continues for over twenty years. From their studio would emerge such emblematic pieces as **The Magician of the Night**, the **Siren** armchair, the pieces commissioned by renowned fashion designer Jacques Doucet and by Mme. Mathieu Lévy – milliner of the boutique J. Suzanne Talbot. The union of their expertise, combined with Gray's sensibility, daring and talent, would become the source of some of the greatest lacquerwork masterpieces of the Western world during the early 20th Century.

JEAN DÉSSERT

Eileen Gray opens the Galerie Jean Désert on May 17th 1922 at 217 Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, Paris, in the heart of a district dedicated to art and luxury. Her clientele consists of aristocrats, fashion designers, financiers, women of letters, and artists – Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, Philippe de Rothschild, Elsa Schiaparelli, Boris Lacroix, Henri Pacon, Damia, Romaine Brooks, Loïe Fuller... Pieces of furniture, carpets, designs for apartment interiors and their decoration are exhibited on the ground floor, while the basement accommodates a weaving workshop. This second workshop is added to the one created in 1910 with Evelyn Wyld following their discovery of the art of weaving in the Atlas Mountains.

The decade of Jean Désert, the designer's most prolific period, would see the materials of lacquerwork and weaving evolve towards those of chromed tubular metal, glass, cork and rhodoid. Gray is surrounded by the most talented artisans: Kichizo Inagaki, cabinet-maker and plinth-maker to Rodin; Abel Motté, editor of the furniture of

Francis Jourdain; and textile designer Hélène Henry. It is during this period that she designs the famous decor of the **Chambre à coucher boudoir pour Monte Carlo** in 1923. In 1930, Eileen Gray definitively closes the Galerie Jean Désert.

VILLA E 1027

Sitting high above the Bay of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, the seaside villa is the fruit of the enigmatic collaboration between Eileen Gray and Romanian architect Jean Badovici. Its name, **E 1027**, is the only element which attests to the complexity of the role played by each in the development of the project: a combination of the first and last names of the architects – E for Eileen, 10 for the J in Jean (the 10th letter of the alphabet), 2 for Badovici and 7 for Gray. The design of the villa **E 1027** begins in 1926 and is based on a minimalist agenda: for a man, Jean Badovici, who enjoys work, sport and entertaining. The combination of a vertical axis (the spiral staircase providing access to the rooftop terrace) and horizontal planes (the two levels of the villa crowned by the rooftop terrace), the villa is organised around a central room, all the while bestowing genuine importance to its secondary spaces. Oriented in relation to the path of the sun, the interior spaces communicate with the exterior by means of various sliding window systems. An organic entity endowed with a soul, **E 1027** is a model of sensitive modernity. Here, Gray and Badovici intend that one should 'find within the architectural construction the joy of feeling perfectly himself, as though part of a whole which both extends and completes the self.'

TEMPE A PAILLA

In 1931, Eileen Gray embarks upon the design of her own house, **Tempe a Pailla** (a Mentonasc proverb meaning 'time for yawning'), which will remain the only project which she designs entirely independently. Construction begins in 1934 on a site of old cisterns in the hills of Menton. Amidst vineyards and citrus trees, the house seeks to be hidden from view. While **Tempe a Pailla** borrows certain concepts from the villa **E 1027** in its multiplication of references to ocean liners and in the addition of a diagram of wind patterns to the diagram of the trajectory

of the sun, Eileen Gray nonetheless chooses an architectural treatment which lies at the crossroads of modernism and the vernacular. Her fierce independence of spirit incites her to satisfy her own desires and needs rather than to implement the 'Five Points Towards a New Architecture' as defined by Le Corbusier. Developing the architecture/furniture relationship to its utmost in this project, she creates a series of prototype furniture: a mobile pant-rack, a seat-stepladder-towel-rack, a retractable bench, an extendable wardrobe. At the close of the Second World War, Gray undertakes a large scale restoration of the house which had been greatly damaged. She finally sells it to painter Graham Sutherland in 1955.

LOU PÉROU

At the age of 76 years old, with the help of a local architect, Eileen Gray embarks upon her last architectural project: the restoration and extension of a country house which she had owned since 1939. In the heart of a vineyard, not far from the Chapelle Sainte-Anne and just south of Saint-Tropez, **Lou Pérou** would be her last summer refuge. The sobriety of the site, the simplicity of the volumes, the rustic nature of the materials and the proximity to nature all appeal to the designer who wishes to construct a modest and discrete project. In a clearly vernacular style, the basic architecture establishes a discourse with the gardens and the layout of the terraces. Interior and exterior spaces intermingle and echo one another with simplicity and elegance.

THE PORTFOLIO OF EILEEN GRAY

Between 1956 and 1975, Eileen Gray assembles a selection of her own projects in a portfolio. Following her own criteria, she includes black and white photographs, sketches, architectural plans, elevations and cross-sections. In a relative chronology, she annotates, labels, details and explains her work. Although she does highlight her lacquered furniture and interiors from the 1910s and 1920s, she equally emphasises the Galerie Jean Désert, the villa **E 1027**, the studio for Jean Badovici in the Rue Chateaubriand and **Tempe a Pailla**. She also devotes a large part of the portfolio to her

architectural work, revealing finished projects that were never built, such as the **Vacation Centre**, the **Cultural and Social Centre**, the **Ellipse House**, the **House and Studio for Two Sculptors**, and a proposed theatre decor for the **Ancient Irish Epic**. In this collection, she chooses to exclude some of her most famous projects, including the pieces of furniture created for Jacques Doucet. She also elects not to include her painting and photography work: her own private world of creation deliberately kept aside from her career.

PERSONAL CREATION

Although considered secondary in the oeuvre of Eileen Gray, the practice of painting remains nonetheless consistent throughout her life. Her training as a painter at the Slade School of Fine Art, the Académie Colarossi and the Académie Julian leads her to exhibit a watercolour in 1902, and then a painting in 1905, at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français held at the Grand Palais. Despite the fact that she abandons canvas and paper media for a period of time, she never stops painting and drawing. Lacquered panels and carpets become her new media for creation, through which she develops her research into geometric abstraction. Architectural drawing monopolises the greater part of her attention from the mid-1920s onwards, even if she continues to devote herself to photography, painting and collage until the end of her life. Letters addressed to her niece, painter Prunella Clough, bear witness to the keen interest with which Gray continues to view her initial training, although she is over 90 years old: 'I can understand you ask yourself sometimes why go on, when painting seems to aim either at total facility or total destruction... I can see what Tapié means when he says it's unnecessary that painting should express anything at all, but just be'.

BIOGRAPHY

1878. Birth of Kathleen Eileen Moray Smith-Gray on 9 August in the family residence of Brownswood, in county Wexford, Ireland.

1900. Enrolled in the Slade School of Fine Art in London to study painting. A year later she began to learn the technique of lacquer work in the workshop of D. Charles in Soho.

1902. Enrolled in the Académie Colarossi and then the Académie Julian in Paris. She exhibited a watercolour in the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français in the Grand Palais.

1906. Settled in Paris and the following year bought an apartment at 21, rue Bonaparte which she lived in all her life. Beginning of her collaboration with the Japanese lacquer worker Seizo Sugawara.

1910. Opened a carpet workshop with Evelyn Wyld and a lacquer workshop with Sugawara.

1913. Exhibited several works at the 8th Salon of the Société des Artistes Décorateurs, including **Le Magicien de la nuit** [The Night Magician].

1914. The couturier Jacques Doucet bought her screen with four panels, **le Destin** [Destiny], and went on to commission different pieces of furniture from her.

1919. Decoration of the apartment of Madame Juliette Mathieu Lévy, the rich owner of the Suzanne Talbot fashion boutiques, at 9 rue de Lota, Paris.

1922. 17 May: opening of her Galerie Jean Désert at 217 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris.

1923. Exhibited a suite called **Chambre à coucher boudoir pour Monte-Carlo** [Bedroom-boudoir for Monte-Carlo] at the 14th Salon of the Société des Artistes Décorateurs.

1926. With Jean Badovici, designed and building of the **E 1027** villa at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

1930. The Galerie Jean Désert closed down.

1934. Start of the construction of her villa called **Tempe a Pailla**, in Castellar, near Menton.

1937. Presentation of her project for a Holiday Centre at the Paris World Fair in the **Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux** of Le Corbusier.

1954. Worked on her last architectural project, the **Lou Pérou** house near la Chapelle Sainte-Anne on the outskirts of Saint-Tropez.

1972. Awarded the title of 'Royal Designer for Industry' by the British Society of Arts.

1976. Eileen Gray died in Paris on 31 October.

*« Gesamtkunstwerk » [total work of art]

This concept was first advanced as a theory, then put into practice by the German composer Richard Wagner in the second half of the 19th century. It expressed the hope of merging all the arts, and uniting them in a single design. Throughout the 20th century, numerous artists and architects – each in a very singular way – explored this idea of bringing several disciplines together within a single artistic project.

EXHIBITION

CURATOR

Cloé Pitiot

ASSISTANT CURATOR

Marielle Dagault-Ferrari

RESEARCH

Jennifer Laurent
Élise Koering

ARCHITECT/DESIGNER

Corinne Marchand

PRODUCTION COORDINATORS

Dominique Kalabane
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PUBLICATIONS

CATALOGUE

Eileen Gray, Directed by Cloé Pitiot,
Curator of the Exhibition.
232 p., 267 colour ill.
Price: €39,90

ALBUM

Eileen Gray, Directed by Cloé Pitiot,
Curator of the Exhibition.
60 p., 50 colour ill.
Price: €10,50

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

PAROLE AUX EXPOSITIONS

Eileen Gray

Friday 17 May, 7pm, Petite Salle,
Level -1

GUIDED VISITS

In French
Every Saturday and Sunday
at 2:30 pm
€4.50 Reduced rate €3.50
(+ Museum & exhibitions ticket,
reduced rate €10)
€3.50 with the Annual Pass.
Meet with purchased tickets
at the entrance of the exhibition.

TOURS FOR VISITORS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

-Lip-reading tour: for
hearingimpaired persons
Saturday 23 March at 11 am

- Tour in French sign language:
deaf visitors
Saturday 23 March at 2:30 pm

€4.50 including admittance, free for
one accompanying person
Reservation required at least
3 days before.
Fax 01 44 78 16 62
SMS 06 17 48 45 50
nicole.fournier@centrepompidou.fr

AUDIOGUIDE

Languages: French, English, Spanish,
German and Italian.
On the forum level you can rent an
audioguide that will plunge you into
the heart of creation. Let you guides
through Eileen Gray exhibition.



Also discover almost 70 works from
the Museum's permanent collections,
as well as an architectural visit
of the building.

€5, concessions €4, free for children
under 13.

**Rental of the audioguide at the ticket
counter, level 0.**

**Retrieval at the Espace Audioguide,
level 0**

INFORMATIONS

01 44 78 12 33

www.centrepompidou.fr

EXHIBITION OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

From 20 February to 20 May 2013
Galerie 2, Level 6
Every day except Tuesdays
from 11 am to 9 pm
Ticket counters close at 8 pm
Evening visits on Thursdays
until 11 pm
Ticket counters close at 10 pm

ADMISSION

Access with the ticket

"Museum & Expositions"

Valid throughout the day at the
Museum, for all exhibitions
and the Panorama, for a single
admission in each space
€13, concessions €10

Free with the annual pass and for
under-18s

**Online ticket purchase and printing
(full price only)**

www.centrepompidou.fr/billetterie

TWITTER

More information on the exhibition
can be found via Twitter (hashtag
#EileenGray) or via [http://
www.twitter.com/centrepompidou](http://www.twitter.com/centrepompidou)

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