

Fifty Shades of Gray

By Julien Beauhaire (translated by Lauren Hasty)

Through a selection of photographs, models and documents, for the most part unique, and together in an unprecedented way, the Pompidou Centre * offers a tribute to the architectural work of Eileen Gray that crossed the Art Deco and the Modern Movement and a poignant portrait of a discreet, poetic and enigmatic woman.

Of Eileen Gray (1878-1976), there rests a signature, a few unique pieces, scattered archives and an aura of mystery. It was thirty-seven years after the Irish designer's death in 1972 that the master of modern art deco furniture was rediscovered, during the "Doucet" furniture sale at the Hotel Drouot.

At the turn of the twentieth century, after training as a painter at the *Slade School of Fine Art* in London, at the *Académie Colarossi* and the *Académie Julian* in Paris, Eileen Gray discovered, with the help of the Japanese artisan Seizo Sugawara, the art of lacquer. Their collaboration went on to last more than twenty years and realized emblematic pieces such as *Le Magicien de la nuit*, the *Sirène* armchair, or orders of the couturier Jacques Doucet (four-leaf screen, *Destiny*).



Brick Screen (1919-1922), Private Collection, courtesy Galerie Vallois, Paris © Vallois, Paris-Arnaud Carpentier

In 1922, she opened her gallery under the enigmatic name "Jean Desert", in Paris, on the rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, where Charles and Marie-Laure de Noailles, Philippe de Rothschild and Elsa Schiaparelli all acquired pieces of furniture, carpets or installation projects for their apartments. There, during ten years, she worked with lacquer and weaving, her preferred creative mediums, through which she developed her research of geometric abstraction, while moving towards modern materials, such as tubular and chrome metal, glass, cork and rhodoid.



E1027 Side Table (1926-1929), from the E 1027 house © Centre Pompidou / Jean-Claude Planchet

Starting in 1926, she created for and with her close friend, the Romanian architect Jean Badovici, the "house by the sea" in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. The villa, referred to as "E-1027" is a mix of minimalism, modernism, and futurism. If Le Corbusier painted in 1939 imposing murals without pre-warning, he still chose to create in its shadow thirteen years later his *Cabanon*, thereby demonstrating the complex and often tense relationship between them.



Villa E 1027, Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici, Centre Pompidou, Kandinsky Library © Eileen Gray Fund / Alan Irvine

In 1952, at age 76, Eileen Gray began her last architectural project, "Lou Peru", the restoration and remodeling of an abandoned Tropezienne bastide, where she created an intimate dialogue between the interior and exterior.

The exhibition closes with two portfolios (1956-1975), where the artist consigned a selection of projects. *"I like doing things, I hate possessing them. Memories cling to things and objects, so it's best to start from scratch,"* she reiterated.

* Until May 20th 2013, Gallery 2, Level 6

Eileen Gray, from February 20th to May 20th, 2013 at *centrepompidou*
(<http://www.dailymotion.com/centrepompidou>)

<http://artyparade.com/en/flash-news/81>