eileen gray
architect
designer
painter

information and resources for second level students

12 October 2013 - 19 January 2014
Irish Museum of Modern Art
Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin 8
About the Exhibition

Eileen Gray Architect Designer Painter
Irish Museum of Modern Art
12 October 2013 - 19 January 2014

- This exhibition is a retrospective of the work of Eileen Gray, an important and influential twentieth century designer and architect.

- Designed and produced by the Centre Pompidou in Paris, in collaboration with the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA), this exhibition is a tribute to Gray’s career as a leading member of the modern design movement. The exhibition at IMMA celebrates Gray’s Irish roots and presents a number of previously unseen works that offer new insights into Gray’s extraordinary career.

- Gray’s practice encompassed painting, furniture design, lacquer work, textiles, interior design and architecture. The approach to the curation of the exhibition is to present the diversity of Gray’s work in the spirit of Gesamtkunstwerk where she is presented as a total creator.

- The exhibition is the result of a collaboration between the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Irish Museum of Modern Art. The exhibition took place in the Centre Pompidou, Paris, from 20 February until 20 May 2013 (see www.centrepompidiou.fr) and takes place in IMMA from October 2013 until January 2014.

- IMMA is based in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham (see www.imma.ie for further information on IMMA and the Royal Hospital).

Curation

Curation refers to the strategy for an exhibition: how it is displayed, its themes, content, layout, etc.

The overarching theme of the exhibition is to present Gray’s diverse practice as a whole, the gesamtkunstwerk. The work is presented chronologically emphasising the development of Gray’s practice over time and through different phases.

- The exhibition is presented in several rooms and corridors in the galleries on the second floor of the east wing of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Gesamtkunstwerk

Gesamtkunstwerk is a German word for ‘total work of art’. This concept was first advanced as a theory, then put into practice by the German composer Richard Wagner in the late 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 explored this idea of bringing several disciplines together within a single artistic project.

A retrospective is an exhibition of an artist’s practice over a period of time. It usually features the work of a well-established artist who has built up a body of work over time.

Chronological

Chronological refers to the sequencing of information or material according to the time in which it occurred.
display and layout

Many of Gray’s works are functional items such as tables and chairs which were intended to be used.

- It is tempting to sit on a chair or open a drawer; however, these works are quiet old and are vulnerable to damage from physical contact, light and climate conditions.

- Several of the screens and furniture items are presented on large platforms to increase their visibility and to provide a natural boundary around the work. The works are presented in the gallery spaces and in the corridors in such a way that the viewer can get close to them without touching them and can also see them from several angles.

- Gray’s architectural work is presented using models, drawings and photographs. Some of the photographs and two-dimensional work, including paintings and collages, are hung on the walls while others including the models are presented in vitrines.

- Colour is used throughout the exhibition to enhance the display of the work and also to indicate different areas and phases of Gray’s practice. Large photographic images of Gray’s work in its original context provide the backdrop for the presentation of several works such as Transat Chair in corridor 2 and Console Table in room 1.

Lighting

A range of lighting is used throughout the exhibition. Spot lighting highlights individual works and also allows a greater level of control of light exposure on individual works.

- Many works in the exhibition are sensitive to light - too much light could result in fading colour and surface damage. Diffuse lighting creates an ambiance in a particular space.

- The light levels are monitored to assess the level of light in each space and windows are covered to restrict any sunlight.

Information

The exhibition includes documentary, photographic and biographical material which provides insights into the artist’s interests, influences and motivations. There are also a number of video works including an interview with Eileen Gray (see room 2).
About the Artist  
Eileen Gray was born in Wexford in 1878.

- She studied at the Slade School of Art in London and the Académie Julian in Paris where she lived for most of her life.
- Gray collaborated with Seizo Sugawara a Japanese expert in decorative lacquer work for several years. In 1910 Gray opened a workshop with Sugawara to develop their lacquer work and another workshop with Evelyn Wyld to develop tapestry weaving.
- Over several years, Gray designed furnishings and furniture including lacquered wall panels, tables and chairs.
- In 1922, she opened a shop Galerie Jean Désert which specialised in luxury furnishings and carpets.
- Gray collaborated with architect Jean Badovici on the seaside villa *E-1027* (see p. 7) in the South of France which was one of several architectural projects undertaken by Gray.
- Her reputation receded in the latter part of her life; however, she was rediscovered in the late 1960s and there has been a growing interest in her work ever since. Some of Gray’s designs such as the E-1027 table were put back into production.
- Eileen Gray died in Paris in 1976 aged 98.
Eileen Gray developed her diverse practice through collaboration with a range of artists and artisans.

- Over the course of her long career, and through collaboration with others, she developed skills in furniture and interior design, lacquer work, textile design and architecture.

  - She was influenced by the Bauhaus, Art Deco, De Stijl and, in particular, the geometric forms and industrially-produced materials of the International Style designers.

  - Her early work is associated with Art Deco and her later work is associated with modernist design.

Textiles

Gray collaborated with her friend the textile artist Evelyn Wyld.

- In 1910, they opened a weaving studio at 17-19 rue Visconti, Paris, for the production of carpets and wall hangings based on the traditional weaving techniques they had discovered during their travels in the Atlas mountains in north western Africa.

  - Gray’s designs evolved from figuration to more affirmed geometric abstraction, while Wyld’s designs tended to be floral.

  - Their creations were characterised by the reappropriation of tradition techniques and the use of natural dyes. Their studio closed in the late 1920s.

Examples of Gray’s textile designs and carpets including Saint-Tropez Carpet can be found in corridor 2.

While a student in the Slade school of Art in London, Gray discovered lacquer work.

- Gray worked with Japanese lacquer work artisan Seizo Sugawara for many years when she moved to Paris.

  - Lacquer work is quite a toxic process and, despite developing lacquer disease on her hands, Gray persisted in her development and refinement of the technique.

  - Examples of Gray’s lacquerwork include Siren armchair and Console Table in room 5 and Six Panel Screen and Brick Screen in room 7.
Architecture

Gray's long association with Romanian architect Jean Badovici influenced the development of her interest in architecture.

- Through association with Badovici, the editor of *L'Architecture Vivante*, she gained access to many of the key figures of modern architecture and design.

- Gray and Badovici collaborated on the design of the villa *E-1027* (see p. 7) in the 1920s and, in the 1930s, Gray designed Badovici's studio in Rue Chateaubriand in Paris.

- Other architectural works include *Maison Ellipse, Tempe à Pailla*, in the heights of Menton and *Villa Lou Pérou*.

- Details of Gray's architectural projects can also be found in the gallery spaces and in corridor 2 and room 11.

Painting, Drawing and Collage

Many of Gray's designs were developed through drawings, paintings and collage. Some of these, especially her textile designs, show influences from *Dada* and *Surrealism*.

- Examples of her paintings, drawings and collages can be found in room 12 and also on corridor 2 in the textile section.
Villa E 1027
1926-1929
Architectural model
Corridor 2 (outside room 8)

E 1027 is a villa designed by Eileen Gray and Romanian architect Jean Badovici. It sits above the Bay of Roquebrune-Cap-Martin in the south of France near Monaco.

The villa is a ‘maison minimum’ influenced by Modernist architecture, in particular the French modernist architect Le Corbusier, in its use of simple geometric forms which emphasise space and function. The name of the villa indicates the complex nature of their collaboration: E 1027 represents 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 villa comprises two bedrooms, a maid’s room, utility rooms and a main living room which can also function as a dining room. The bedrooms face the rising sun and the living room overlooks Monte Carlo harbour. The kitchen includes an outdoor cooking space and each room has a balcony and access to the garden.

E 1027 was intended to be a flexible living and working space that could be adapted to one’s needs. The design maximises the use of light and space and also takes account of its environment in terms of sun, wind and sea. Many of her iconic furniture items, which were also intended to be flexible such as Dressing Screen (see p. 10), Transat armchair (see p. 8) and her tubular steel table E-1027 Table (see p. 11), were designed for E-1027. Always concerned to make best use of space, Gray designed concealed storage compartments throughout the house. It was also important for Gray that one could find space to be alone even in a small space.

Gray was interested in the possibilities of new industrial materials and the villa is constructed from concrete, steel and glass. Large planes of glass enabled her to maximise light and the concrete and steel structure enabled her to create large internal and external planes. The furnishings are also constructed using industrial materials such as stainless steel, synthethic leather and aluminium.

In keeping with the modernist aesthetic there is no decoration or ornamentation. The emphasis of the design is on function, maximising use of light and space and the integration of the furnishings with both the form and the function of the building. The walls are angular and plain; however, after Gray moved out in 1932 Le Corbusier visited the villa and, with the encouragement of Baldovici, painted several murals on the walls of E-1027. Gray considered these murals to be an act of vandalism.

Over the course of time and with change of ownership, Gray’s furniture was dispersed through auctions and the house fell into disrepair. It was purchased by the French state in 1999 and declared a French National Cultural Monument. Following a period of controversial refurbishment, it was was due to open to the public in 1913.
Designed by Eileen Gray, the Transat Chair was manufactured in the mid-1920s and was one of the rare pieces by Gray that was handcrafted in a series. The reclining form of Transat Chair is inspired by deck chairs on transatlantic liners. It consists of a suspended seat, made from supple, flexible, synthetic leather, and a geometric structure made from wood. The chair was designed for Gray’s villa in the south of France E-1027 (see p. 7). The swiveling headrest follows the movement of the head enabling the person to sit up or recline.

The chair is made from wood - varnished sycamore - and synthetic leather. The joints and supports are made from nickel-plated steel. There are a number of different versions that combine various materials: blonde sycamore and black leather; black lacquered wood and celadon green canvas; or black lacquered wood and natural leather.

Gray employs a simple, functional design for this chair drawing on influences from modernist design. The nickel-plated steel elements provide support for the structure and their simplicity of form ensures they are integrated into the overall design of the chair.

The Art Work
Transat Chair
Date 1926-1929
Materials Varnished sycamore, nickel-plated steel, synthetic leather.
Dimensions 79 x 56 x 98 cm
Location Corridor 2
Furniture from E-1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin

About the Artwork
Designed by Eileen Gray, the Transat Chair was manufactured in the mid-1920s and was one of the rare pieces by Gray that was handcrafted in a series.

Form
The reclining form of Transat Chair is inspired by deck chairs on transatlantic liners. It consists of a suspended seat, made from supple, flexible, synthetic leather, and a geometric structure made from wood.

Function
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Decoration
Gray employs a simple, functional design for this chair drawing on influences from modernist design. The nickel-plated steel elements provide support for the structure and their simplicity of form ensures they are integrated into the overall design of the chair.

Notes
The origin of the Bibendum armchair is unclear in that some suggest it was designed for the apartment of Madame Mathieu Lévy on rue de Lota in Paris while others suggest it was designed for Gray’s villa in the south of France E-1027 (see p. 7).

The design for the Bibendum armchair was influenced by the trademark figure of the ‘Michelin Man’, used to promote Michelin tyres, who was called Bibendum. The term Bibendum comes from the Latin ‘Nunc est bibendum’ (now is the time to drink).

The armchair was designed to provide comfort and support to sit upright. The armchair was intended for use in a bedroom or living room.

The chair comprises back and armrests made of two flared stacked rolls, stitched onto a deep semi-circular seat, canvas upholstery, originally ivory-coloured. The legs were made of a polished, chromium-plated, stainless steel tube and the seat was made of beechwood reinforced with rubber webbing for added comfort. This first edition was followed by a variant in white leather.
The Art Work

Dressing Screen

Date 1926-1929

Materials Painted wood, decorated in aluminium leaf mirrors, glass shelves, mobile and pivoting drawers lined in cork and silver leaf.

Dimensions 164 x 56 x 18 cm

Location Furniture from E-1027, Roquebrune-Cap-Martin

Room 10

About the Artwork

The Dressing Screen is a multi-purpose cabinet with storage facilities and mirrors intended for a bathroom or in conjunction with a washbasin.

Form The Dressing Screen is a tall, thin storage cabinet comprising shelves and drawers in a variety of sizes. There are mirrors on the inside of the doors.

Function The Dressing Screen was designed for Gray’s villa in the south of France E-1027 (see p. 7) where it was placed in the master bedroom. Positioned perpendicular to the wall, it served as a screen separating the night table area from the washbasin. The Dressing Screen existed in various versions, playing on the multipurpose nature of a piece of furniture, while inviting tactile and visual sensations.

Materials This piece testifies to Eileen Gray’s keen interest in using a diverse range of simple or precious materials. The structure is made from painted wood covered in aluminium leaf, supporting glass shelves, drawers made from cork lined with silver leaf, and two asymmetrical doors that serve as mirrors.

Decoration The simple form and use of materials emphasise the function of the cabinet and decorative elements are kept to a minimum.

Notes
E-1027 Adjustable Table

Date: 1927

Materials: Tubular stainless steel and tempered glass.

Dimensions: 62 x 50 (approx)

Location: Corridor 2 (outside room 9)

About the Artwork: Gray designed this iconic adjustable table in 1927 for her villa in the south of France E-1027 (see p. 7).

Form: The design combines simplicity of form and function: the stand consists of two concentric forms in tubular steel, the lower one an incomplete circle which functions as the stand and the upper one encases a circle of tempered glass which functions as the table surface. The two circular forms are joined by two verticle stainless steel tubes.

Function: It is alleged that the table was inspired by Gray’s sister who enjoyed breakfast in bed. The design enabled a tray to be placed over rather than on the bed. The stand comprises two telescopic tubes which can be adjusted to raise or lower the height of the table which is then secured with a pin on a chain. The portable table is very light and was intended to be flexible in its use and location. It can be moved easily and used next to an armchair, bed or it can be freestanding.

Materials: The table is constructed from industrial materials: tubular stainless steel and the glass is tempered to function as a table surface. The table is one of several designs by Gray that is still in production. See corridor 1 for examples of re-editions of Gray’s designs.

Decoration: The design of the table uses a minimum of decoration, depending on the overall simplicity and functionality of the design for effect.

Notes:

Concentric refers to circular forms which share a centre point.
Eileen Gray Timeline

1878 Birth of Kathleen Eileen Moray-Smith Gray on 9 August 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, London.


1906 Settled in Paris and the following year bought an apartment at 21 rue Bonaparte where she lived 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 Exhibition of 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 Gray’s screen with four panels, le Destin (Destiny), and went on to commission different pieces of furniture from her.

1914 Gray and Sugawara moved to London for the duration of World War I.

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

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

1923 Exhibited a suite called Chambre à couche 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 oversaw the building of the E-1027 villa at Roquebrune-Cap-Martin in the south of France.

1930 The Galerie Jean Désert closed.

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

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

1940

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.


Timeline

1882 Birth of James Joyce
1888 Vienna Secession
1900 Sigmund Freud Interpretation of Dreams
1905 Die Brücke
1907 Pablo Picasso, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon
1908 The Futurist Manifesto
1911 Blaue Reiter (Blue Rider)
1913 Armory Exhibition, New York
1914-1918 World War I
1915 Malevich Black Square
1916 Easter Rising, Dublin
1916 Dada
1917 Russian Revolution
1917 DeStijl
1917 Marcel Duchamp Fountain
1919 Bauhaus opens
1920 Berlin Dada Fair
1921 Irish Free State established
1922 James Joyce's Ulysses published
1923 Mainie Jellett and Evie Hone show abstract paintings in the Dublin Painters Gallery
1924 Surrealist Manifesto
1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris
1929 Wall Street crash
1931 Le Corbusier Villa Savoye
1933 Nazi party assume power in Germany
1936 Spanish Civil War
1937 Degenerate Art exhibition, Munich
1939-1945 World War II
1943 Irish Exhibition of Living Art formed
1951 Samuel Beckett Waiting for Godot
**Gallery Layout:**
Location of selected art works

A. Villa E 1027 model
B. Transat Chair
C. Bibendum Armchair
D. Dressing Screen
E. E-1027 Table
Suggestions for students

- spend some time looking at the art works
- make visual and written notes about the exhibition
- interact with the art works where appropriate
- discuss your impressions and observations with other students
- think about the themes the artist is exploring in the work:
  - how are these themes presented in art works in the exhibition
  - how do these themes relate to you
- make comparisons with other artists and art works
- which parts of the exhibition do you consider successful and unsuccessful
- consider the broader context of Eileen Gray’s work:
  the cultural context
  such as literature, film, music and popular cultural references; the social context; the political context.

Research the artist and the exhibition.
### Mapping the exhibition

Use the attached floor plan to map out the exhibition indicating the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exhibition Space</strong></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kind of exhibition space is it – new, old, renovated, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many rooms and floors does the exhibition comprise?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Display</strong></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are the art works displayed?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the layout of the exhibition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describe the spaces of the exhibition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a theme/s to the exhibition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is/are the theme/s presented throughout the exhibition?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Access</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do visitors find their way through the exhibition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is it possible to get close to the artworks?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any obstacles to getting around the spaces?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider the following in terms of access: space, lighting, information.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Seating</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there seating for visitors to sit and rest and/or contemplate the works?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What kind of seating is available?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where is it situated?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Lighting</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>What kind of lighting is used in the exhibition – daylight, artificial, bright, low, spotlight, theatrical?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the effects of the lighting?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Information, Reading and Resource Material</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of information, reading and resource material about the exhibition are available in the gallery spaces, at the reception desk, on the website, over the phone, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there labels and/or wall texts, gallery guides, guided tours, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Security</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the security issues for this exhibition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What security mechanisms are in place?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Further reading and resources

Publications

Essays

Websites
Irish Museum of Modern Art  www.imma.ie
Centre Pompidou  www.centrepompidou.fr
National Museum of Ireland  www.museum.ie
Design Museum, London  http://designmuseum.org/design/eileen-gray
Irish Architecture Foundation  www.irisharchitecturefoundation.ie

Art Terms
IMMA, _What is_ ? programme - Glossary of Art Terms
www.imma.ie/en/subnav_112.htm

Tate Modern, Glossary
www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary

Museum of Modern Art, New York, Index of Art Terms
www.moma.org/collection

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The exhibition is presented in association with the National Museum of Ireland where an Eileen Gray exhibition is on permanent display at the Decorative Arts & History site, Collins Barracks, www.nationalmuseum.ie
Notes