

## Eileen Gray E.1027 Master Bedroom

Installation at the *Akademie der Künste Berlin*

Berlin, Germany, 12 April 2019 – 10 June 2019,

Curator Wilfried Wang, Co-Curator Peter Adam

In contrast to art, architecture itself cannot be exhibited. While in sculpture and painting the original works themselves are shown, in architectural exhibitions models, photos and drawings can only refer to something else. Although they can convey a design concept, they do not convey the real spatial experience, which only emerges from the passage through the building, and, in interaction with changing situations of light, specific atmospheres result. The current exhibition on the legendary house E.1027, which the artist Eileen Gray built (1926–1929) as her first architectural work on the French Mediterranean coast, goes beyond a classical architectural exhibition, because a part of the building is presented as a full-scale model, which is walkable.

This house is one of the very few examples of a modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a total work of art that has been designed by one person, in which architecture, landscape architecture and furniture design have been developed as an artistic unity. The extensive interior fittings of the house were largely lost over time as the building stood empty and gradually began to deteriorate while the furniture pieces were sold or considered to be lost. In addition, Le Corbusier painted various walls of the house and intervened massively in the design, much to the annoyance of Eileen Gray. For the overall concept of this particular work, however, the interiors in their original version are essential, so that during the recent renovation of the house not only the exterior was reconstituted, but also some of the interior. However, in this house that has been accessible to visitors since 2016, those areas of which only black-and-white photographs from the time the house was built have only been reconstructed rudimentarily.

Meanwhile, Wilfried Wang and students of the University of Texas at Austin have spent years exploring the interior of the house and reconstructing it in great detail. They have accurately drawn numerous objects constructively and reconstructed in a meticulous way. A goal of the investigation was the understanding of the complex mechanics of the hinged and folding systems of the

furniture. This research has shown that on-site reconstruction of the interiors cannot yet be considered complete.

The walk-in full-scale model exhibited at the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin shows the master bedroom, which is not a classically rectangular room, but a newly developed spatial concept in which a rectangle is first divided into two parts and these were moved in plan so that two different room zones arise: a kind of vestibule with workplace and the actual sleeping area. The visitors pass through this part of the house in a S-shaped path and experience the architecture in segments. In contrast to a conventional room, where the entire space is visible immediately upon entering, visitors of E.1027 constantly see new parts of space in their field of vision. Although the spatial configuration is very small, the perception of a maximum spaciousness was nevertheless achieved, as the people entering the room walk towards a glazed corner of the building, which allows a wide panoramic view over the sea, while the more private areas with the bed are not visible when entering. The experience of spaciousness can also be experienced from the bed, as the end of the window is hidden behind a wall.

The room is reminiscent of a luxurious cabin of a ship because, in a confined space,

maximum comfort is created. The built-in wardrobes, fold-out shelves, lighting elements and multilayered mirror systems above the washbasins are complex and at the same time simple in their form and materiality. The technical expression is individualized by a polychromy, by poetic inscriptions on components of the house as well as by decorative elements. Those, however, do not appear as something applied, but bind the different parts together in a unity, so that the design appears as if made of one piece, as a tailor-made container for life processes. The furniture is as solemn as the furniture of Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, but less monumental and representative, and, in contrast to Marcel Breuer's furniture from the Bauhaus period, less geometric and industrial in appearance. Eileen Gray's architecture is proportioned in a harmonious, human body-based way, while the overall spatial constellation and furnishings are proportioned to a system of the golden section spiral, as Wilfried Wang demonstrated in the accompanying monograph on the house (see "Book Reviews").

The walk-in installation is supplemented by a presentation of photos from the time of the origin of the house. Shown are the photos that Eileen Gray probably shot herself and published in the journal of her then-life partner, Jean Badovici, who worked on the detailing of some elements of the house. They published the house together in a special issue of *L'Architecture Vivante* as a portfolio with a loose collection of leaves. In this sense, Eileen Gray's concept of a comprehensive design also includes the publication of the work. Like Marcel Duchamp, she not only created a three-dimensional object, but also systematically developed the compositions and sequence of illustrations to convey this work.

Carsten Krohn



01 Eileen Gray's E.1027 Master Bedroom, 1:1 Installation, *Akademie der Künste*, Berlin. Photograph © Carsten Krohn, 2019.



02 Eileen Gray's E.1027 Master Bedroom, 1:1 Installation, detail, *Akademie der Künste*, Berlin. Photograph © Carsten Krohn, 2019.