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Dream and Action find Equal Support in It

A solo exhibition by Pia Rönicke

From January 7 to February 18, 2012

Copenhagen, December 2011

In this work consisting of many elements, there are 3 curious images I would like to tell you about. One is a photograph of a bathroom and a window seen through a mirror in the bedroom of E1027, a house created by the designer and architect Eileen Gray (in the period 1926-1929). Another is a drawing of 'the mirror room' by the dancer and performer Loïe Fuller from 1893. This image depicts a room (of mirrors) placed in a room (of mirrors) on a stage. The third is a portrait by the artist Hannah Höch from 1917, which show a circle of 5 women looking at each other or a mirroring and doubling of one woman.

In connection with the publication of the plans for the house E1027, a conversation between Eileen Gray and the architect Jean Badovici was released with the title *From eclecticism to doubt* in the magazine L'Architecture Vivante in 1929. Gray states: "The influx of light and air can be regulated...like the shutter of a camera." ¹ The house becomes a viewfinder, a constructed frame through which to see the world. She furthermore says "For me, a model house is merely a house whose construction has been carried out in accordance with the best and least costly technical procedures, and whose architecture attains the maximum of perfection for a given situation; that is to say, it is like a model that is not to be infinitely reproduced, but which will inspire the construction of other houses in the same spirit." ² In the text Gray indirectly goes to war with part of the modernist movement's practice, and in particular, with aspects of the architect Le Corbusier's thinking. The text also functions as a case study of what architecture can be, with E1027 as an example. Gray was concerned with designs of mobility and practiced it through "obtaining several uses for the same object."

Gray was first educated as a visual artist, but became engaged with working in the difficult craft of lacquer. After working with lacquer screens she continued making other furniture and was commissioned to build interiors. It was in a meeting with the architect and editor of the architecture magazine L'Architecture Vivante, Jean Badovici that she started doing architecture. Badovici commissioned Gray to do a house for him. The previously mentioned house, E1027, has been the focal point for a larger controversy. Much against Gray's will, Le Corbusier did a series of murals inside and outside the house. Le Corbusier 'over wrote' the wall inscriptions that Gray had made for the house. This is a strange action from a man that had complimented the house for its continuity. You could perceive this act as a primitive retaliation for Gray's criticism in the article "From eclecticism to doubt."

In the exhibition are a series of screens that are constructed in the same system as Eileen Gray's block screens. They function as room dividers and as surfaces for projection. Slide images are projected on a mirror, which is sent back onto a paper screen, transforming the image as well as negotiating spatial conceptions.

The portrait by Hannah Höch from 1917 (seen in the poster series in the exhibition), speaks to me, because it is not only of a woman, but a collective of women. Virginia Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*: "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size." ³ In Höch's montage the reflection becomes an act, where women are looking at and being seen by other women.

The series of posters in the exhibition takes its title from Hannah Höch's 'Album', where she collected a wide range of images and montaged them together in various associative categories. The album was not meant to be shown to a public, or at least she kept it private. The collection of images in the posters shows the work done by women in the field of design, architecture, performance and art, all of them contemporary with Eileen Gray. There are works by Berenice Abbott, Eileen Gray, Hannah Höch, Loïe Fuller, Karla Grosch, Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, Dörte Helm, Gritt Kallin-Fischer, Lotte Beese, Irene Bayer, Florence Henri, Charlotte Perriand, Lily Reich, Ise Gropius, Ilse Bing, Gertrud Arndt, Marianne Brandt, Lis Beyer, Lucia Moholy, Kattina Both. Many of them trained at the Bauhaus school and whose existence is mostly known through the historical photo archive of Bauhaus. The female students at Bauhaus were discouraged from working with architecture and furniture making, and the general idea was that women could not work in 3-dimensional practices. Nevertheless, a group of them managed to transgress these rules and trained with carpentry, metal and used photography to capture and transform space with. I see the 'Album' posters as an unfinished collection, one to be added to. The montage of images I think of as associative, systematic and desirable. One of the things that interested me is the idea of mirroring space and investigating a particular conception of space that happens in the montage.

The filmic work in the exhibition consists of a series of recordings in E1027. Through mirrors, the camera is recording the reflection of the ceiling as a reversed floor plan as well as fragments of the house. The point of view brings about the illusion that the viewer is walking around in a different house, but in fact it is rather the focus that has changed and the principals of movement that are altered. With a slow pace the camera traces lines, curves, built-in rooms, holes and steps, in an imaginary as well as a concrete space. The voice in the film guides us through the rooms, and describes the surroundings and how they were conceived. It is based on Eileen Gray's own text *From eclecticism to doubt* and excerpts from conversations she had with the biographer Peter Adams. The recordings capture some of the layers of the house, but not as a documentation of the house's present condition, it rather tries to show what is no longer here. I think of it as a place without a present reality, but which comes alive through the conception of it. "Enter slowly... Pajamas... Overcoats and umbrellas... Little things... Dresses... Shoes... Pillows. The door to the right leads to the main room: a partition screen obstructs views that might penetrate from the exterior to the interior when the door is open." ⁴

With our body confined within the perspective of the mirrored room we move into the space. Elements and walls are floating; the movement of the mirror creates a rhythm that gives us a sense of the surroundings, the ocean outside, the house as a boat and the house as a body we are entering. It is an interior, a setting that calls for us to feel the pleasure of the house, to become apart of it.

The space the camera is not capturing, the imagery that is outside the frame or in the periphery of it, is

the misconceived, neglected, assaulted place. Also missing are the restored Le Corbusier murals, and the contradictions involved in the restoration process. It is a house without the original furniture, which Eileen Gray thought to have been an essential part of the house.

The house is a document of a continuous misrepresentation of a marginal practice. The lack of representation in relationship to women's work is of course something I am concerned with. I am trying to build a space that includes these practices on their own terms...

The room is lit partially with paper lamps created from photocopies made in the period when I was collecting images and texts of Eileen Gray's work. Gray had specific notions of how light should be installed as a way to create intimacy.

In Gray's work she is in dialog with a number of different collaborators and practices. I wonder how these meetings have influenced her work. For example, was Gray fascinated by the dancer Loïe Fuller's performances. Fuller worked innovatively with light, projections and mirror rooms in her staging. Loïe Fuller choreographed the Serpentine dance, which was one of the first performances to be caught on film. The dance form was expressed through a large white fabric, and formations were created through the movement of the staged and illuminated body. The filmmaker and writer Germaine Dulac formulates it the following manner: "That also was cinema, the play of light and of colors in relief and in movement (...) Loïe Fuller created her first color harmonies at the movement that the Lumière Brothers gave us the cinema." ⁵

I think Gray's designs challenge notions of the ideal. She includes context as a factor that can change the concept and function of an object and therefore also the ways in which it interacts in space. In Fuller's Mirror Room, I imagine the body becomes fragmented and multiplied. This quote by Henri Bergson might best describe the condition: "In reality... the body is changing form at every moment; or rather there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition." ⁶

In addition to the exhibition is a limited artist book: a series of collages, unmounted, but photographed. The different elements in the collages can be moved around. All elements come from publications about Eileen Gray's work. The images and texts are cut out from photocopies.

1. Peter Adam, *Eileen Gray, Architect / Designer* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1987) p. 234

2. *Ibid.*, p. 220

3. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (A Harvard Book, 1989) p. 35

4. Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray* (Phaidon Press Limited, 2000) p. 241

5. Tom Gunning, *Camera Obscura Camera Lucida*, ed. Richard Allen Malcolm Turvey (Amsterdam University Press, 2003) p. 85

6. *Ibid.*, p. 86-87

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Envisioning Buildings - group show

MAK, Vienna

December 7 - April 22, 2012

FOKUS Videoartfestival

Nikolaj Contemporary Art Center, Copenhagen

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Rosa's Letters - Artist's book

Mousse editions

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Dream and Action find Equal Support in It

Une exposition personnelle de Pia Rönicke
Du 7 janvier au 18 février 2012

“Dream and Action find Equal Support in It” est une histoire de reflets, de cadrages et décadrages. Trois images constituent le point de départ de ce projet : une photographie de la salle de bain à travers un miroir de la maison E1027 d'Eileen Gray, le dessin réalisé par Loie Fuller en 1893 de la salle des miroirs et la photographie d'une femme reproduite cinq fois, et formant un cercle, par Hannah Höch en 1917. “Dream and Action find Equal Support in It” est aussi un hommage à ces trois femmes à la fois libres et visionnaires, soulignant à quel point leur création leur a permis de transgresser les règles de leur époque. Au delà de leurs parcours, l'artiste questionne les potentialités et les limites de l'art, son rapport à l'utopie. Pia Rönicke est fascinée par la manière dont le design de Gray défie les notions d'idéal. Sa façon d'inclure le contexte comme un facteur pouvant changer le concept et la fonction d'un objet et plus encore, la façon dont ils agissent sur l'espace.

Lors d'une conversation entre Eileen Gray et l'architecte Jean Badovici publiée sous le titre *De l'éclectisme au doute* dans la revue *l'Architecture Vivante* en 1929, Gray déclare : “L'afflux de la lumière et de l'air peut être régulé... comme par l'obturateur d'un appareil photo.” La maison devient ainsi un viseur, un cadre construit, à travers lequel on voit le monde.

Faisant écho à cette pensée, Pia Rönicke crée pour l'exposition une série d'écrans construits selon le même système que les paravents d'Eileen Gray. Ils fonctionnent à la fois comme des cloisons et comme des surfaces de projection. Des diapositives sont projetées sur un miroir qui est renvoyé sur un écran de papier, transformant l'image tout en altérant notre perception de l'espace.

D'autres éléments ponctuent l'exposition. Un film, tourné dans la villa E1027 joue aussi de cette ambiguïté. A travers des miroirs, la caméra enregistre le reflet du plafond comme un plan d'architecte renversé et des fragments de la maison. Les différents points de vue donnent l'illusion de marcher dans une maison différente, mais c'est la mise au point et le mouvement qui sont déformés. Lentement, la caméra poursuit les lignes, les courbes, les pièces, les creux et les marches, dans un espace aussi bien imaginaire que concret. La voix off nous guide et nous raconte la manière dont les choses ont été pensées. Les éléments et les murs flottent, le mouvement du miroir crée un rythme. L'enregistrement témoigne des différentes strates de la maison, révélant ainsi ses manques. L'artiste ne cherche pas à réaliser un documentaire de la condition actuelle de ce lieu mais recherche les raisons de sa conception.

La salle d'exposition est en partie éclairée par des lampes de papier constituées de photocopies faites par l'artiste pendant la période où elle rassemblait images et textes autour du travail d'Eileen Gray.

Enfin, en référence au montage de Höch, dans lequel le reflet devient un acte politique car les femmes sont cette fois regardées et vues par d'autres femmes, Pia Rönicke réalise une série d'affiches intitulée *Album*, dans laquelle elle met en miroir le travail de femmes dans les disciplines du design, de l'architecture, de la performance et de l'art. Il s'agit de travaux de Berenice Abbott, Eileen Gray, Hannah Höch, Loïe Fuller, Karla Grosch, Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, Dörte Helm, Gritt Kallin-Fischer, Lotte Beese, Irene Bayer, Florence Henri, Charlotte Perriand, Lily Reich, Ise Gropius, Ilse Bing, Gertrud Arndt, Marianne Brandt, Lis Beyer, Lucia Moholy, Kattina Both.

Pia Rönicke utilise l'assemblage comme medium et prolonge ainsi la tradition du montage Dada. Des travellings animés plus anciens, à la re-création d'objets design récents, l'artiste revisite notre histoire moderne. Chacun de ses projets associe textes, mise en scène spatiale, production d'objets, films et révèle sa fascination pour l'utopie moderniste tout en soulignant son caractère désenchanté. "Dream and Action find Equal Support in It" transforme l'espace de la mémoire, celle des avant gardes du XXème siècle, en un espace physique d'exposition, scénographié, que nous parcourons et dans lequel des oeuvres communiquent entre elles. A travers un hommage à l'oeuvre d'Eileen Grey Pia Rönicke met en lumière toutes ces images réalisées par des femmes, artistes ou designers dans les années 20, interrogeant les raisons pour lesquelles elle sont souvent restées dans l'ombre. Au delà du rapport homme femme dans une époque déterminée, Pia Rönicke questionne la pratique artistique aujourd'hui et son rapport à la société.

Un livre d'artiste, intitulé *From eclecticism to doubt. Invitation au voyage*, édité à 75 exemplaires a été réalisé pour ce projet.

Actualités

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