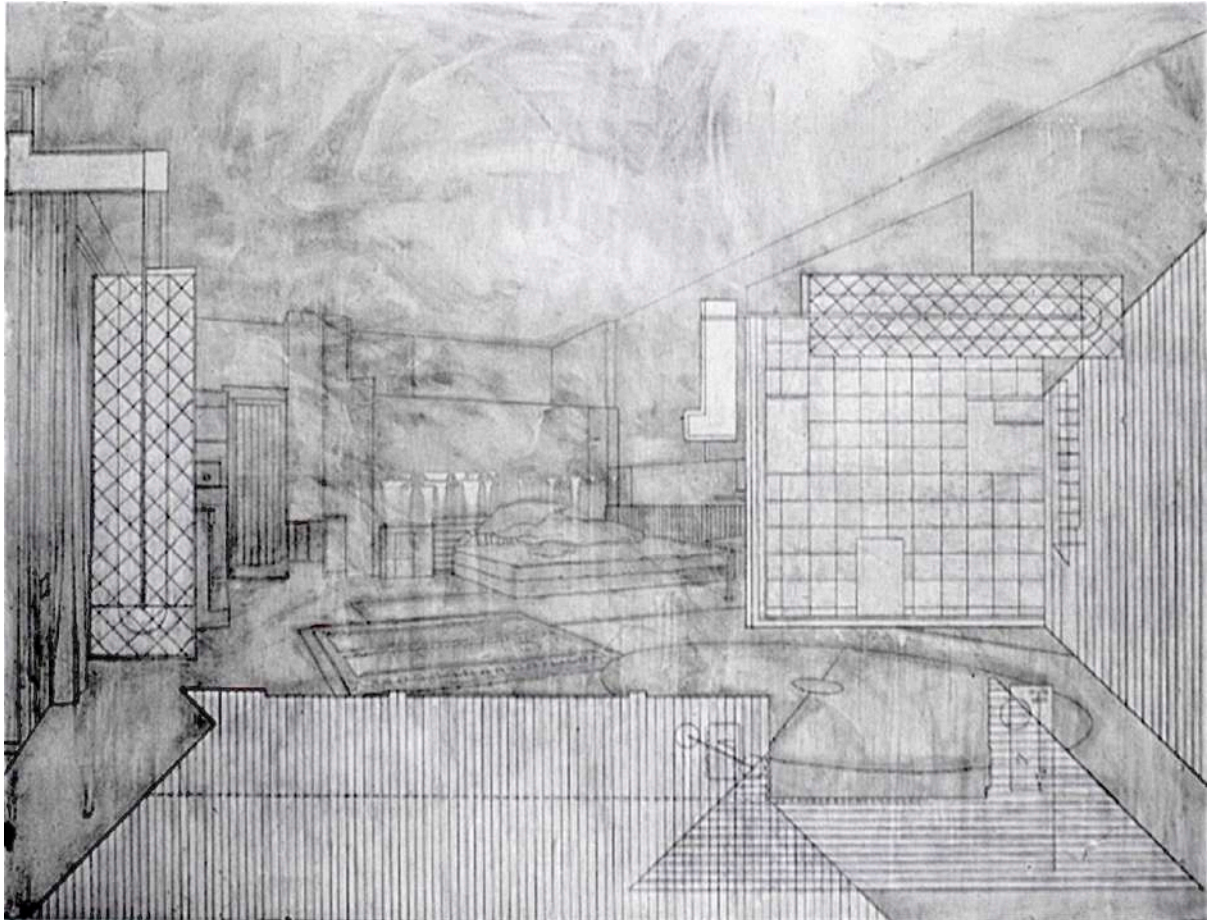


The 21st Century - 2002

Oil Painting Class with Sadie Murdoch

Hey Art class, in the second part of “The 21st Century”, I’m going to talk to you about an exhibition which was a turning point for me in the way I thought about painting.

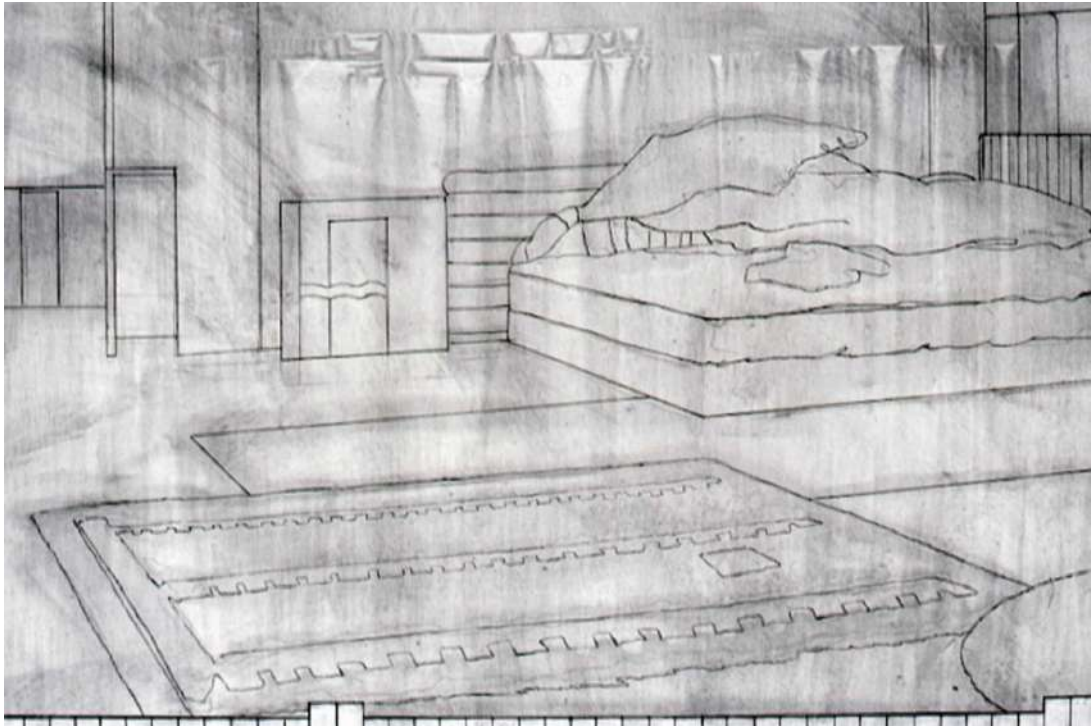


Sadie Murdoch, ink, detergent and housepaint on canvas, 2002

This painting from 2002 was one of two shown in a solo show which I called “The Harsh Law of Spacing” (2002), which comprised two separate but related bodies of work, installed at the Henry Peacock Gallery and domobaal contemporary art, both in London. It was about the architectural language and interior space of Eileen Gray’s fantastic modernist villa – “E-1027”.

The painting was made by making a line drawing - a kind of diagram - on acetate of the interior of Gray’s villa from an archival photograph, and including a kind of linear overlay of what is known in architectural language as a kind of ‘plan’ or ariel view. The plans were architectural drawings by Gray and Swiss architect and arch modernist, Le Corbusier. This line drawing was projected onto the surface of a large blank white canvas, about 2 x1.5 metres, by using an overhead projector. Black ink was then poured and wiped onto the surface of the picture. As in earlier work, I was both adding and ‘cleaning away’ the image at the same time. This is a detail, so you

get an idea of the surface texture:



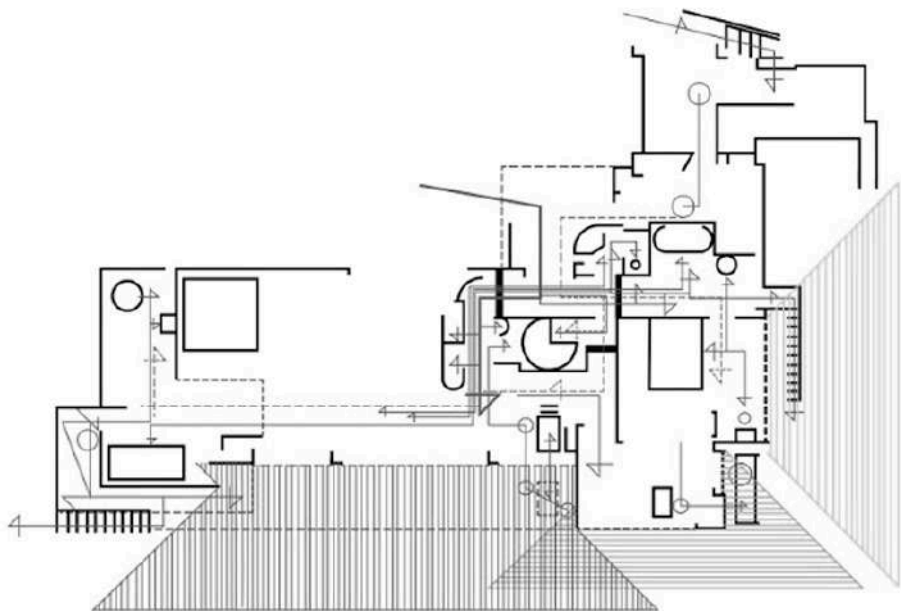
Eileen Gray was an Irish architect and interior designer who until recently was relatively unknown. She designed some amazing lacquered modernist screens before moving into architecture, furniture and interior design. From 1926-1929 she designed and helped in the construction of her now iconic house by the sea which she named E-1027. Perched on the edge of the Mediterranean in the South of France near Monaco, in a town called Roquebrune St Martin, the building was a 'love letter' to Hungarian architect Jean Badovici. The plan diagrams are of the house as Gray intended it, and also some of a house just outside Paris, designed by Le Corbusier, and called the Villa Savoye. It was built shortly after, from 1929-1931.

Eileen Gray & Jean Badovici, *E1027*, 1926 - setting, view from the sea

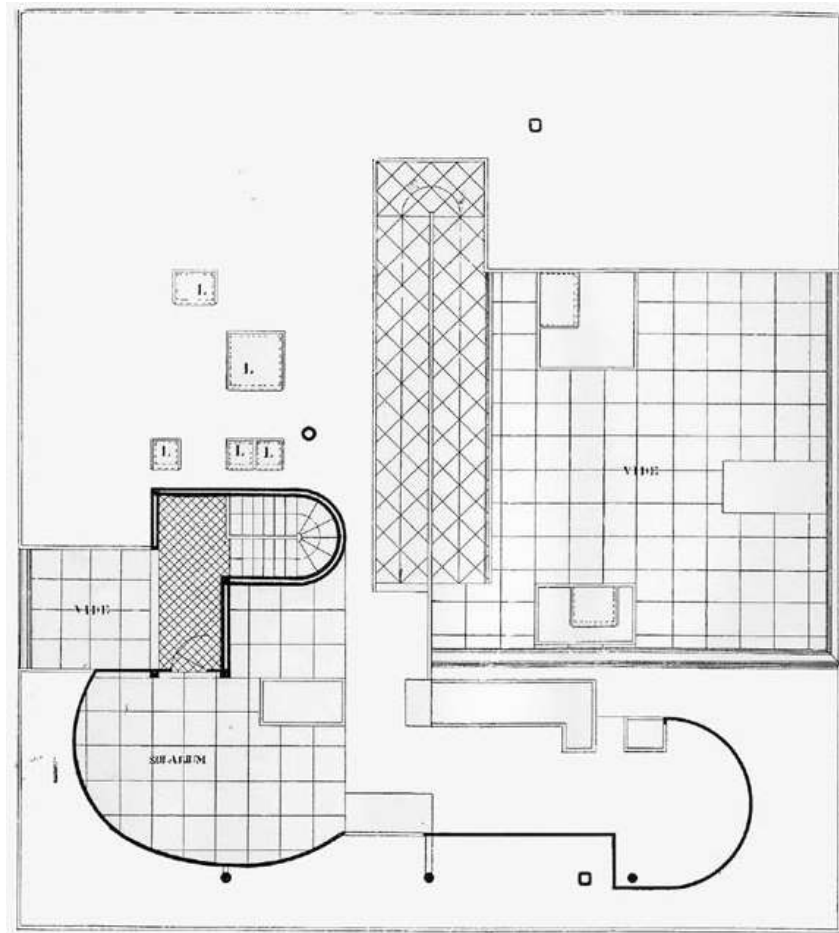




Interior of E-1027.1929



Plan of E-1027 by Eileen Gray



Plan of Villa Savoye by Le Corbusier



Exterior of E-1027 in 2002.

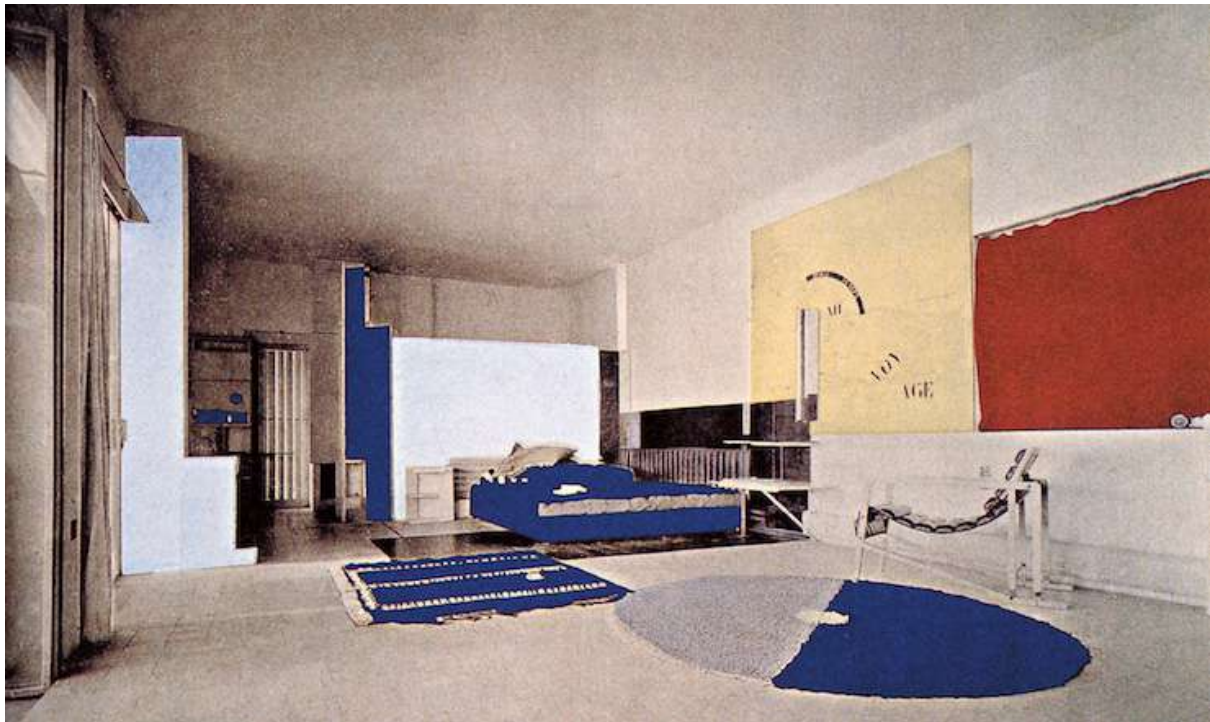
The name of the building was a code: Gray's initials frame, or if you like 'embrace' his; E for Eileen, then number seven for G, the seventh letter in the alphabet and then 10 for J, 2 for B and 7 for G. So, we can see that E.10.2.7 reads as E J B G.



Exterior of E-1027 in 2002.

I took these two pictures when I went to visit the house with my Mum in 2002. E-1027 was in a rather dilapidated state. The building is made of reinforced concrete and stands on pillars facing the Mediterranean, with an amazing view of the sea. It was a bit of a pilgrimage, and also quite hard to arrange; the villa had been squatted since the last owner to live there had abandoned it. I managed to persuade the local architect who was looking after the building to show me and my Mum around.

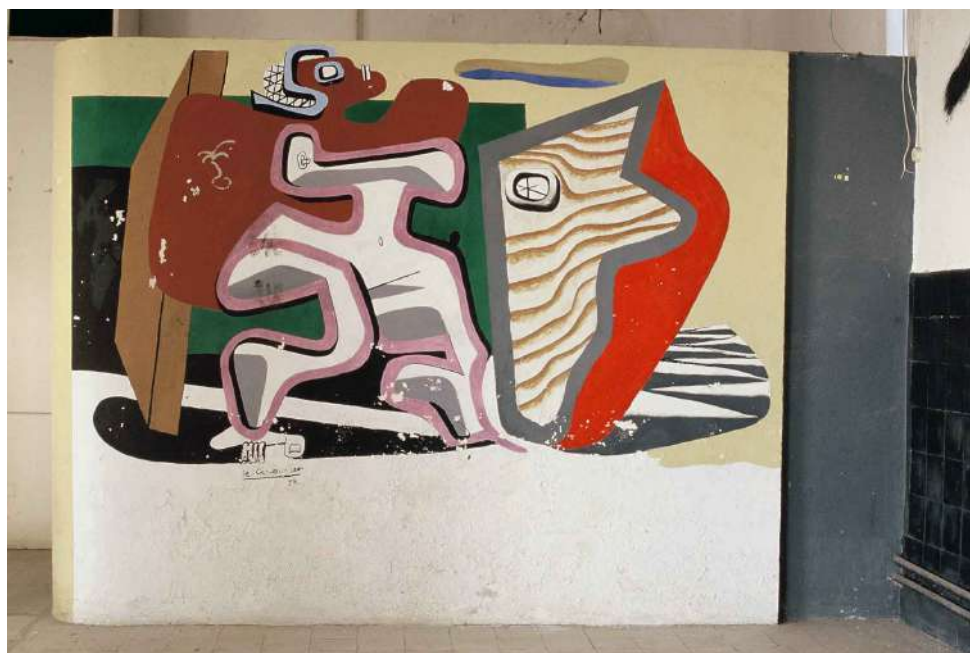
There was an interesting story attached to the building...! Gray and Badovici lived together in E-1027, and the house rapidly gained a reputation for being an outstanding representation of the Modernist "International Style". Gray designed all the furniture, carpets, fixtures and fittings. This photo shows the interior as she intended the decor to look. It is a black and white photograph that has been 'tinted' or coloured in. It is rather lovely. Who wouldn't want to live in a room like that?



Interior of E-1027. Tinted photograph.

Badovici was also a friend and colleague of Le Corbusier, and one summer he invited Le Corbusier to stay. Le Corbusier took it upon himself to cover many of the white walls of E-1027 with brightly coloured murals. When Gray discovered this, she was furious. Le Corbusier was unapologetic. Gray saw the murals as an act of vandalism, and was particularly affronted by the mural etched into the underside of the villa which allegedly depicts Gray and Badovici together.

Here are some of the murals, which I photographed on my visit..





Interior of E-1027 in 2002.



Exterior of E-1027 in 2002.

In the end, the house was left to Badovici to do what he wanted with; it was the end of their relationship. Badovici died in 1956. End of story? - no! Le Corbusier developed a strange obsession with E-1027. He designed and built a row of holiday chalets and a little wooden cabin to overlook it, and he was a regular visitor to the site. He drowned in the sea outside the villa in 1965, the year I was born, and the site is now administered by the Foundation Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye in Poissy in France was designed and built just after the completion of E-1027 and bears some striking similarities. My exhibition attempted to link the two buildings...



Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye in Poissy, France. Construction 1929-1931



I visited the Villa Savoye, as you can see in this photograph - lounging on the chaise long that Le Corbusier co-designed with Charlotte Perriand.

E-1027 became something of a contested place. Should the villa be restored to how it was when Gray completed it or should Le Corbusier's 'interventions' be preserved?' Eventually a compromise was reached which you can read about here: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/02/eileen-gray-e1027-villa-cote-dazur-reopens-lost-legend-le-corbusier>

But let's quickly backtrack. In 1940, during the second world war, France was invaded by Germany. The building was abandoned by Badovici and Le Corbusier, and the occupying army used E-1027 as a naval look-out post. To while away the time, the soldiers used one of Le Corbusier's murals for target practice. Damage from artillery fire can still be seen on the exterior of the building..

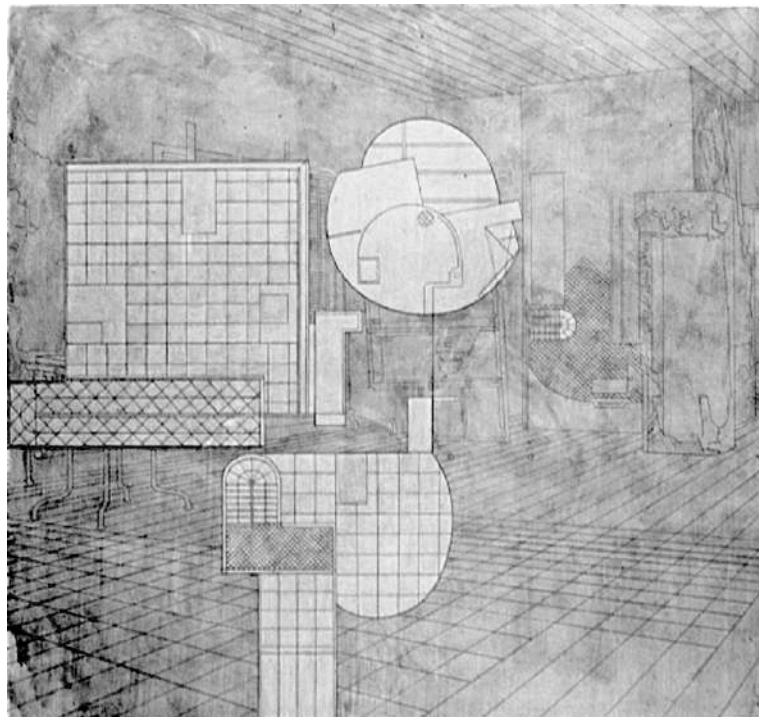


Exterior of E-1027 in 2002.

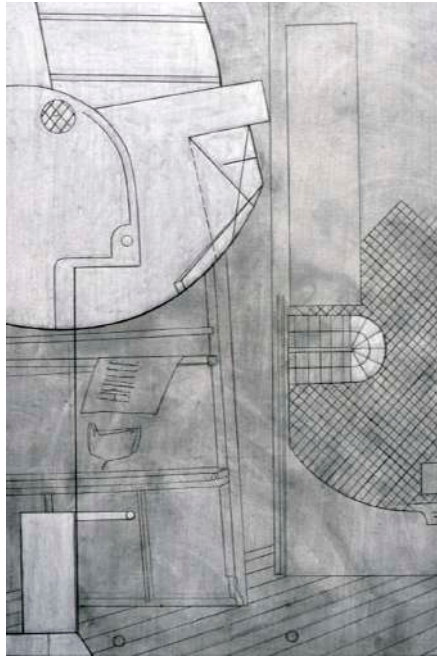
After the war E-1027 was bought by a woman called Madame Schelbert who was under the impression that she was purchasing a Le Corbusier villa. The murals were restored but Gray's furniture remained. When I went to see it the interior really affected me - it was very haunting in a way - and I took these photos, one of which I used to make a second painting:



The painting below included an architectural plan - another 'ariel view' of Le Corbusier Villa's Savoye built just after Gray's building was completed. I was thinking about how the two buildings were separate but related, but - why did Le Corbusier deliberately 'deface' Gray's building.?



Sadie Murdoch, ink, detergent and housepaint on canvas, 2002

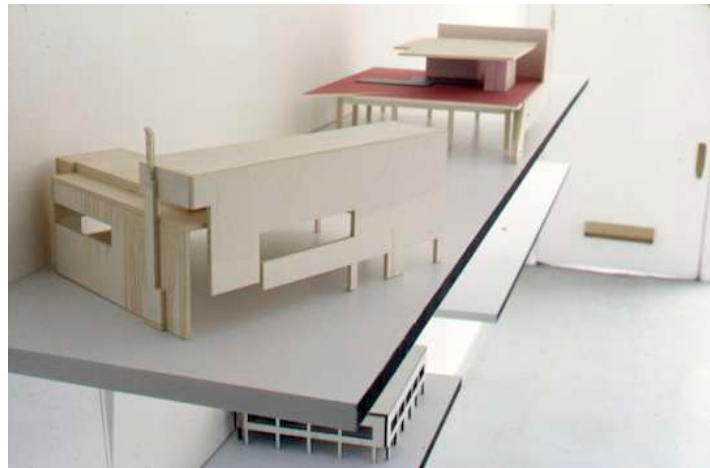


Sadie Murdoch, ink, detergent and housepaint on canvas, detail. 2002

The two grey paintings were exhibited in domobaal contemporary gallery, an exhibition space painted entirely in grey in a Georgian house on John Street, near Holborn. Over in Foley St in the Henry Peacock gallery, in a much smaller space, a converted shop, I exhibited some some sculptures that looked like architectural models (maquettes).



The Harsh Law of Spacing, Installation View, Henry Peacock Gallery. 2002



The Harsh Law of Spacing, Installation View, Henry Peacock Gallery. 2002

They were made from Fome-board and construction board, that had been painted with drips and stains of bright colour, and were based on E1027 and Villa Savoye. I placed them on shelves I had made, that looked like black lines drawn on the wall.



The Harsh Law of Spacing, Installation View, Henry Peacock Gallery. 2002

They look a bit forlorn and abandoned, like E1027 when I encountered it. And also incomplete, as if they were under construction, like stories waiting to be finished...

Next time I'll pick up where we have ended here, and show you what happened next!