

Maison en Bord de Mer
by Yuki Higashino

How do you bring a lemon tree from the south of France to Montréal? You either photograph it or build a greenhouse so the plant can survive the Québécois winter. This is not an idle question. It touches upon our fundamental human nature to covet things from elsewhere: the unfamiliar, the profitable, the romantic, or simply better weather. The impulse drove the construction of botanical gardens, the invention of photography and the development of botany and zoology. Enabled by the industrial revolution, modern chemistry, transportation and construction techniques, it in turn spawned modern architecture, various imaging technologies and much of what we recognize as modernity. They enable Lorna Bauer to make her works.

Her pieces shown here revolve around the house known as E-1027, the long-neglected modernist masterpiece in southeastern France designed by Eileen Gray in the late 1920s. The nucleus of the exhibition is the photographs Bauer took in 2017 during her visit to the house (then yet to be fully restored), presented here as darkroom-developed analogue prints. Rather than straight architectural photography, they are fragmented and personal, showcasing the ability of a camera, held by a photographer, to inhabit a space and capture its mood. They are shown along with more recent images—for instance, of a spider in its nest. Is the common thread the construction of a dwelling?

From these pictures, Bauer embarked on her exploration of the material condition photography and modernist architecture share: the industrial production of glass. From the dual development of mass fabrication glass and iron-frame construction emerged glasshouses in botanical gardens—the precursor to modern architecture's embrace of floor-to-ceiling windows. The same industrial process that manufactured consistently flat, smooth and clear glass also enabled the development of early photography, making possible the production of glass negatives. With these two strands of history in the background, Bauer's glass sculptures and reliefs exist in the space between photography and architecture. The relief works bridge these two poles.

Works like *A House is Not a Machine* are made reflective by application of silver nitrate, which is a light sensitive substance also used in black and white photography. The ensuing gleam is reminiscent of Eileen Gray's chrome furniture, especially the chromed-framed mirror featured in E-1027. The relief forms were generated by placing window glass on a plaster mold and firing it in a kiln, fixing the shapes of the mold onto the glass. This is essentially the principle of the photogram applied to glass. Some of the photographs are embedded in these mirrored reliefs, blurring the distinction between the pictures and the actual surrounding reflected.

The hues of the colored glass pieces were achieved using the process developed for medieval stained glass, which involves painting the glass with silver compounds and then firing them. Again, the silver nods to both photography and architecture at once.

And there is the lemon-shaped glass sculpture, its brilliant yellow reached through silver. The lemon motif comes from the lemon trees that surround E-1027. In this work, the building of a greenhouse to bring tropical plants such as the lemon tree to the north and the photographing of the fruits growing around Gray's house for memory's sake, are condensed into a single work of art. The fragility of this delicate glass object rhymes with the sensitive chemical processes involved in making photography, with the position of a female architect whose achievements were contested again and again, and with memory itself—whose fragility both photography and the writing of history aim to counter.