

Award-winning Irish filmmaker, Mary McGuckian, knows the French Riviera well. She also knows the struggles of being a woman in a male-dominated industry, which helped her identify with the protagonist of her film in 'The Price of Desire,' the story of the trail-blazing Irish architect Eileen Gray and her innovative villa E-1027 in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin. At a time when women could not own their own house, Eileen defied norms but never achieved the recognition she deserved for her postmodern masterpiece.



Irish filmmaker Mary McGuckian © D.R.

Meet the filmmaker

Mary McGuckian

By KIMBERLEY MANNION

RI: Where did you first learn about Eileen Gray?

MM: I first became aware of Eileen Gray's architecture when I was an engineering student in Ireland. She has a legacy that got so lost that it was only in various small circles that people tried to lift her out of obscurity. Her career was so long and spanned so many areas that there were people aware of her, and every ten years or so there were efforts to revive her legacy. Even in the 80s and 90s there were Irish architects trying to make people aware of the sad state of the E-1027 villa, but people didn't really understand the importance of it. The history of who owned the house and restoration work has been so murky over the years and got caught up in so much bureaucracy, that the film proposal was welcomed as a way to kickstart it. We came to an agreement that in turn for using the house and filming in it, we would do certain restoration work and provide certain furnishings, so we had to raise a separate fund for that. The villa* was then taken over by what is now Cap Moderne, which ends in a year.

Where did the idea for a film about Eileen Gray and the E-1027 villa come from?

There were murmurings in Ireland that it was time to start creating more films about women, particularly from the Irish Film Board. And for personal reasons which actually connected with Eileen's story, so that sparked my interest. Eileen Gray's story is more interesting as the physical loss of the house mirrored by the metaphorical loss of her intellectual property as its architect. It was lovely to work on and I hope the essence of her came through. She had a great sense of Irish spirit and she had that Irish humour.

What do you hope people take away from 'The Price of Desire'?

What was most interesting to me about the film and was probably subtle at the time, was the universal theme of chipping away

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at a woman's career: at her ideas, her right to be recognised, the establishment that did not embrace her. No one big injustice was committed against her, but so many little knocks across a lifetime that by the end of her life she really wasn't recognised at all, so the career she should have had did not emerge. She was what I call the three M's: Maverick, Marginal and Minority, which are also often used to describe female filmmakers. It is a pretty universal theme for trailblazers in male dominated careers.

How was the reaction to the film?

Unfortunately, cinemas saw it as a niche film rather than an opportunity to tell a story with a more universal impact. I think most people who came to see it knew who Eileen Gray was already. It came out before the #MeToo movement, so it didn't have the impact it could or should have.

Cap Moderne's curation ends this year. How do you see the future of Eileen Gray's legacy?

At the moment, Eileen Gray does not have a foundation working on her legacy and it would be great to see one set up post-Cap Moderne. It's particularly important in the current climate that work is done from the female perspective and not the male gaze. ▀

*The Price of Desire is available on Apple TV, Amazon Prime and On-Demand.

*Villa E-1027 has been fully restored to its original 1929 state and is open for visits. See page 45.