





Prahlad Bubbar

INDORE

The Project of a Modern Vision  
1929-35

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## The Project of a Modern Vision

### 1929-35

India's greatest collector of the avant-garde of the 20th century, Yeshwant Rao II Holkar, Maharaja of Indore attracted the great minds of his day. He was educated at Oxford and travelled to Paris and New York, where he met the most discerning dealers, artists and designers of his time. His sophisticated taste was backed with great intuition and a keen eye for the extraordinary.

Manik Bagh, his palace in Indore, is perhaps the greatest testament to this unique figure in Indian culture. Designed by the German architect Eckart Muthesius, it was filled with some of the best examples of modern art and design of its time, including sculptures by Constantin Brancusi and design pieces by Muthesius, Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann and Eileen Gray. For the palace interior, the architect collected examples by European masters such as Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier, Charlotte Perriand, and Emile-Jacques Ruhlmann in addition to his own work. Manik Bagh was completed after several years, emerging as a locus of design at the transitional moment when the sumptuous surface decoration that typified the 1920s was being propelled toward simple, functional forms made of industrial materials as exemplified by the Bauhaus movement. Particularly avant-garde for India, the grand yet intimate palace, was a landmark of burgeoning modernism.

Between 1929 and 1933, while in Paris, the Maharaja of Indore commissioned two portraits of himself, and two of his wife, the Maharani Shrimant Akhand Sahib Soubhagyavati Sanyogita Bai Holkar, from one of the pioneers of Art Deco, the French artist Bernard Boutet de Monvel (1881-1949). De Monvel was renowned for his etchings and oil paintings, in which he combined a stylised use of line and colour with a modern sense of composition. His portraits became the iconic representations of the distinguished society of his time, with the sitters being depicted in stylish poses and beautiful attire. The artist had been recommended to the Maharaja by Henry-Pierre Roché, the French author who was also one of the most important art dealers of the time.



Reference Image: Bernard Boutet de Monvel.  
*HH The Maharaja of Indore in traditional Maratha dress. 1933-34. Oil on canvas.*







## I. BERNARD BOUTET DE MONVEL

### Study for the Portrait of the Maharaja of Indore in traditional Maratha dress

1929-34  
Graphite on paper  
37 x 37.5 cm

Exhibited:  
‘Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930’,  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,  
26 September 2019 - 12 January 2020.

Boutet de Monvel produced several studies for the two portraits that he painted of the Maharaja of Indore, as well as for the two accompanying portraits of the Maharani Sanyogita Devi. These preparatory sketches, executed on tracing or drawing paper, are exemplary of the great skills of de Monvel as draftsman. The line is confident and expressive, while at the same time being consummately refined and precise. Particular attention is given to the studies of hands, where de Movel experimented with slightly different positions, and display a modern and expressive stylisation of form.

The Maharaja is depicted in the traditional costume of the Maratha, the Indian group of casts famed for being warriors that resided in different princely states such as Indore. Here, the Maharaja is seated occupying the very centre of the drawing, looking straight into the eyes of the viewer. The serene and stately pose reflects the strict geometry of the composition, and the hands of the Maharaja, while in a resting pose, are painted expressively, including a third hand study drawn as if floating on the page.

Through his intimate knowledge, as a sculptor, of the complexity and articulation of the human body, de Monvel balances the solid volumes needed to portray a great and noble personage with the delicate touches that reveal the humanity and artistic instinct that so characterised the Maharaja.

## 2. BERNARD BOUTET DE MONVEL

### Study for the Portrait of the Maharani of Indore in Western evening dress

1929-34

Graphite on paper

65 x 43 cm

Exhibited:

‘Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930’,  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,  
26 September 2019 - 12 January 2020.

This delicate study for the portrait of the Maharani of Indore exemplifies the gradual process through which Boutet de Monvel gradually developed and revealed the portraits of his illustrious subjects. Here, the complicated folds and pleats of the skirt in the Maharani's dress are balanced against the subtle lightness of the bodice. His approach is intimate, yet ennobling and subtle shading is punctuated with bolder points of emphasis to create dynamic torsion and dimensionality.

Beyond the exquisite drapery of the dress, with its multiple pleats and gatherings, which emphasize the elegant and elongated figure of the Maharani, as well as the diagonal folds at the waist, generating volume and complexity, is the refined revelation of the torso, its outline hinted at rather than developed. The slender arms are held in a graceful and engaging pose, the proper right held outwards, and the left bent at the elbow and extending past a series of bracelets to the delicate hand, holding against a support element behind the figure.

What is immediately obvious from the rendering of this remarkable study is de Monvel's affinity for the sculptural – he was a sculptor as much as he was a painter – as the human form begins to appear from behind the costuming. The neck of the Maharani emerges from the upper chest as an impossibly refined extension of the body and, through the subtle articulation of the inner elbows, the reclining posture of the body is implied. At the lower end of the drawing, her two feet, held within ballerina-like footwear, appear close together as right foot crosses over the left and one can almost see the bend of the leg that produced this pose.



*“..simplicity and streamlining of form are underlined both by  
great elegance and by a spirit of essence and truth.”*



# ECKART MUTHESIUS

## A Series of Watercolours and Studies by Eckart Muthesius for Prince Yeshwant Rao Holkar Bahadur, the Maharaja of Indore

After meeting the German architect Eckart Muthesius, the son of the renowned architect Hermann Muthesius, while studying at Oxford in the late 1920s, the Maharaja of Indore and Muthesius formed a strong friendship and a bond through their shared passion for the European avant-garde. Muthesius had become fascinated by the new International Style of architecture and his progressive designs, with their minimalist elegance and progressive approach to volume and line, captivated the Maharaja.

He had begun to develop a network of like-minded visionaries in the fields of art, architecture, and fashion. Foremost among his European connections was the German architect Eckart Muthesius, whom he had befriended while studying at Oxford in the 1920s. The son of the renowned architect Hermann Muthesius, the younger Muthesius was enmeshed in the progressive architecture and design of his father's generation and captivated by the budding International Style architecture of his own. The Maharaja and the architect shared a similar frame of reference and affinity for the European avant-garde.

In 1929, the Maharaja asked Muthesius to design for him the palace “Manik Bagh” in Indore, the city of his birth and heritage. After 4 years of construction, the palace became a masterpiece of art as Muthesius integrated the palace with his own modern furniture designs as well as those of the designers of the day: Eileen Gray, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (known as Le Corbusier), Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, Louis Sognot, Charlotte Perriand and René Herbst as well as carpets by Ivan da Silva Bruhns.

In preparation for the completion of the palace, Muthesius produced a series of remarkable sketches of rooms, furniture, and fittings for the palace as well as for other projects such as the building of a barge for the Maharaja (1934) and for a sumptuous reception hall to be built in Indore (ca. 1935). The sketches are sublime insights into the design philosophy that united Muthesius and the Maharaja: simplicity and streamlining of form are underlined both by great elegance and by a spirit of essence and truth. Lamps are designed as vessels of light and unencumbered by excessive decoration while rooms and internal spaces in the palace are a considered integration of natural components and graceful lines.







### 3. ECKART MUTHESIUS

#### The Living Room at Manik Bagh

Circa 1929  
Watercolour on paper  
32 x 43.5 cm

Published: Billé, Raphaële, and Louise Curtis. *Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930*. Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 2019, p.134.

Exhibited:  
‘Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930’,  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,  
26 September 2019 - 12 January 2020.

In this exquisite drawing, Muthesius has used perspective and chromatic tonality to highlight the elegant comfort of the living room in Manik Bagh. Simple lines dominate the design of the built-in chaise whose terracotta tones are balanced against colourfully patterned cushions. A tiered circular table and masculine armchair are the only other elements that decorate the centre of the room while a built-in sideboard accommodates the L-shape of the corner and a section of a modernist carpet, possibly by Ivan da Silva Bruhns appears in the foreground.





#### 4. ECKART MUTHESIUS

##### Four Drawings of Lamps Designed for Manik Bagh Palace in Indore

###### A. Floor Lamp for the Entrance Hall of the Palace

1930

Pencil and gouache on paper

35.3 x 23 cm

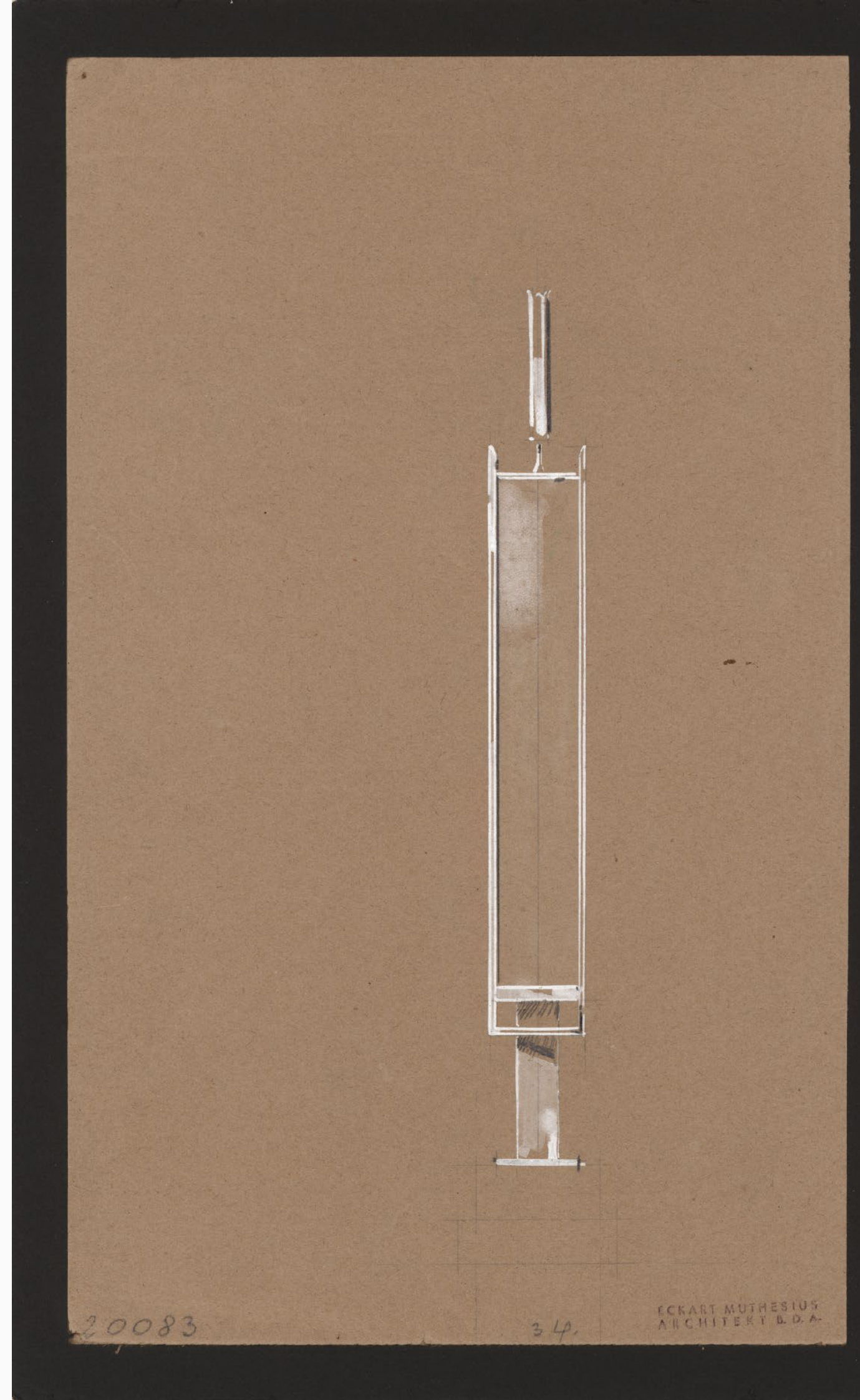
This exquisite drawing illustrates one of the pair of floor lamps made for the Maharaja's palace. Executed in alpaca, a silver alloy with a distinctive muted surface, the unique pair of standing lamps featured as luminous sentinels in the entrance hall. Emphasizing verticality and purity of line, like many of the designs for the palace, the lamp also balances the lightness of its materials and the opaqueness of its glass components.

Although not illustrated in the drawing, the lamp was placed on a black lacquered wooden rectangular block base; this material highlighted the muted elegance of the alpaca silver structure and, even further, the opaqueness of the white frosted glass panels that featured on the square section column of the lamp. The metal parts of these lamps were made by Otto Frieske in Berlin in 1930; the lighting elements were made by the Max Krüger Studio in Berlin-Halensee, which later produced models for the Bauhaus.

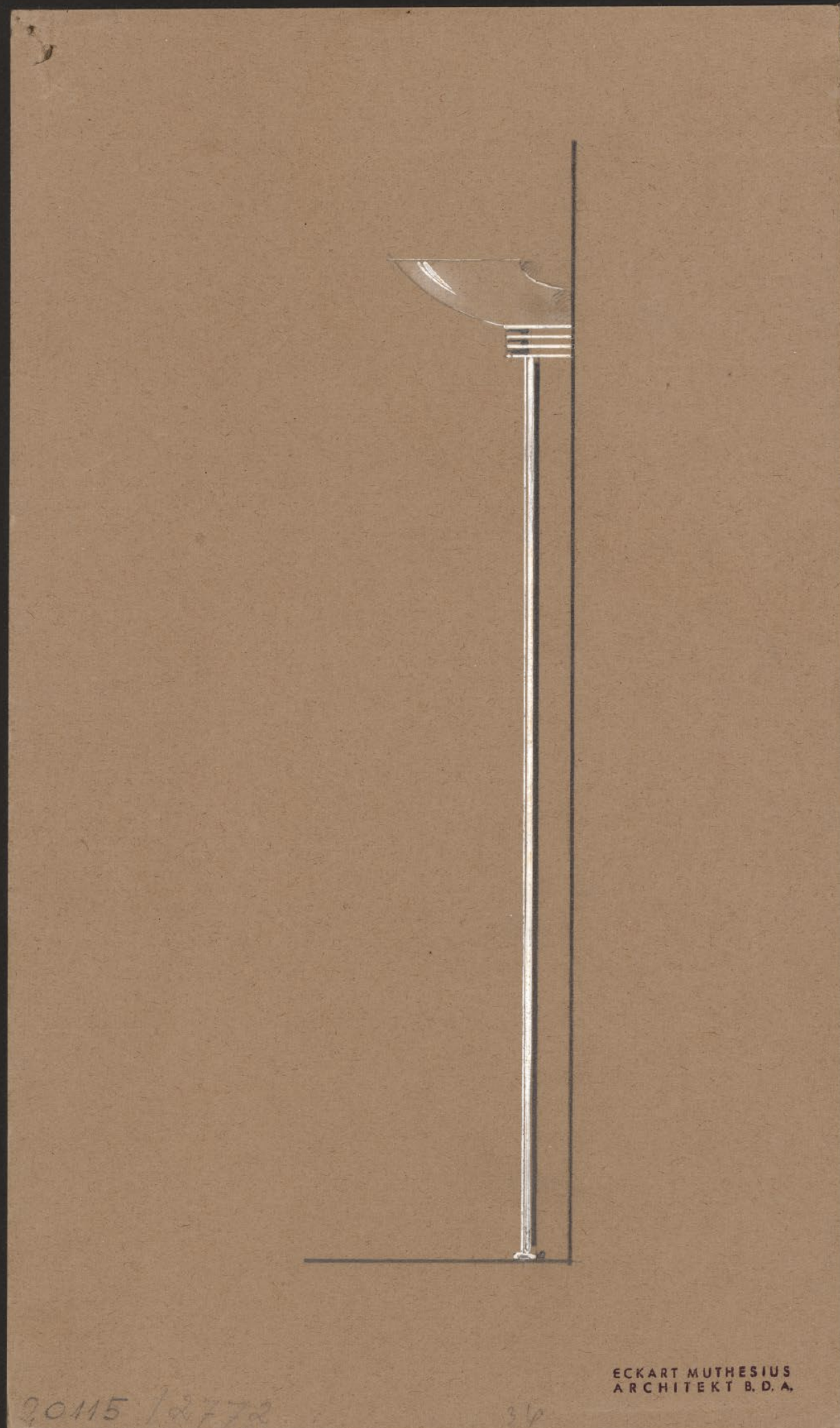
In this delicate illustration, one senses Muthesius is accessing the ethereal quality of something placed between heaven and earth, a beacon as much as a stellar entity. With great precision and precise application of white (silver) gouache, he manages to acknowledge the strength of materials as well as its lightness.

After the Maharaja's death in 1956, his widow, children and heirs maintained the spirit of the Palace till it was eventually sold and much of the furniture found its way to auction in a historic sale in Monte Carlo in 1980, among which were the exceptional lights by Muthesius presented here. One of this pair of lamps was famously collected by Yves Saint Laurent and subsequently sold at auction in 2009.

The drawing is inscribed on lower left '20083' and, on centre and lower right '34.' and with the studio stamp 'ECKART MUTHESIUS. ARCHITEKT B.D.A.'







## B. Floor Lamp for the Palace's Banquet Hall

1930

Pencil and gouache on paper

36 x 22 cm

This study for a floor lamp for Manik Bagh again illustrates the great care and delicacy with which Muthesius wanted to emphasize lightness, purity, and elegance in his designs for the palace. The lamp depicted is a blueprint for one of the three pairs of lamps that occupied three walls of the magnificent banquet hall, each pair flanking one of the three superb stained American sycamore, walnut, and alpaca silver sideboards, also designed for Muthesius.

On one of the walls of the banqueting hall and flanking a pair of these floor lamps were two of Constantin Brancusi's famed 'Bird in Space' sculptures, one in white marble and the other one in black. Together with these sculptures, the lamps guided the viewer's eyes upwards, towards the firmament and the spiritual. With their long, slender stems, the lamps would have appeared bird-like as well as they ascended to the modernist inverted shades that contained the light source. Below the shade, a curved element with tripartite extensions would have allowed the lamp, along with the flat back edge of the shade, to rest flat against the wall.

The drawing is inscribed on lower left '20115/2772' and, on centre and lower right '36.' and with the studio stamp 'ECKART MUTHESIUS. ARCHITEKT B.D.A.'



## C. Wall Lamp for Dr Hardy's Study at Manik Bagh

1930

Pencil and gouache on paper

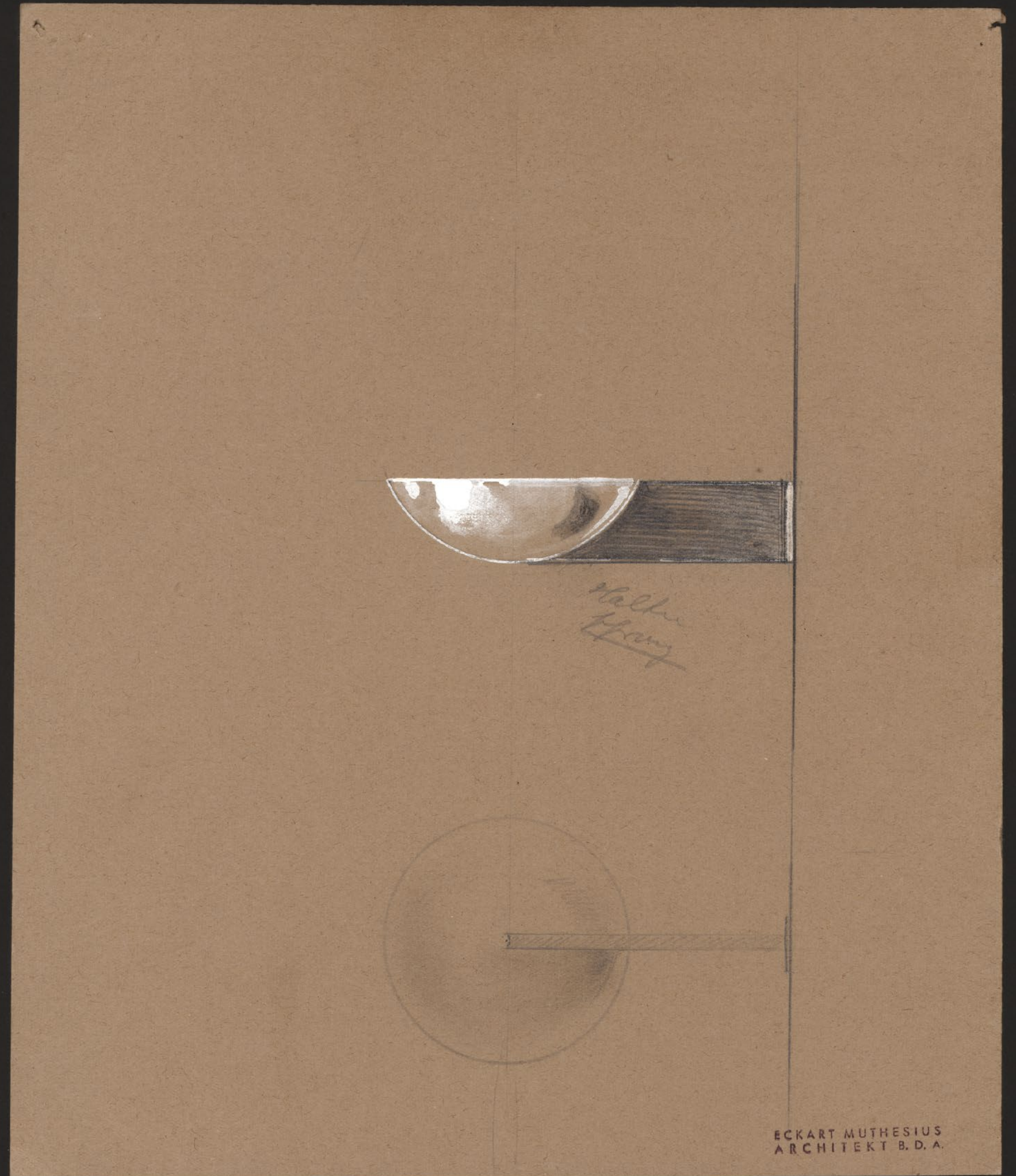
32 x 27 cm

This wonderful drawing by Eckart Muthesius illustrates one of the wall sconces designed for the Manik Bagh palace in Indore. The sconce was one of a set of the lighting fixtures designed for the study of Dr Marcel Hardy within the palace, as an early photograph of the interiors of the palace attests to.

During the 1920s, the Maharaja was sent to study at Oxford, where a Belgian French-speaking private tutor, Dr Marcel Hardy, introduced him to the cultural milieu of European modern artists. Under the guidance of Dr Hardy, who became his personal secretary, the Maharaja met two figures who would become instrumental in his artistic pursuits: the German modern architect Eckart Muthesius and French artistic advisor and writer Henri-Pierre Roché, both of whom were closely linked to the avant-garde. Together, they visited England, Germany, and France, exploring art fairs, museum exhibitions, galleries, and artist's workshops, rousing in Holkar II a passion for Modern Art.

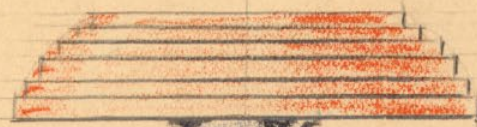
The wall sconce is pure simplicity as the illustration shows a semi-spherical bowl in Alpaca silver from which a rectangular extension in black lacquered metal with sharply defined edges extends for attachment to a wall. The drawing delicately displays, through shading and highlights, the luminescent quality of the silver bowl set against the darkened metal. An inscription in Muthesius's handwriting describing the lamp can be seen underneath. A further drawing of the same sconce can be seen below, in lighter shade, and depicting the same lamp as seen from below so that the point of attachment to the extension can be clearly seen.

The drawing is stamped on the lower right with the studio stamp 'ECKART MUTHESIUS. ARCHITEKT B.D.A.'





Pos. 20 Sitting room



Ausführung:  
Neusilber (Weissbronze)  
teils farbig Spritzlack  
f. 5 Lampen

ECKART MUTHESIUS  
ARCHITEKT B.D.A.

## D. Floor Lamp for the 'Chambre d'Amis' at the Palace

1930

Pencil, coloured pencil, and gouache on paper  
31.5 x 23 cm

In this remarkable drawing by Muthesius, we observe one of the lamp designs that he created for the Manik Bagh palace in Indore. Although the drawing is inscribed 'Pos. 20 Sitting Room', it is likely that the final location of the lamp was altered as the full set of furnishings and accessories for the palace was reconciled. Historical photographs place the location of the lamp within the Guest Room (Chambre d'Amis), where it graces a corner to the side of the bed. Although the shade of the lamp is of domed form, the ingenious design with an opening at the top of the curving dome allowed the lamp to illuminate both downwards and upwards, so that it functioned as a torchière as much as a reading lamp.

The supreme elegance of the lamp is evident as we see a tapering stem emerge from a disc-like base and taper gradually through the middle before reaching the element that holds the light source. In effect, the design contains much of the naturalistic and organic philosophy that Muthesius and the Maharaja accorded to the palace, and the lamp takes on the aspect of a flower.

As the lamp stand flares, it gradually merges visually with the dome, underneath which it contains the electrical bulb to activate it. The shade, which Muthesius has here coloured by hand in rich ochre tones to represent its chromatic accents, is a tiered design where the dome is set into gradual circular segments that taper as they rise to the horizontal edge at the top.

To the lower right of the lamp, an inscription can be observed 'Ausführung: Neusilber (Weissbronze) teils farbig spritzlack f. 5 lampen (trans: New silver version (White bronze) partly coloured spray lacquer for 5 lamps).

The drawing is stamped on the lower right with the studio stamp 'ECKART MUTHESIUS. ARCHITEKT B.D.A.'







## 5. ECKART MUTHESIUS

### Inner Courtyard of the Palace

Circa 1929-30  
Watercolour on paper  
41.5 x 57.5 cm

Published: Billé, Raphaële, and Louise Curtis. *Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930*. Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 2019, pp.78-9.

Exhibited:  
‘Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930’,  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,  
26 September 2019 - 12 January 2020.

This drawing shows one of the Manik Bagh palace’s inner courtyards from a corner perspective. The elegance of materials is highlighted by the gleaming marble floor tiles as they interact with the gentle rays of sun entering the composition. The chromatic of foliage, lawn, and a slanted roof balance the pure white colour of the internal architecture; both highlight the architectural focus on purity of design and lightness of spirit.



*“..simplicity and streamlining of form are underlined both by  
great elegance and by a spirit of essence and truth.”*







## 6. ECKART MUTHESIUS AND TRUDE REIN

### Reception Hall in Indore

Circa 1935  
Gouache on paper  
58.8 x 67.5 cm

This remarkable drawing, the preliminary sketch for an elegant reception hall, came about from the collaboration between Muthesius and the renowned German fashion illustrator Trude Rein, a professor at the Textile-und-Modenschule in Berlin who also collaborated with numerous fashion magazines, manufacturers, and newspapers.

In this image, her delicate rendering of traditional Indian men's clothing serves as counterpoint to the stark, clean lines of Muthesius interior. The height of the ceiling, dramatic columnar wall features and gleaming coils of the floor tiling project the grandeur of a room dedicated for audiences with the Maharaja within the venue. A long red carpet leads the eye from the frontal edge of the drawing to the seated Maharaja, wearing a Holkar-cut turban and highlighted by streaming light, as spear-holding guards, attendants, and guests wait upon his attention and demands.

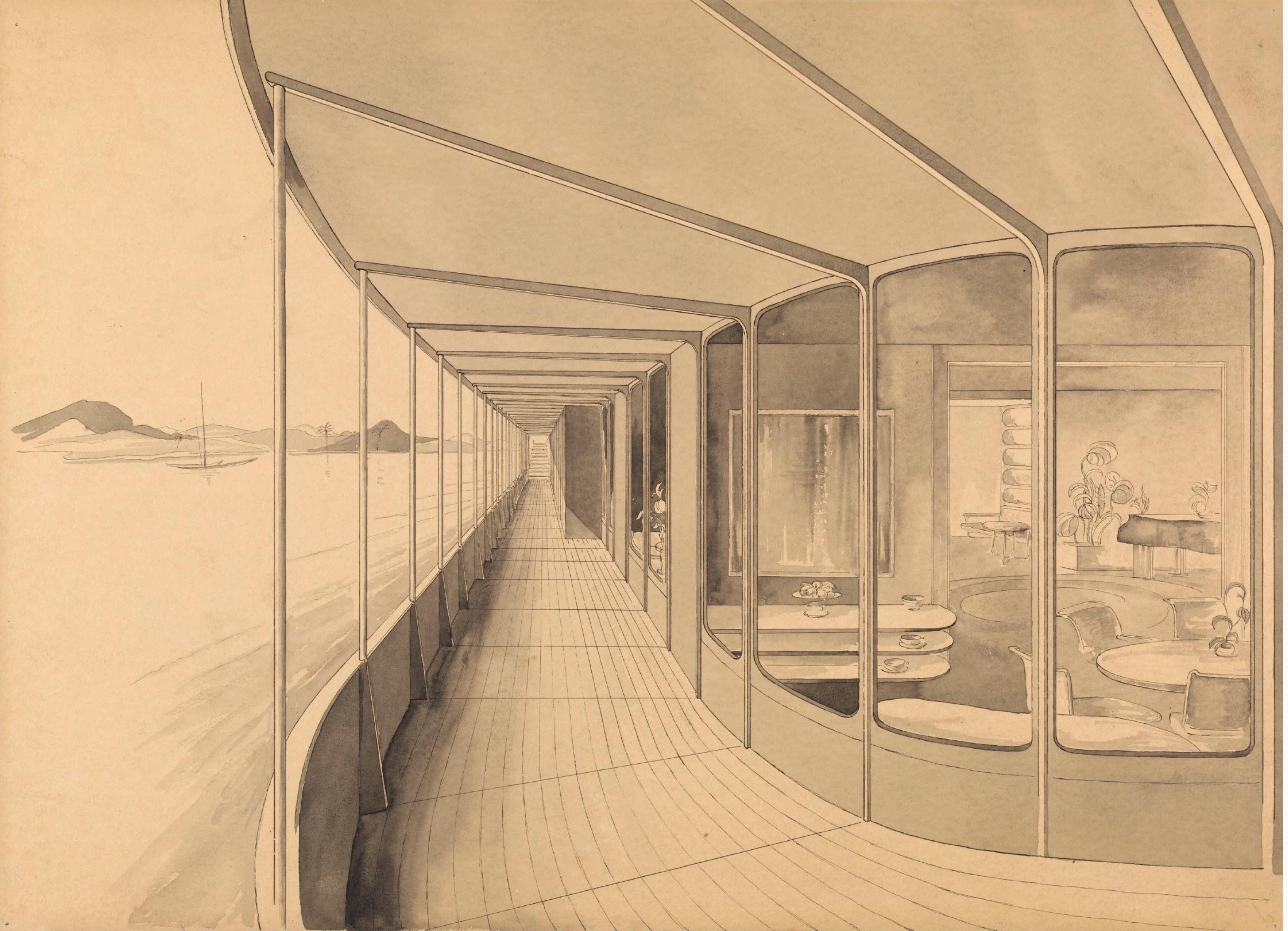






*“..sublime insights into the design philosophy that united  
Muthesius and the Maharaja.”*







## 7. ECKART MUTHESIUS

### River Barge for the Maharaja

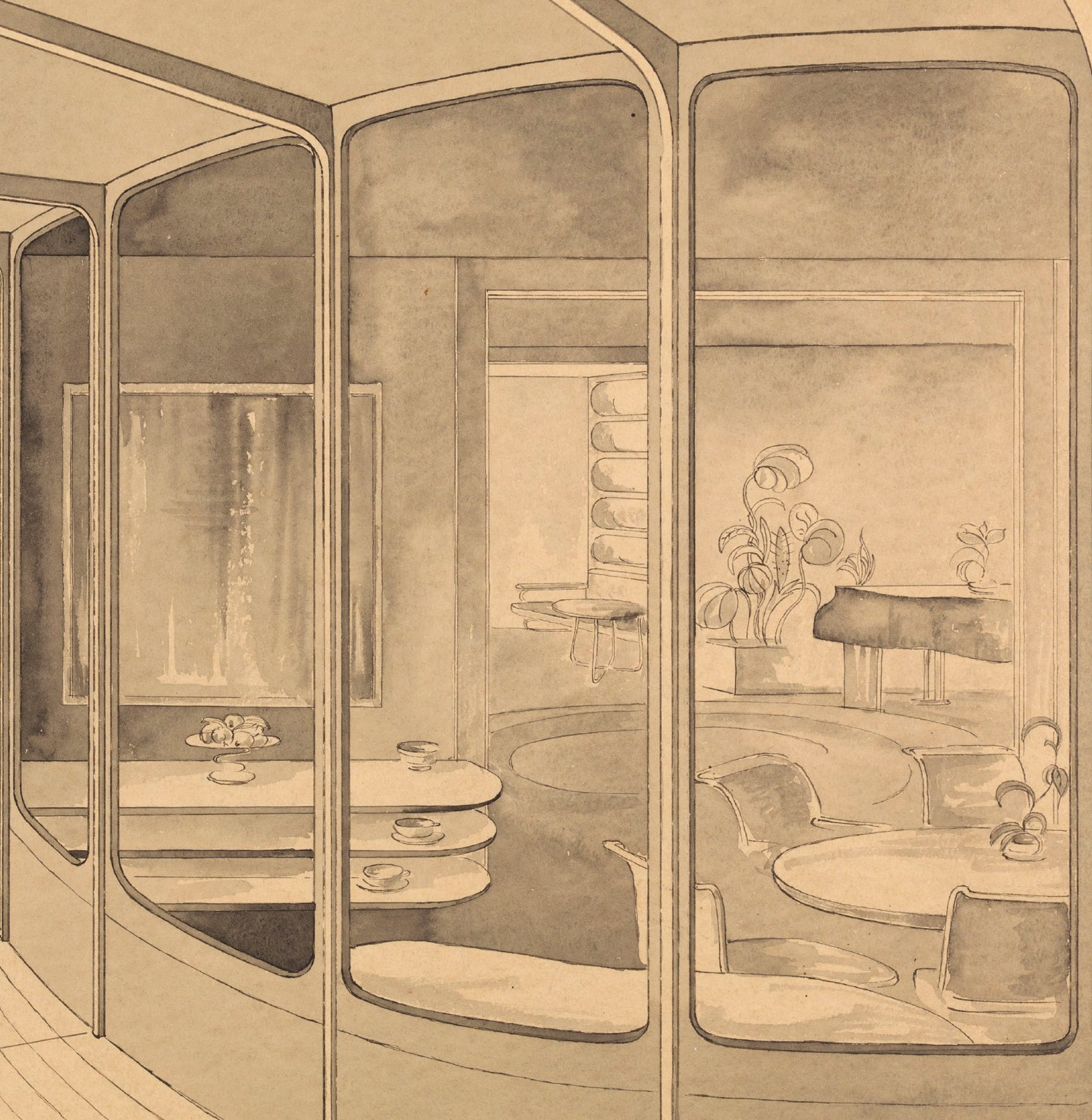
1934  
Graphite on paper  
47 x 64 cm

Published: Billé, Raphaële, and Louise Curtis. *Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930*. Paris: Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 2019, p.61.

Exhibited:  
Bombay City Hall, 1934.  
‘Moderne Maharajah, un mécène des années 1930’,  
Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris,  
26 September 2019 - 12 January 2020.

This delicately rendered drawing depicts one of the decks of the planned barge designed for the Maharaja. From a 3/4 perspective, it depicts both the elegant interior as seen from large vertical windows as well as the streamlined wooden decking, slanted roof, and elegant balustrade. In the distance, topographical features and other vessels can be made out.







*“..Muthesius is accessing the ethereal quality of something  
placed between heaven and earth, a beacon...”*



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