

Frederick

Kiesler



Frederick Kiesler



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Kiesler

by Lisa Phillips

with essays by
Dieter Bogner
Cynthia Goodman
Barbara Lesák
Jeanne T. Newlin
Lisa Phillips

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Kiesler (below)

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Contents

Foreword	7
Acknowledgments	9
Architect of Endless Innovation Lisa Phillips	13
Visionary of the European Theater Barbara Lesak	37
Kiesler and the European Avant-garde Dietrich Bogner	46
The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques Cynthia Goodman	57
Part of the Cosmos: Kiesler's Theatrical Art in America Jeanne T. Newlin	85
Environmental Artist Lisa Phillips	108
Chronology 1890–1965	139
Selected Bibliography	163
Works in the Exhibition	164

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Foreword

On Friday, November 11, 1932, a diminutive, energetic man entered the Whitney Museum of American Art at 8 West 8th Street to hear Royal Cortissoz deliver a talk entitled "The Basis of American Taste." Cortissoz might have been surprised to learn that there was one person in his audience who would truly influence American taste. More than half a century later, it is now our distinct honor to celebrate the accomplishments of this man, Frederick Kiesler, who came to this country in 1926 and developed vital creative associations with vanguard American artists in the thirties and forties. Known primarily for his work as an architect and stage designer, he was also an important catalyst in the conceptual thinking of his time. He worked closely with the pioneering American abstract artists John Graham and Arshile Gorky; his spirit energized his associates; and in 1942, he transformed a tailor shop into Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery.

Lisa Phillips has organized this first American retrospective of Kiesler's work. Kiesler was included in the Museum's 1985 exhibition "High Styles: Twentieth-Century American Design," and three of his furniture designs in the show were widely reproduced by critics as innovations in American design. In her research for the present exhibition, Lisa has had access to the vast resources of visual and documentary material owned by Mrs. Frederick Kiesler. It is my great pleasure on this occasion to announce that Lillian Kiesler has promised the Whitney Museum of American Art the large model of the *Endless House*, a sculptural, biomorphic, architectural environment that Kiesler developed over a long period and that has had a remarkable influence on both sculptural concepts and architectural design.

The Whitney Museum is devoted to bringing all aspects of American art to the attention of the public. We do not have a department of architecture and design, but our curators are sensitive to innovation and accomplishments in all fields. I am pleased that we are able to familiarize the public with an interdisciplinary artist so important to the fabric of twentieth-century American art. Once again, our endeavor could not have been realized without the cooperation and support of those who have carefully tended Kiesler's legacy in their private and public collections. We are indebted to the owners of his works, especially Lillian Kiesler, who have made our efforts successful.

Tom Armstrong, Director

The exhibition is sponsored by the Enid and Crosby Kemper Foundation, The Mnuchin Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation and the Graham Foundation.

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Acknowledgments

An exhibition of this magnitude and complexity would not have been possible without the generous support and cooperation of many individuals and institutions. Above all, I am most grateful to the artist's wife, Lillian Kiesler, for her unflagging efforts and enthusiastic help with every aspect of the project. Her willingness to embark on this adventure, to provide access to notebooks, letters, and works that have never been shown before made the exhibition and catalogue possible. I am indebted as well to Jason McCoy, who represents the Kiesler Estate, for his generous assistance and cooperation in every stage of this project.

In preparing this exhibition and catalogue, I have had extraordinary cooperation from scholars and museum colleagues in America and Europe. In particular I would like to thank Dieter Ronte and Dieter Bogner of the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, with whom we collaborated, and the team of art and architectural historians in Vienna who provided new and valuable information on Kiesler's activities in Europe. This group, under the direction of Dr. Bogner, includes Matthias Boeckl, Barbara Lesák, Susanne Neuberger, and Thomas Weingraber. Bogner and Lesák have contributed fine essays to this catalogue, as have Jeanne Newlin, curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection, and Cynthia Goodman, director of the IBM Gallery of Science and Art. Others who have contributed recollections and important material include Raimond Abraham, Doré Ashton, Leo Castelli, Maryette Charlton, Roselee Goldberg, Ward Jackson, Barbara Jakobson, Philip Johnson, Irving Sandler, and Ilana Sonnabend.

This undertaking has involved all levels of the Whitney Museum's organization. I am most appreciative of the support given by Tom Armstrong and the special efforts made by James Kraft and Pat Hynes to raise the necessary funds for the project. I am also indebted to the publications department for the extraordinary effort required to organize and edit this publication. Thanks are also due to my former assistants Claudia diFendi and Elizabeth Lesnick for their work in the early stages of the project, to intern Elizabeth Finch for her assistance with research, and especially to Katie Gass, who has coordinated the many details of the loans, catalogue, and installation with diligence, capability, and enthusiasm.

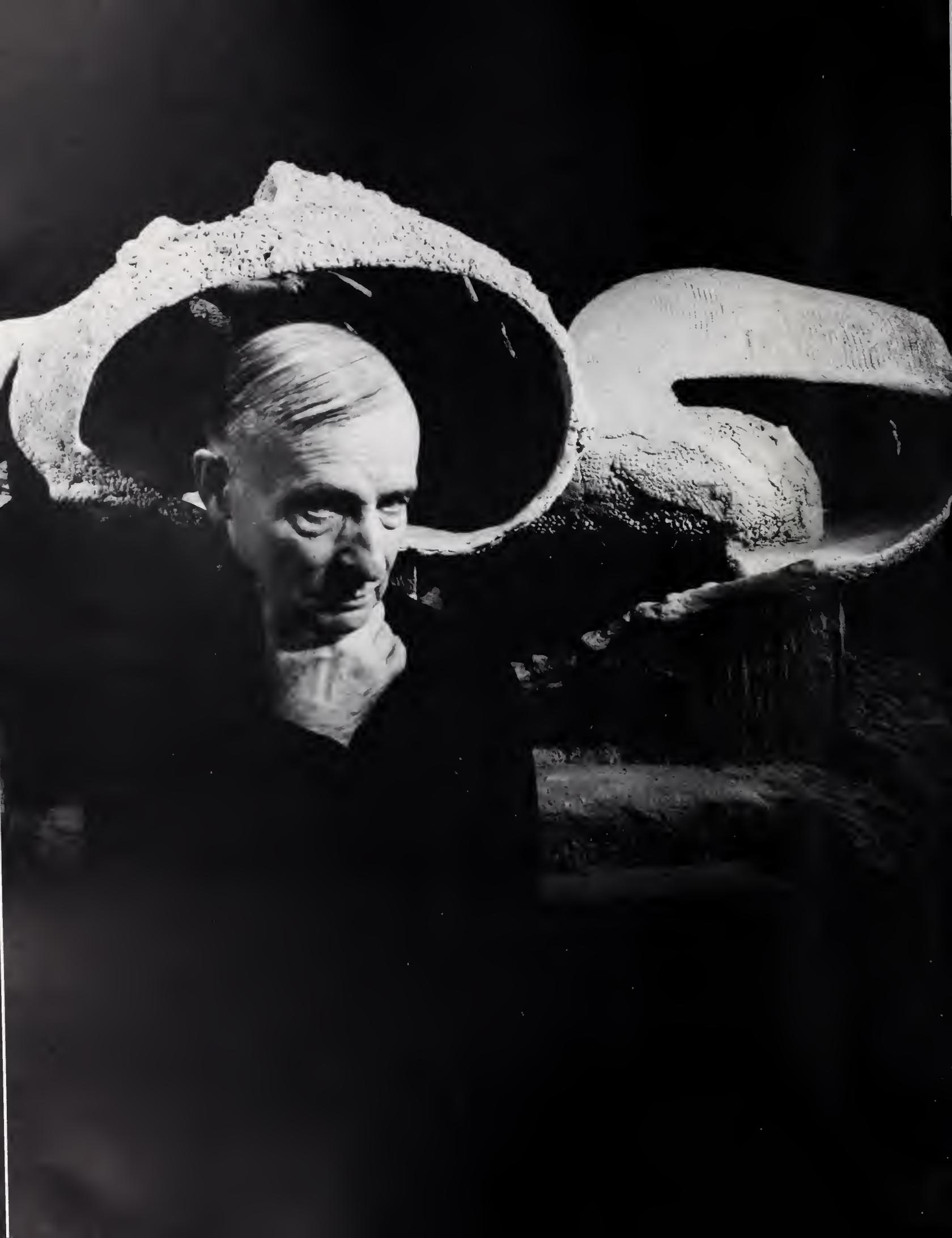
Others whose extraordinary skills have been brought to bear on the organization of this project are Winnie Bendiner, Paul Blazek, Angela Gentilcore, Rustin Levenson, Edna McCown, Marie and Larry Ornstein

of Meridian Labs, Leslie Phillips, Len Pitkowsky, Kevin Ryan, Mary Whitten, and Armando Zetina. Wolfgang Waldner and the Austrian Institute have been of great help. We have been fortunate to work with Michael Glass, designer of this catalogue, and with architects Christian Hubert and Andy Zelnio, designers of the installation, who share a passion for Kiesler's interdisciplinary activities.

Finally, I express my deep appreciation to the supporters of the exhibition, who are listed on the previous page, and to the lenders, who have made their works available for this presentation: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Harvard Theatre Collection, The Lannan Foundation, The Museum of Modern Art, the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna, and the Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna, as well as Martha Bartos, Nicholas Brown, Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts, Incorporated, Isobel Grossman, Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller, John Shore, and Michael Werner.

L.P.





Architect of Endless Innovation

Lisa Phillips

Frederick Kiesler—architect, artist, designer, poet, philosopher—was part Renaissance man, part space-age prophet. He bridged the past and the future, while maintaining that “the artist can never be of his time, he is always by necessity ahead of it.”¹ He also bridged boundaries between media, challenging conventional definitions of disciplines. Though his activities were far-ranging, they were not disconnected. His lifelong creed was continuity—the essential relatedness of all his seemingly diverse practices. “Everyone has one basic idea,” he said, “and he will always come back to it.”² For Kiesler this idea was the concept of spatial continuity—of endlessness. Much of his life was spent designing and redesigning the *Endless House* (Fig. 1)—a biomorphic structure that proposed a new sculptural model for architecture, a model of free-form spaces rather than the usual grid configuration. Though never built, it was considered one of the most original architectural concepts of the century.³ Despite his achievements—or perhaps because of them—Kiesler lived and worked in America for forty years in relative obscurity. But in vanguard circles his name was legendary, as was his personality. Small (4 feet, 10 inches tall), spry, tough, and intense, he always made an unforgettable impression. He is remembered as much for his enormous stamina, dynamic energy, wit, candor, and passionate provocation as he is for the remarkable visionary works that survive him. According to his lifelong friend Virgil Thomson, “being with Kiesler was like touching an electric wire that bore the current of contemporary history.”⁴

Born in 1890 in Romania, Kiesler studied art and design in Vienna with the leaders of the Secessionist movement. He claimed to have served in the German military press corps during World War I and afterwards to have worked with Adolf Loos on a slum-clearing project.⁵ By the mid-twenties he had become well known in Europe mainly as a stage designer who pioneered such innovations as film-projected backdrops and theater-in-the-round. In 1923, he was invited to join the De Stijl group as its youngest member and worked closely with Jean Arp, Theo van Doesburg, and Piet Mondrian. Two years later he designed the *City in Space* (Fig. 2) for the “Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes” in Paris. This walk-through model of a utopian city, the climax of his European career, consisted of a suspended framework of intersecting planes, which Alfred H. Barr, Jr., later described as “technically and imaginatively the boldest creation in the De Stijl tradition”⁶

Fig. 1 Kiesler in front of the *Endless House*, 1959

When Kiesler arrived in America in 1926 he was already, at age thirty-six, an internationally acclaimed theater architect and designer, familiar to vanguard artists in Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. Though not well known in America, he expected great success here. But he was shocked to discover that Americans were not yet accustomed to modern art and were even mistrustful of and hostile toward it. During the 1920s, American artists were making a wholesale retreat from the adventurous activities of the teens. With the exception of John Storrs and Patrick Henry Bruce, pure abstraction was hardly practiced at all. In this conservative artistic climate, Kiesler was so far ahead of his time that it would take twenty-five years for his ideas to gain widespread acceptance.

Kiesler journeyed to New York in January 1926 at the invitation of Jane Heap, author and editor of *The Little Review*. After seeing the *City in Space* in Paris and the impressive exhibition of new theater designs it contained, she induced Kiesler to re-create the exhibition in New York under the auspices of *The Little Review* and The Theatre Guild for the opening of Steinway Hall. The "International Theatre Exposition" was one of New York's earliest introductions to the radical stage ideas of Constructivist, Cubist, Futurist, and Bauhaus artist-designers such as Picasso, Oskar Schlemmer, Enrico Prampolini, El Lissitzky, and V.E. Meyerhold as well as to Kiesler's own plans for an egg-shaped *Endless Theater* (Fig. 3).

As a result of the critical response provoked by the theater exhibition, Kiesler was asked to design a performing arts center in Brooklyn Heights by Ralph Jonas, president of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. Encouraged by this commission, he and his wife, Stefi, decided to remain in New York, but problems soon arose. Expecting a monthly stipend for the duration of the project, Kiesler was stunned when, after he submitted the drawings, his stipend was suspended, leaving him completely without means. He was forced to give up his apartments in Vienna and Paris and to sell their contents to pay off back rent. Apparently, the commission had been a campaign strategy for an aspiring politician, which collapsed after the election results.⁷

The art patron Katherine Dreier, who had befriended Kiesler, came to his rescue by arranging a meeting with the successful skyscraper architect Harvey Wiley Corbett. In a letter to Corbett, she wrote:

From all I can gather he [Kiesler] is really very able and understands how important it is to confirm our building laws, but as a European he cannot gauge and differentiate between who will use him and whom he can trust....if you could advise him on how not to appear too suspicious and yet protect himself it would help matters—for between you and me, after all their ghastly experiences here in America, they are on the verge of starvation, and I'm talking actual starvation.⁸

It seems likely that as a consequence of Dreier's letter, Kiesler was offered some modest work in Corbett's firm. (Kiesler's own account was that Corbett had been impressed with his *Endless Theater* in the 1926 exhibition and invited him to join the firm then as an associate.⁹) Kiesler later remembered that Corbett and Dreier, along with the actress Princess Matchabelli and the writer John Erskine, were the four people who

Fig. 2 *City in Space*, "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes," Grand Palais, Paris, 1925



Fig. 3 Stefi Kiesler at "International Theatre Exposition," Steinway Hall, New York, 1926

1. Frederick Kiesler, "The Art of Architecture for Art," *Art News*, 56 (October 1957), p. 41.
2. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in T.H. Creighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," *Progressive Architecture*, 42 (July 1961), p. 105.
3. See, for example, the opinions of Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph, Aline Saarinen, et al., quoted in *Frederick Kiesler Architekt*, exhibition catalogue (Vienna: Galerie nächst St. Stephan et al., 1975), pp. 147–49.
4. Virgil Thomson, transcript of the eulogy delivered at Kiesler's funeral, December 28, 1965, Kiesler Estate Archives.
5. Though Kiesler included this claim on several versions of his curriculum vitae (Library, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), no corroborating evidence has been found.
6. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Cubism and Abstract Art*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), p. 144.
7. See "Design's Bad Boy," *Architectural Forum*, 86 (February 1947), p. 89.
8. Dreier to Corbett, March 25, 1927, Archives of the Société Anonyme, Yale University, New Haven.
9. See Kiesler in Creighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," p. 113.

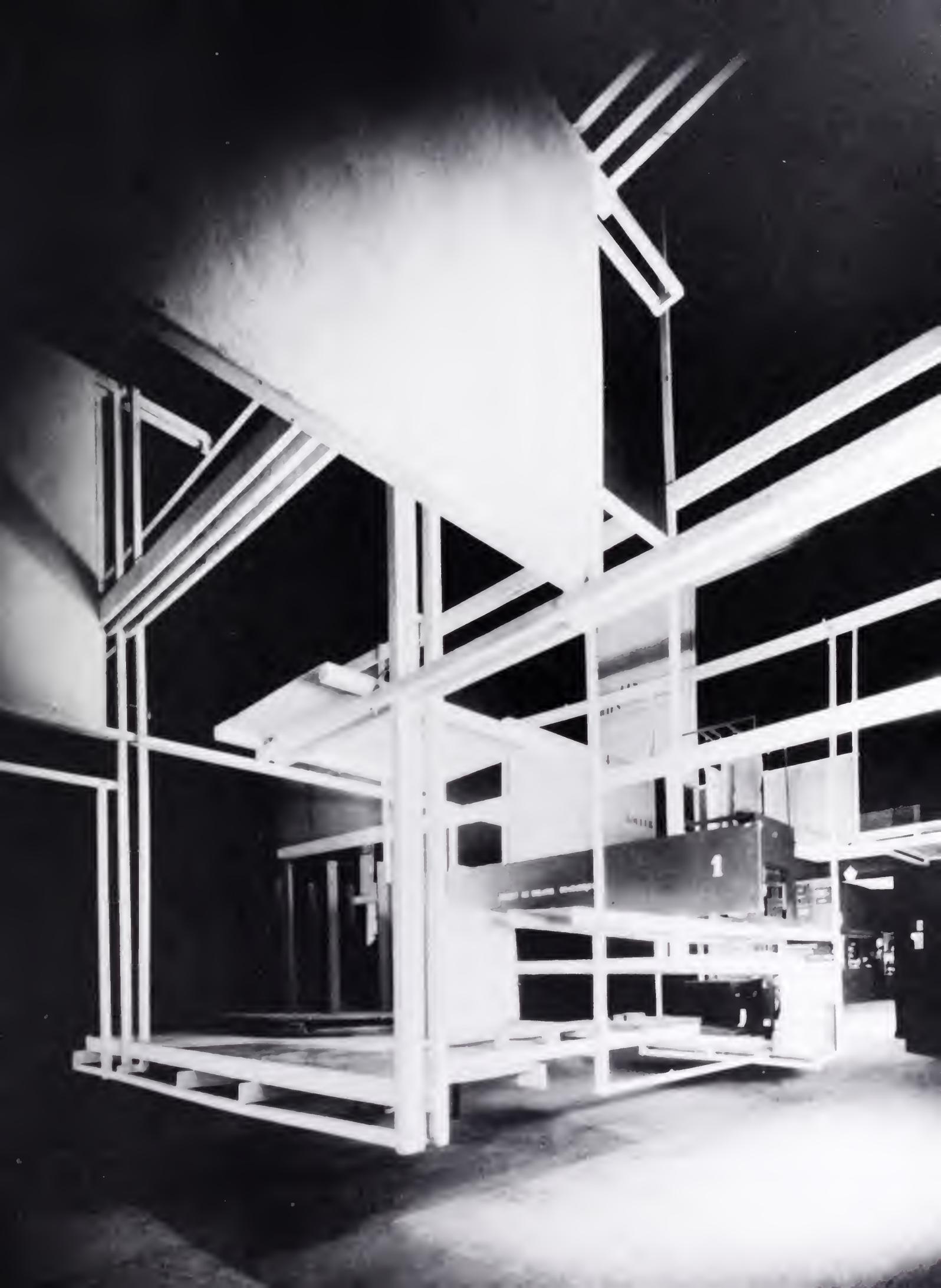




Fig. 4 Film Guild Cinema, exterior, New York, 1929

“stood courageously and amicably by my side during my trying first ten years in America.”¹⁰ Despite their support, Kiesler continued to struggle financially. His career from this point on would be a roller coaster ride of brilliant highs and crushing lows.

Kiesler had another project in the works that would bring him further notoriety: designing a modern movie house for Symon Gould, founder of the Little Film Theater movement in America. The Film Guild Cinema, on West 8th Street (Fig. 4), opened on February 1, 1929, to an impressive crowd that included such luminaries as Theodore Dreiser, Otto Kahn, George Gershwin, Walter Lippmann, John Dos Passos, and Alexander Archipenko.¹¹ Reported as the first theater in America designed solely for the projection of cinema, it was a press sensation.¹² Kiesler referred to it as a “megaphone” design, planned for optimum acoustics and angle of vision. The traditional proscenium was abolished, and not only the floor but the ceiling as well were graded toward the screen, prompting some to compare it to being inside a camera (Fig. 5). The cinema was equipped with an eye-shaped screen, and a multiple projection system was planned but not realized. The modernistic architecture and decor created a stir: the glistening black exterior was punctuated by heavy white concrete lines; on the inside, black and white tiles covered the walls, and the silver and black auditorium was bathed in pink and blue lights (Figs. 6–9). Some found the austere modernism too harsh, bleak, and coffinlike; others hailed it as a bold and daring design.¹³

10. Unpublished statement on his first ten years in America, Kiesler Estate Archives.

11. Jeffrey Holmesdale, “At The Film Guild Cinema: Two Days,” *The New York World*, February 2, 1929.

12. There were hundreds of nickelodeon theaters in New York, though they were all undoubtedly traditional proscenium theaters. The Film Guild Cinema, 52 West 8th Street, was New York’s first modern movie house. Today it is the Eighth Street Playhouse, though no trace of Kiesler’s original design remains.

13. For the ambivalent reactions to Kiesler’s design, see Douglas Fox, “The Film Guild Cinema: An Experiment in Theater Design,” *Better Theater Section of Exhibitors Herald World*, March 16, 1929, pp. 15–19.



Fig 5 Film Guild Cinema, auditorium, New York, 1929

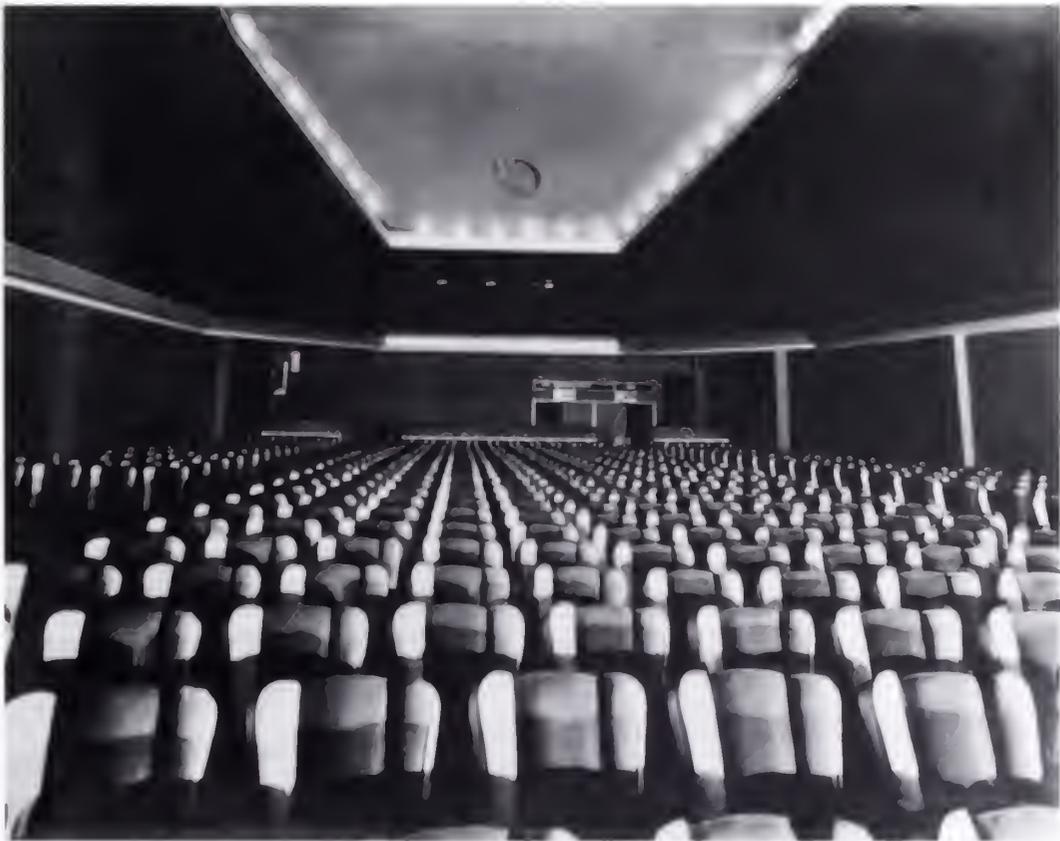


Fig 6 Film Guild Cinema, auditorium, New York, 1929

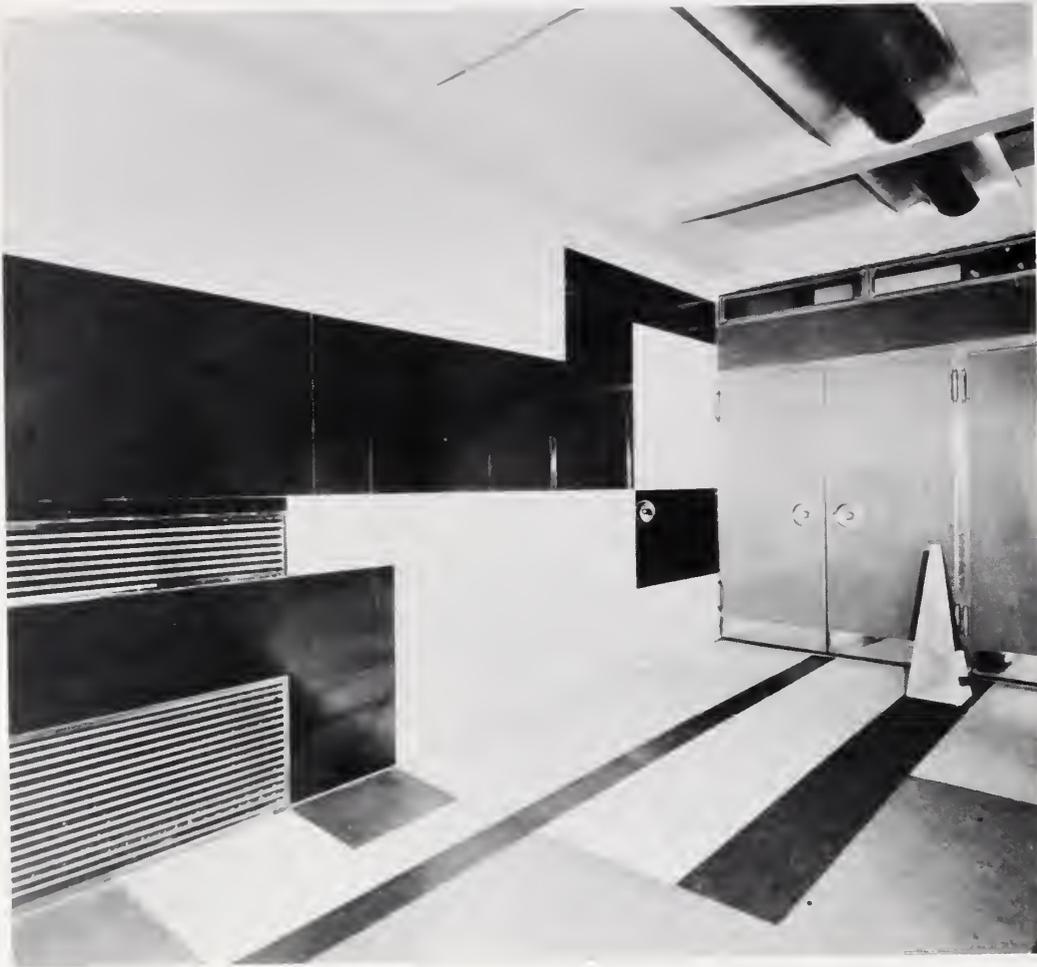


Fig. 7 Film Guild Cinema, foyer, New York, 1929



Fig. 8 Film Guild Cinema, lobby, New York, 1929

While working on the Film Guild Cinema, Kiesler was chronically short of funds and supplemented his income by designing store windows for Saks Fifth Avenue. Again, the results were startling—single items were presented in isolation in starkly dramatic, asymmetrical arrangements. Minimal, monochromatic props were used and mannequins often forsaken.¹⁴ Kiesler's new approach to display, theater, and design brought him considerable notice, and in May 1929 he was recognized by *Vanity Fair's* "Hall of Fame." The magazine effused: "because he has devoted his attention to the peculiar problems of the moving picture theater; because three years ago he brought the International Theater Exhibition to New York, because he revolutionized window display by his modernist designs, and finally—because he has now developed the funnel shaped theater—providing an improved vision for motion pictures."¹⁵ Despite the recognition, Kiesler's reputation was still primarily confined to Greenwich Village bohemians and vanguard architects and designers, so that he remained underpaid and in debt.

During these difficult years in America, Kiesler's first community of friends consisted chiefly of other architects and designers. Among them were Donald Deskey, Norman Bel Geddes, Russel Wright, George Howe, and William Lescaze, as well as other recent European émigrés such as Josef Urban, Paul Frankl, Ilonka Karasz (who designed the lounge furniture for the Film Guild Cinema), and Kem Weber.¹⁶ He became closely acquainted with many of them through his membership in the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC). AUDAC was America's first attempt at a professional industrial arts group. The members were all committed to progress through industry and promoted the new discipline of industrial design, which was then in its infancy in America, having only recently attained status as a distinct profession. Many of the industrial designers had backgrounds in advertising, fine art, or, like Kiesler, in stage design.¹⁷ With no formal training programs yet established, these designers were self-taught. They banded together to promote their ideas through a series of annual exhibitions and publications. Kiesler was a founding director and an active member of AUDAC, attending meetings, lecturing, designing exhibitions, and contributing works to them (Figs. 10, 11).

Concurrently, Kiesler was preparing a book dealing with his progressive beliefs about architecture, art, theater, and design—a book that was not only a forum for his ideas but also a showcase for the works of many AUDAC members. *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, prepared in 1929, was published by Brentano's the following year. Though the title seems highly specialized, the book was immeasurably important for artists as well as designers: it was the first encyclopedia of vanguard preoccupations in art, architecture, and design of the previous two decades. Kiesler had assembled all the visual motifs that had graced European avant-garde publications in the 1920s for presentation to an American audience.¹⁸ Movements such as Cubism, Futurism, De Stijl, Neoplasticism, the Bauhaus, and the Machine Aesthetic were described; a few images by such American artists as Elie Nadelman, Charles Sheeler, Thomas Hart Benton (an abstract screen), and John Storrs were also included. In the text, Kiesler states that by 1928, America had gained leadership in everything but the arts and that contemporary art remained unappreciated by the vast majority of



Fig. 9 Film Guild Cinema, ceiling, New York, 1929

14. Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (New York: Brentano's, 1932), pp. 140–41.

15. "Vanity Fair's Hall of Fame," *Vanity Fair*, 32 (May 1929), p. 85.

16. See American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen, *Exhibition of Modern Craftsmanship* (New York: The Brewery, March 1931).

17. Katherine Benton (1930–1943), *The World of Tomorrow: The Future Within Us* (Part 1, High Style); Twentieth Century American Design Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1932), p. 36. Others who had backgrounds in stage design were Norman Bel Geddes, Henry Clay Fowler, and Paul Wever.

18. Dick A. Wain, *The New York School: A Critical History* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 30.



Fig. 10 Kiesler's room for the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC) exhibition, Grand Central Palace, New York, 1929



Fig. 11 Kiesler's room for the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC) exhibition, Grand Central Palace, New York, 1929

Americans. He then credits the department store with having introduced modernism to the public through commerce—as a style in textile designs, shop window displays, and special expositions. “The department store acted as the interpreter for the populace of a new spirit in art.”¹⁹

Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display was one manifestation of Kiesler’s tireless effort to spread the tenets of modernism and correct the provincial attitudes prevalent in New York. Indeed, Kiesler was crucial in keeping modernism alive in America, by providing continuous access to the most advanced ideas from Europe. Stefi Kiesler also played an important role in this process. As a correspondent for the *Avant-garde Zeitschrift* and a librarian at the foreign-language desk of The New York Public Library, she continuously funneled up-to-date information about European activities to Kiesler and his friends.

Kiesler was taken aback at the lack of professional respect accorded artists in America—technically the most advanced country in the world. Only the support of a few enlightened patrons such as John Quinn, A.E. Gallatin, Katherine Dreier, Alfred Stieglitz, and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney provided indispensable support and enabled certain artists to continue working when no one else valued what they were doing. Kiesler was determined to change the situation, and his determination helped bolster the spirits of the small struggling group of vanguard artists in New York. As Virgil Thomson recalled: “Kiesler was the one among us who understood best the work that any of us was doing and who cherished it. Such faith is rare on the part of an artist who knows himself to be advanced.”²⁰

During the thirties, a genuine community of vanguard artists began to form in New York. Artists came into contact with one another through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Art Program (Kiesler was employed by the WPA in 1934 to scout suitable locations for murals). Another group formed around the Hans Hofmann School. Kiesler was intimately acquainted with the small but growing number of abstractionists who were struggling to be recognized, including Willem de Kooning, David Smith, Stuart Davis, John Graham, Arshile Gorky, Isamu Noguchi, Burgoyne Diller, and Alexander Calder.²¹ The lack of public appreciation and institutional support strengthened their bonds and united them under a common cause. In a characteristic demonstration of moral support, Kiesler’s close friend John Graham wrote to him from Mexico in 1939: “I think with dread of your staying alone in the atmosphere of New York where no one understands you or values you properly. To think you’re being butchered daily on the gridirons of N.Y.”²²

For aesthetic inspiration, American abstract artists looked specifically to Picasso, Leger, Neoplasticism, Russian and Bauhaus Constructivism, and the biomorphic Surrealism of Arp and Miro. Because of Kiesler’s firsthand knowledge of these movements and his personal friendships with Leger, Arp, and Mondrian, he was seen as a living exemplar of European high culture. As if in confirmation of this role, he was one of the few New Yorkers included in “Cubism and Abstract Art,” Alfred H. Barr, Jr.’s exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art in 1936; he was represented in the architecture, theater, and furniture sections.²³ In

19. Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, p. 66.

20. Virgil Thomson, *Reminiscences* (London: Da Capo Press, 1966), p. 28.

21. Kiesler’s wide circle of friends and professional engagements in America is thoroughly documented through the Department of American Art by John Kiesler from 1930 to 1954. Most of these were collected by the artist and his wife, Stefi, and are now housed in the Kiesler Family Archives, and are available for the study of Kiesler’s friendships and social activities.

22. Graham to Kiesler, May 25, 1939, Kiesler, Diller, Archives.

23. *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, p. 66. Photographs of Kiesler’s display stand (1923), *POPE* (1925), *Empire* (1925), *Empire* (1925), and *Empire* (1925) were included in the exhibition *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (1923).

his architectural and design work, Kiesler traversed the ground between Constructivism and Surrealism—the two poles of interest for American artists in the 1930s.

Kiesler's network of friends expanded to include artists in all disciplines as he continued to pursue his varied interests in art, architecture, theater, and design. In 1934, he was appointed director of scenic design for The Juilliard School of Music, a post he held until 1957 (his friend John Erskine ran the school). Around 1930, Kiesler had founded his own design firm, the Planners Institute, with Sidney Janis' wife, Harriet; he also became a certified architect in 1930²⁴, though prospects for realizing big commissions had all but evaporated with the 1929 crash.

24. Certification papers, 1932, Kiesler Estate Archives.

25. Kiesler in Creighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea," pp. 113–14.

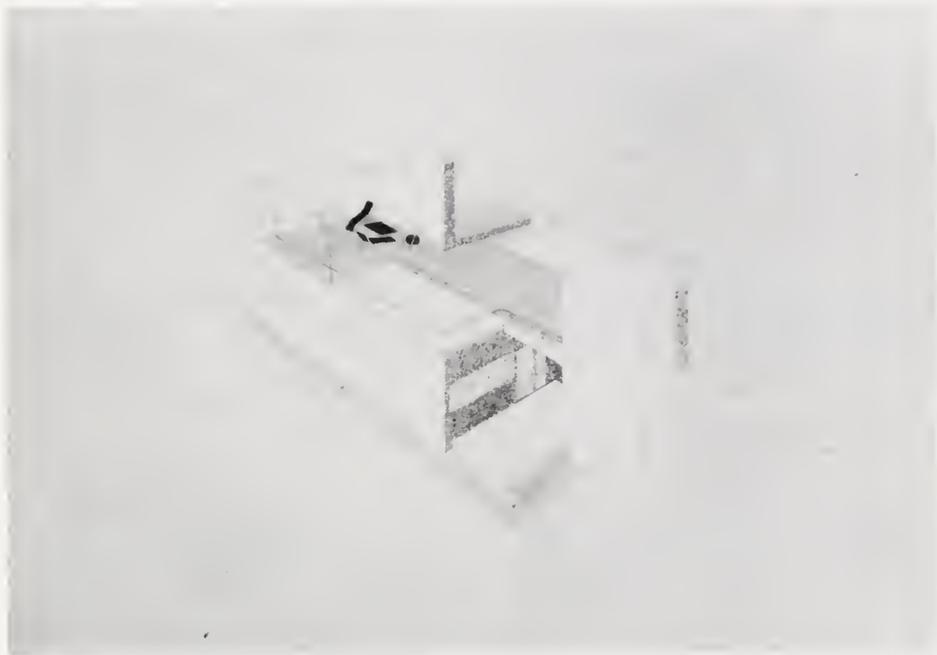


Fig. 12 Study for *Nucleus House*, 1926–28
Pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 in. (38.1 x 55.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 13 Study for *Nucleus House*, 1926–28
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 in. (38.1 x 55.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 15 Lamp, 1934
Chrome, 25 in. (63.5 cm) height
Collection of Mrs. Mervin Bayer

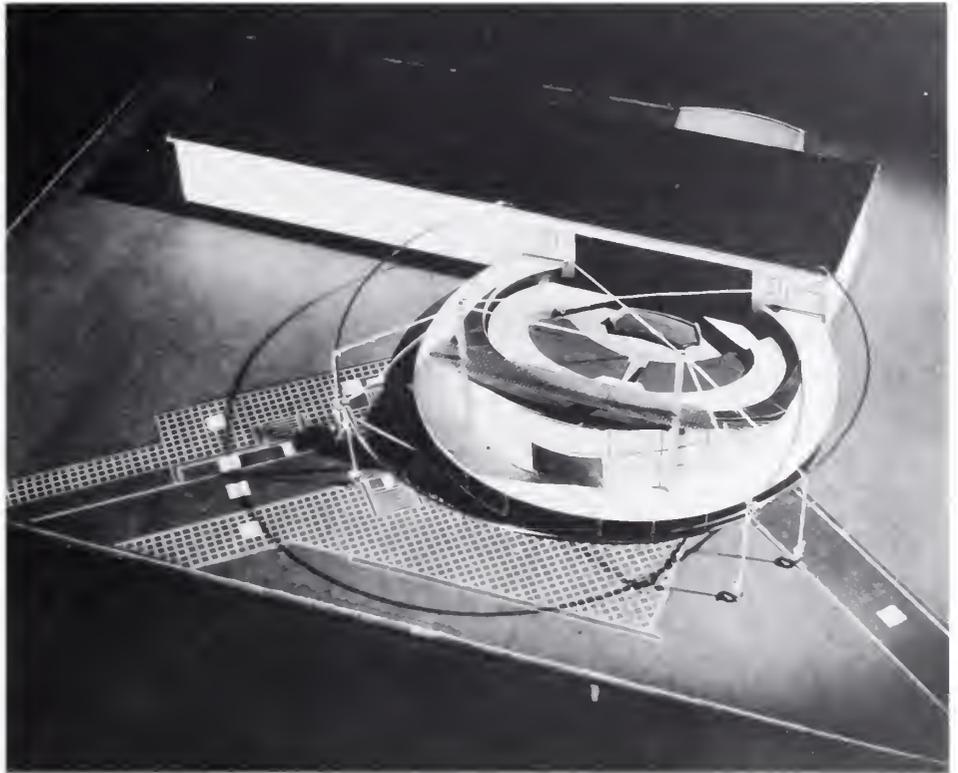


Fig. 14 Model of *The Universal*, a theater for Woodstock, New York, 1931
Whereabouts unknown



Fig. 16 Combination desk and drafting board, 1935
Wood
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 17 Ashtray, 1935
Chrome, 2 x 5 in. (5.1 x 12.7 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Mervin Bayer

Among the many projects Kiesler undertook during the Depression that never progressed beyond the blueprint stage were mass-produced, modular homes designed for Sears, Roebuck and Co. (1931) (Figs. 12, 13); *The Universal*, a theater complex for Woodstock, New York (1931) (Fig. 14), planned as a flexible structure, adaptable for a variety of uses; and furniture and lighting designs (Figs. 15–17). Kiesler had hopes of realizing his egg-shaped *Endless Theater*, but the time was not ripe. Recalling this period in his life thirty years later, he wrote: “I was terribly poor, on a salary of \$1,000 a year. I designed many projects for friends—all in vain. Many people made propositions without offers to pay....Here were plans for a building that looked like an egg, not like the customary box. It wasn’t square, it wasn’t in steel, it wasn’t in glass, it wasn’t in aluminum. It was absolutely outside the mode of the International Style.”²⁵

Finally, in 1933, Kiesler was given a chance to realize this new kind of building in a full-scale model of a single-family dwelling for the Modernage Furniture Company in New York. This project was the culmination of “seven years of waiting, seven years of search and research.”²⁶ *Space House*, as it was called, had an organic, streamlined shell based on the principle of continuous tension, using the eggshell as a model (Fig. 18). Influential in this design was the engineering construction of grain elevators, bridges, aqueducts, and planetariums—structures that also had curving, continuous exterior surfaces. This continuous-shell construction allowed for a flowing of interior space between floors, walls, and ceilings free of vertical supports. Though the full-scale model at Modernage was not technically a shell construction, it made allusions to it through the rounded facade. *Space House* had an elastic interior with varying floor levels and movable partitions (Fig. 19). Other innovative techniques and materials were used, such as indirect lighting, brushed aluminum fixtures, rubberized flooring, fishnet curtains, and built-in modernistic furniture (Figs. 20–23).²⁷ In *Space House*, “the streamlining becomes an organic force as it relates to the dynamic equilibrium of body motion within encompassed space.”²⁸

26. Kiesler, “Space House,” manuscript, Kiesler Estate Archives, p. 3.

27. Frederick Kiesler, “Space House,” *Architectural Record*, 75 (January 1934), pp. 45–61.

28. Kiesler, “Space House,” Kiesler Estate Archives, p. 17.



Fig. 18 *Space House*, exterior, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933

Space House was also the first articulation of Kiesler’s guiding principles of “correalism and biotechnique.” Correalism, as he described it, is “an investigation into the laws of the inter-relationships of natural and man-made organisms,” and biotechnique is “the application of such knowledge to the specific field of housing man adequately (an applied science).”²⁹ It was an approach that involved defining man in relation to various forces in the environment—“natural, technological and human”—to seek the proper equilibrium among them. This approach was distinctly different from the Bauhaus ideal of form follows function: “Form does not follow function,” said Kiesler, “function follows vision. Vision follows reality.”³⁰ “Instead of functional designs which try to satisfy the demands of the present, bio-technical designs develop the demands of the future.”³¹

29. Frederick Kiesler, “On Correalism and Biotechnique: Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design,” *Architectural Record*, 86 (September 1939), p. 59.

30. Frederick Kiesler, “Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture,” *Partisan Review*, 16 (July 1949), p. 738.

31. Kiesler, “On Correalism and Biotechnique,” p. 68.



Fig. 19 *Space House*, interior, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933



Fig. 20 Indirect lighting in stairway of exhibition hall adjoining *Space House*, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933



Fig. 21 *Space House*, curtain and light fixture, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933



Fig. 22 *Space House*, sponge rubber floor covering, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933



Fig. 23 *Space House* window with fishnet curtain, at Modernage Furniture Company, New York, 1933

During the 1930s, Kiesler devoted much of his time to elaborating his design theories, publishing articles (including a series in *Architectural Record* on “Design Correlation”), and lecturing at universities and design conferences around the country, gaining notoriety for, among other things, his exhortations on the mean-spirited character of the American bathroom and the pressing need for a nonskid bathtub. He also called for the founding of an industrial design institute (for which he prepared architectural plans in 1934) and eventually persuaded Columbia University to allow him to set up an experimental Laboratory for Design Correlation within the School of Architecture. This laboratory, which functioned from 1937 to 1942, was the testing ground for many of Kiesler’s biotechnical ideas. During this period, he actively experimented with new materials and techniques, such as lucite and cast aluminum, and executed some of the extraordinarily sensual, organic furniture designs that presaged the form-fitting, ergonomic concepts of the 1940s and 1950s (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24 Two-part nesting table, 1935–38
Cast aluminum, $9\frac{3}{4} \times 34\frac{1}{2} \times 22\frac{1}{4}$ in. (24.8 x 87.6 x
56.5 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Isobel Grossman

One of the projects that preoccupied Kiesler at the Columbia Design Laboratory was the invention of a *Vision Machine*, about which little is known. Writing in 1954 to Museum of Modern Art director René d’Harnoncourt, he said: “I had developed a design for a large machine for the study and demonstration of visual perception.”³² Though numerous sketches survive, there is no evidence that the machine or a three-dimensional model was ever constructed. From Kiesler’s notes and drawings, it appears to have been, like much of his theoretical work, quasi-scientific, grandiose yet vague, ideogrammatic and poetic rather than diagrammatic. These experiments into the nature of visual percep-

tion included some consideration of the unconscious mind and dream activity, which brought him closer to the Surrealist movement. The mysterious drawings for the *Vision Machine* would have a great impact on the development of Kiesler's increasingly Surrealist work of the forties.

By 1940, Kiesler was already well acquainted with the Surrealist movement through his close friendships with Marcel Duchamp, Matta, and Julien Levy, who, in the 1930s, was the first art dealer to exhibit Surrealist works in New York. His ties to the movement were further strengthened by the immigration of many European Surrealists to New York at the onset of World War II. He had an ongoing dialogue with the Surrealist artists Yves Tanguy, Andre Breton, Kurt Seligmann, Matta, Joan Miró, André Masson, Max Ernst, Leonora Carrington, and Luis Buñuel, all exiled in New York during the war.

Kiesler's Greenwich Village apartment at 56 Seventh Avenue was a haven for visiting and emigre Europeans. They were not only welcomed there by Kiesler but by symbols of America—the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building were clearly visible from his penthouse apartment (which was otherwise described by the doorman as a cross between a studio, apartment, and junk shop).³³ Among his many guests were Marcel Duchamp, Fernand Leger, Mies van der Rohe, Hans Richter, Jean Arp, and Piet Mondrian (Fig. 25). Kiesler generously introduced the newcomers to curators, critics, and dealers—Philip Johnson, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., James Johnson Sweeney, Sidney and Harriet Janis—as well as to other artists and prominent friends such as Arnold Schonberg, Frank Lloyd Wright, Martha Graham, E.E. Cummings, Virgil Thomson, Edgard Varese, and Djane Barnes (Fig. 26). Committed to

32 Kiesler to Harmoncourt, Kiesler Estate Archives

33 Filming tape-recorded conversation between Kiesler and the doorman of the 56 Seventh Avenue apartment building and Kiesler, April 24, 1970, Kiesler Estate Archives



Fig. 25 Kiesler with Jean Arp (center) and Hans Richter, Paris, 1947



Fig. 26 Kiesler and Edgard Varese, c. 1960



Fig. 27 Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942

fostering an active exchange of ideas among artists of all disciplines and nationalities, Kiesler also relished the potential drama of these encounters. The spirit of the old Vienna café days remained with him, and most of his evenings were spent talking with his friends at Romany Marie's or other Village haunts into the early hours of the morning. He never took phone calls before noon.

One February day in 1942, Peggy Guggenheim, the collector of modern art who was married to Max Ernst, asked Kiesler to give her some "advice about remodelling two tailor shops at 50 West 57th Street into an art gallery" where Surrealists would be shown along with emerging American talents.³⁴ This was the genesis of the Art of This Century gallery. At last, Kiesler had an opportunity to put his burgeoning ideas about correlation into action—and the results made exhibition history. *New York Times* critic Edward Alden Jewell hailed it as "miraculous, filling one with a sense of wonders never ceasing."³⁵ The fluid, continuous, curving space of the Surrealist gallery with pictures mounted on baseball bats has become an iconic image (Fig. 27). Paintings were removed from their frames, and kinetic mounting devices were used so that works could be examined from various angles and under different light conditions. The event was seen as a tremendous stimulus to the formation of an artistic milieu—the convergence of the European Surrealists with the young American artists, soon to be exhibited by Peggy Guggenheim, who became known as Abstract Expressionists.³⁶

Two more dramatic exhibition designs followed in the 1940s—for the 1947 "Exhibition Internationale du Surrealisme" at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, and the "Blood Flames" exhibition of the same year at the Hugo Gallery in New York (Fig. 28). In both, the spaces were transformed into continuous environments by means of undulating bands of

34 Guggenheim to Kiesler February 26, 1942, Kiesler Estate Archives

35 Edward Alden Jewell, "Art of This Century Opens," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1942, p. x9

36 Ashton, *The New York School*, p. 121



Fig. 28 "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947

color painted on the floors, walls, and ceilings to make the boundaries between them dissolve optically. Though the art in the exhibitions was not very well received (Surrealism, by 1947, had lost some of its urgency), the installations elicited positive comment. Ad Reinhardt, for one, commended Alexander Iolas, director of the Hugo Gallery, for “letting his rooms be used for such a unique, imaginative experiment,” noting that Kiesler tried “to reorganize the field of vision according to rules of sympathetic magic to achieve an integration of architecture, sculpture, and painting.”³⁷

At the Paris Surrealist exhibition, Kiesler collaborated with Matta, Hare, Duchamp, Miró, Ernst, and Tanguy in constructing a temporary double parabolic room made of paper and canvas called the *Salle de Superstition*. For this special room, a sculptural environment that served as a rite of passage for every visitor to walk through, he created his first freestanding sculptures—the *Totem for All Religions* and a monumental plaster arm, the *Anti-Taboo Figure*.

Through his work on the three Surrealist exhibitions, Kiesler came to envision a whole new direction that painting and sculpture might take, a direction he would pursue for the rest of his life. Painting and sculpture, he came to believe, should no longer be confined to isolated objects—rectilinear, framed canvases or chunks of matter placed on pedestals—but had to expand in an architectural, environmental direction. It was a conceptual turning point for Kiesler, and from then on he devoted as much time to art as to architecture and theater design. Over the next seventeen years, he worked on paintings, sculpture, and environments in a variety of materials—oil on canvas, cast bronze, wood, and clay. He first took a studio on 59 East 9th Street so that he could have room to work and later moved to larger quarters at 12th Street and Broadway.

As an artist, Kiesler could be his own boss. However, he soon realized that being an artist had its own demands, especially if you were to sell and have an audience: “I thought again about retreating entirely from ‘business-architecture’ to sculpture and painting where I can have complete control over the realization of a project independent of bankers, contractors, and salesmen. But then of course I would have to plan many exhibitions to put my name on the market, and become my own promoter—which I hate.”³⁸

Kiesler clearly had difficulty navigating in a commercial society. His building projects exacerbated the conflicts he felt partly because of difficult clients and partly because of his stubborn refusal to compromise his ideas. Each time he became involved in an architectural project—whether building World House Gallery for Herbert Mayer, designing a pavilion for the Albert Einstein Medical Center for Walter Chanin, or an *Endless House* for Mary Sisler in Palm Beach—each client seemed more troublesome than the last. Kiesler often referred to being in a “pressure chamber,” struggling to maintain his individuality and integrity, fearful that “the persistence of compromise may, without your being aware of it, pull you down, down, down and finally into a hole from which you may never come up again, left to breathe that foul air of self deceit which truly stinks to heaven.”³⁹ Kiesler prayed for a break in the chain of misfortunes which had plagued his architectural career and led Philip Johnson to describe him as “the world’s best known non-building architect.”⁴⁰

37. Ad Reinhardt, “Neo Surrealists Take Over a Gallery,” *PM*, March 11, 1947, p. 11.

38. Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), p. 213.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

40. Philip Johnson, “Three Architects: Paul Rudolph, Louis Kahn, Frederick Kiesler,” *Art in America*, 48 (Spring 1960), p. 70.

Though Kiesler would largely remain an architect on paper, he did finally receive widespread recognition in the 1950s. This recognition was chiefly the result of support from members of the art community—dealers, curators, and museum directors—and, in particular, from The Museum of Modern Art. His first big break came in 1950, when Philip Johnson purchased a small model of the *Endless House* for The Museum of Modern Art, after having seen it at the Kootz Gallery, and then commissioned him to design a large, outdoor environmental sculpture for his New Canaan, Connecticut, home. This was a turning point for Kiesler, and much public notice and museum attention followed. In a letter to George Howe in 1951, Kiesler exclaimed, “Thank heavens times have finally changed for me and after twenty years of crouching I can stand up now.”⁴¹ That same year he wrote to his friend Max Bill: “this summer strange things have happened. A veritable resurrection of the whole attitude towards my work has taken place in America.”⁴²

Arthur Drexler then featured the egg-shaped *Endless House* with Buckminster Fuller’s Geodesic Dome in an exhibition called “Two Houses: New Ways To Build” at The Museum of Modern Art (Fig. 29). The same year, Dorothy Miller selected Kiesler’s wooden *Galaxy* for the 1952 “Fifteen Americans” exhibition at the museum (Fig. 30). In addition, there were plans to build a full-scale model of the *Endless House* in

41 Kiesler to Howe, June 2, 1951, Kiesler Estate Archives

42 Kiesler to Bill, October 13, 1951, Kiesler Estate Archives



Fig. 29 Model for the *Endless House*, 1950
Clay, 6 x 10 x 21 (15.2 x 25.4 x 53.5)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase



Fig. 30 *Galaxy*, 1948–51
Wood and rope, 144 x 168 x 168 in. (365.8 x 426.7 x
426.7 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller

the museum garden. (This project fell through when a major expansion of the museum diverted funds and energy, but a large-scale model and related photographs and drawings were shown in The Museum of Modern Art's 1960 "Visionary Architecture" exhibition.) As a result of his museum exhibitions, Kiesler received national media coverage in *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*, along with numerous requests to lecture and participate in symposia and TV and radio shows. He also had one-artist exhibitions at the Sidney Janis (1954) and Leo Castelli (1961) galleries.

By 1960, after years of struggle, Kiesler was finally able to present his ideas to a mass audience and regain the recognition that he had enjoyed in Europe in the early 1920s. Though museums were an essential form of support for Kiesler, he had a love-hate relationship with them and remained rebellious toward most institutions of authority. He openly criticized museums, calling them "oxygen tents of art."⁴³ At a lecture on museums at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, he urged closing all museums because there "art and the public live an artificial relationship. The place of art in society should be as necessary as the sun is to chlorophyll."⁴⁴ Ultimately, however, Kiesler was dependent on museum recognition, so that his lack of control in museums and the rather patronizing attitude they seemed to have toward artists became a source of frustration.

He was also violently opposed to the encroaching commercialization of art. His utopian spirit and rebelliousness seemed to strengthen with age. Kiesler railed against philistinism, ambition, and greed, deploring the fact that "a whole country has been lured into a race for glory and money, a dead-end trap squeeze. The T.V. quiz."⁴⁵ Because of his anti-establishment views and outspoken opinions, he was a welcome voice at the Eighth-Street Club, an informal gathering spot for artists in a loft on 10th Street. During the 1950s, the Cedar Tavern and the Eighth-Street Club were favorite Greenwich Village hangouts for the growing ranks of what would soon come to be known as the New York School. It was here that artists were battling out aesthetic and moral issues of the day.⁴⁶ Feisty, opinionated, articulate, and theatrical, Kiesler was a popular, highly visible presence at these gatherings. His pronouncements and indictments were appreciated by such artists as William Baziotes, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Ad Reinhardt, artists Kiesler had come to know well in the 1940s.

Always the impresario eager to bring artists together in his encompassing embrace, Kiesler supported radical ideas and younger artists in the visual arts, as well as in music, dance, theater, and poetry. He was an early advocate of John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Andy Warhol, and Jasper Johns (Fig. 31). He was also very supportive of Julian Beck (The Living Theater) and independent filmmakers Maya Deren and Jonas Mekas, and he collaborated with Martha Graham, Rudolph Burkhart, and Hans Richter on sets and films. As Erick Hawkins remembered, "if contemporary music was played Kiesler was there. If a new poet published poems, Kiesler had the book. If a new underground film was showing, Kiesler was in the audience."⁴⁷

Kiesler was sometimes criticized for spreading his energy over too wide a field, while others considered him a dreamer—immersed in a world of impractical ideas, refusing to compromise and conform. For

43 Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, p. 95.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 223.

46 Kiesler participated in several panels at the Eighth-Street Club, including "An Evening for Jackson Pollock" (November 30, 1956), "Part of the World Is a Living Home" (March 27, 1958), where he probably introduced his support of Jasper Johns, calling his *Flags and Targets* "a personal, hypnotic dedication to the Environment of Sculpture" (February 12, 1961).

47 Erick Hawkins, transcript of the ecology of the mind interview, February 28, 1965, Kiesler Estate Archives.



Fig. 31 Kiesler with "Superstar" and Andy Warhol, 1950s

the most part, however, he was admired as a visionary and dynamic innovator, respected for his often repeated belief that “more than in any other realm of human life, the so-called artist must learn only one thing in order to be creative—not to resist himself, but to resist without exception every human, technical, social and economic factor that prevents him from being himself.”⁴⁸

There was a grandiosity about Kiesler that friends and acquaintances have commented on. Except for his physical stature, everything about him was big and often exaggerated. He often declared that he was the first to use a particular form or invent a technique. He was also famous for boasting of numerous sexual conquests and was always in the company of beautiful women. If Kiesler said something, it was with such conviction and authority that it usually passed unquestioned. He made his listeners believe. His sense of theater and his small size may be some explanation for his propensity for making exaggerated claims and embellishing facts and situations. As Lewis Mumford remembered, “he had plausible reasons, not merely an inflated ego, when he did extravagant things.”⁴⁹ By some accounts, Kiesler could be childish and blunt, practically uncensored in expressing his thoughts. But this was tempered by his tremendous wit, good humor, and generosity. A friend recalled his erratic, if endearing nature: “When one bumped unexpectedly into Kiesler, let’s say on a Tuesday evening hurrying from one art show to another, he would go through a little ritual. He would pause, look at you in mock amazement, shake his head, stab the air with his thick, square, nub of a sculptor’s finger, waggle it at you, and call out across the room, ‘You are impossible, impossible!’ Then he would embrace you, criticize your tie or your hat, link his arm in yours and take you on to the next show.”⁵⁰

Kiesler paid a high price for his progressive ideas and erratic behavior, for his steadfast refusal to limit his ideas to the salable and the practical, to what could be easily categorized. Because his work often took the form of installations, little of it remains. Kiesler originated more ideas and saw fewer of them built than practically any other architect of his time. He was seventy-five years old before he built his first building.

After forming a partnership in 1956 with his former student, Armand Bartos, Kiesler began working on *The Shrine of the Book*—a building to house the Dead Sea Scrolls (which had been recently discovered) in Jerusalem. The building, completed in 1965, was the culmination of Kiesler’s lifelong dedication to visionary architecture and the concept of “endlessness” in particular (Fig. 32). The *Shrine*’s form—a double parabolic dome—is a plastic expression for the idea of rebirth and renewal. “The entire structure looks like a jar/vessel—the lower parabola the container; the upper the open neck, the mouth exhaling and inhaling space.”⁵¹ The dome was a departure from the traditional cupola resting on a support structure. Instead, the continuous shell rested on a submerged, concrete slab. Along with Le Corbusier’s church at Ronchamps, *The Shrine of the Book* is considered by some to be one of the greatest examples of religious architecture of this century. A sensually charged and mysterious object, it fulfilled Kiesler’s ambition to fuse the sculptural and architectural.

48. Quoted in “Tough Prophet,” *Time*, May 25, 1959.

49. Lewis Mumford, quoted in *Frederick Kiesler Architect*, p. 147.

50. Sidney Kingsley, transcript of eulogy delivered at Kiesler’s funeral, December 28, 1965, Kiesler Estate Archives.

51. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, p. 325.



Fig. 32 Kiesler and Bartos
The Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, completed 1965

Kiesler was never content to do one thing—his philosophy was all-embracing, even cosmic. In everything he did, he advocated an integrated, synthetic approach to produce startling, hybrid forms. As he worked in several disciplines simultaneously—art, architecture, design, theater—he also worked between them. From the start he took an environmental approach that emphasized the active participation of the viewer, anticipating much conceptual and site-specific art by twenty years. His multidimensionality and mediation among disciplines can now be fully appreciated in light of the subsequent developments he so clearly envisioned.



Fig. 33 *Space Stage*, "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924

Visionary of the European Theater

Barbara Lesák

A most unusual Constructivist theater experiment took place in Vienna in 1924. It was unusual in that Vienna was known for its wealthy, but conservative, theater culture; moreover, the city was far from the European centers where Constructivist theater pieces were staged in the early twenties. The “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques” was planned and executed by Frederick Kiesler, who can be counted among the few Austrian artists whose work adhered to the Constructivist code of geometric abstraction. It was for the Vienna exhibition that Kiesler realized his *Space Stage* project, his vision of a stage of the future, developed as an antithesis to the traditional proscenium stage (Fig. 33). During this period, when modern artists were assailing the old, outmoded artistic order, there were many plans for visionary and utopian theaters, even exact blueprints and sketches of the architectural designs of a theater of the future. The most radical break with the conventions of theater architecture was effected, perhaps, by Anton Weininger, a Hungarian student of the Bauhaus. He designed a spherical theater, whose ideally stereometric shape exactly suited the Constructivist vocabulary of elementary forms. At the same time, the organization of the interior of the spherical theater enabled Weininger to produce a new spatial frame of reference between audience and stage—a kind of stage construction that rose up from the floor of the sphere to the center of the space. But Weininger’s design never went beyond the planning stage. Nor did that of the Bauhaus master Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, who planned a tower-form theater with moving mechanisms, or the projects of many other theater revolutionaries.

Frederick Kiesler’s *Space Stage* was actually constructed; performances were held on it, and its special form engendered a new performance aesthetic. Even though the *Space Stage* existed for only three weeks, the fact of its realization brought prestige to the theatrical avant-garde of Europe. For members of this group, the achievement of any of their ideas meant a victory over the lethargic but tenaciously persistent conservatism that was the general rule in the theater. This is why Kiesler’s design generated a great deal of publicity from the beginning. When the *Space Stage* was introduced to the Austrian and international press on September 5, 1924, its spiral-stage construction was greeted with unprecedented debate. There was much speculation on the positive and negative consequences of a reform of the theater through a restructuring of its architecture rather than its dramatic art.



Fig. 34 Space Stage, "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924

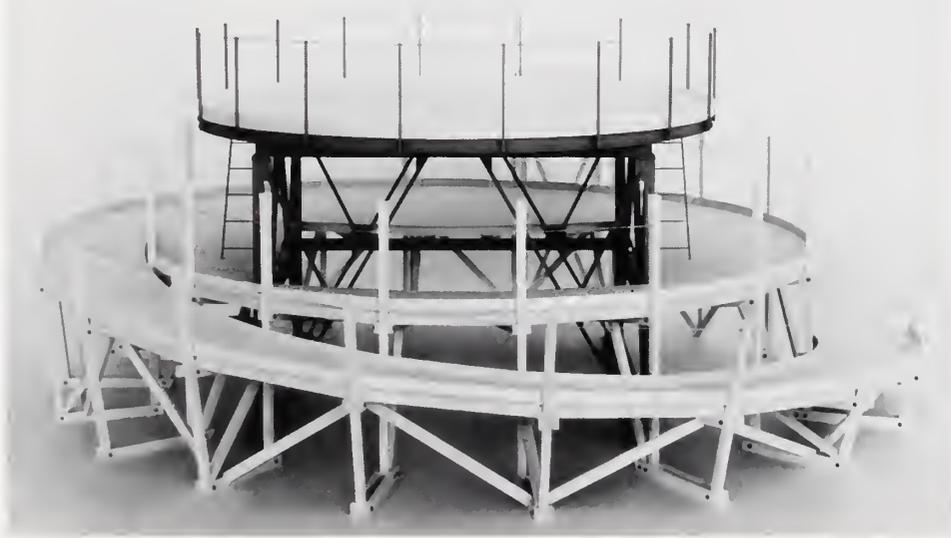


Fig. 35 Model of the 1924 Space Stage, reconstruction, 1986
Balsa wood, 60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm)
Collection of Dieter Bogner



Fig. 36 Illustration of Space Stage in *Der Tag* (Vienna), October 4, 1924



Fig. 37 Kiesler and friends during rehearsal on the Space Stage, "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924

Until this time, it had been the playwrights' ideas on the form and content of drama that determined what was happening on the stage visually and therefore the entire architecture of the theater. In the twenties, however, the formal aspect of the theater—as opposed to the literary aspect (comparable to abstract vs. nonrepresentational art)—moved into the limelight. And then—with Kiesler's *Space Stage*—came the paradoxical situation of a stage construction that called for the creation of new drama; even the contemporary dramatic repertoire proved to be unsuitable to the *Space Stage*. Its particular tectonics demanded a so-called drama of movement, a new performance scenario for mechanical, abstract events of action.

The *Space Stage*, an open tower construction placed in the center of Vienna's Konzerthaus, consisted of several performance spaces staggered on top of one another, which could be performed on simultaneously. From the floor, a spiral ramp led, in a half-turn, to the ring of one performance space; above this rose the second stage space—a circular plateau that could be reached only by a system of steps and stairs (Figs. 34, 35). Kiesler intended a lift to operate in the axis of the tower to lead to both performance spaces, allowing the actors accelerated vertical movement. The form of this stage encouraged a variety of movement among the actors, for it was possible to move on it in all directions—vertically, horizontally, radially, and centripetally.

It is not surprising, therefore, that modern dance, with its gymnastic and acrobatic elements, was particularly well suited to the *Space Stage*. To the dancers (Toni Birkmeyer, Gisa Gert, and the dance troupe of Gertrud Bodenwieser, as well as the English dance company led by Jack E. Burton), the *Space Stage* represented an oversized gymnastic scaffolding to which their choreography had to adapt. The focus of the critics' interest, however, was the staging of the Expressionist play *Im Dunkel* (*In the Dark*), written by the then young and unknown Austrian novelist Paul Frischauer, which premiered on the *Space Stage* October 4, 1924 (Figs. 36, 37). Though the driving dramatic force of this play was the actors' emotions, the production foundered on the neutral, unadorned *Space Stage*. The three-tiered space did not suit Frischauer's dramaturgical structure, a chamber play that called for a classic stage proscenium.

So dominant did the *Space Stage* become as an independent sculpture that—detached from its dramatic function—it became a symbol for the revolutionary movement in Constructivist theater directed against the traditional proscenium stage. The chain of associations that the spiral tower of the *Space Stage* provoked in the writings of contemporaneous critics reveals what they perceived as particularly scandalous or new. The merciless critic Karl Kraus pointed to its form, which he felt was all too typical for that time, accusing Kiesler of having borrowed forms from the boxing ring and modern road construction ("serpentine paths").¹ Kraus' imagination quickly conceived a scenario for the *Space Stage* that included traffic noise and a pugilistic atmosphere—a scenario that lacked any of the intellectual-literary content so important to him.

The *Space Stage* reminded other critics, such as Anton Kuh, an equally important representative of the witty Viennese feuilleton, of a roller coaster, then a hugely popular attraction in the big cities.²

¹ Karl Kraus, "Serpentine paths and other things," *Die Fackel*, no. 668–75 (December 1924), p. 39.

² Anton Kuh, "Das Drehkreuz für Passanten," *Prager Tagblatt*, October 5, 1925, p. 11.

The critic's allusion to this architecture of amusement was totally in the spirit of Kiesler, who had entitled his paradigmatic theater manifesto of 1924 *Railway Theater* (in the twenties the English word "railway" was used in German for "roller coaster"). For Kiesler was inspired by forms from the domain of mass culture: the roller coaster and the sports stadium, as well as elements of the circus. He appropriated these structures for their forceful vitality in order to reflect the new tempo and dynamics of the modern age. With these models he created a modern stage form—the *Space Stage*—as a vehicle for the formalistic, mechanically abstract, speed-oriented "*Space Stage play*."

Kiesler found welcome support for his endeavors in the architect Adolf Loos, who had followed his progress from the "electromechanical" set he created in Berlin in 1923 for the robot drama *R.U.R.*, by Karel Čapek, to the *Space Stage*. Loos also championed the aesthetic of the circus, with its elementary circular forms. In 1926 he wrote of Kiesler's theater experiment: "From the circus form F. Kiesler has created the 'space stage,' which carries in itself the seeds of a revolution in staging methods."³

Čapek's *R.U.R.* presented technology as a threat, culminating in the ultimately sinister discovery of robots (who are the actors in *R.U.R.*). By contrast, Kiesler's representation of the mechanical world was full of admiration for a technology that functioned with precision, fully in agreement with the mechanical aesthetic subscribed to by almost all avant-garde artists of the twenties. Kiesler's "electromechanical" set was a huge montage, compiled from the most diverse apparatuses and machine parts (megaphone, seismograph, tanagra device, iris diaphragm, light bulb)—some real, some painted (Figs. 38, 39). According to their functions, the devices could send light signals or sounds, as well as project films or perform optical illusions with mirrors.

Fig. 39 Detail of set for Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, 1923

3. Adolf Loos, "The Theatre," in *International Theatre Exposition*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Steinway Hall, 1926), pp. 6–7.

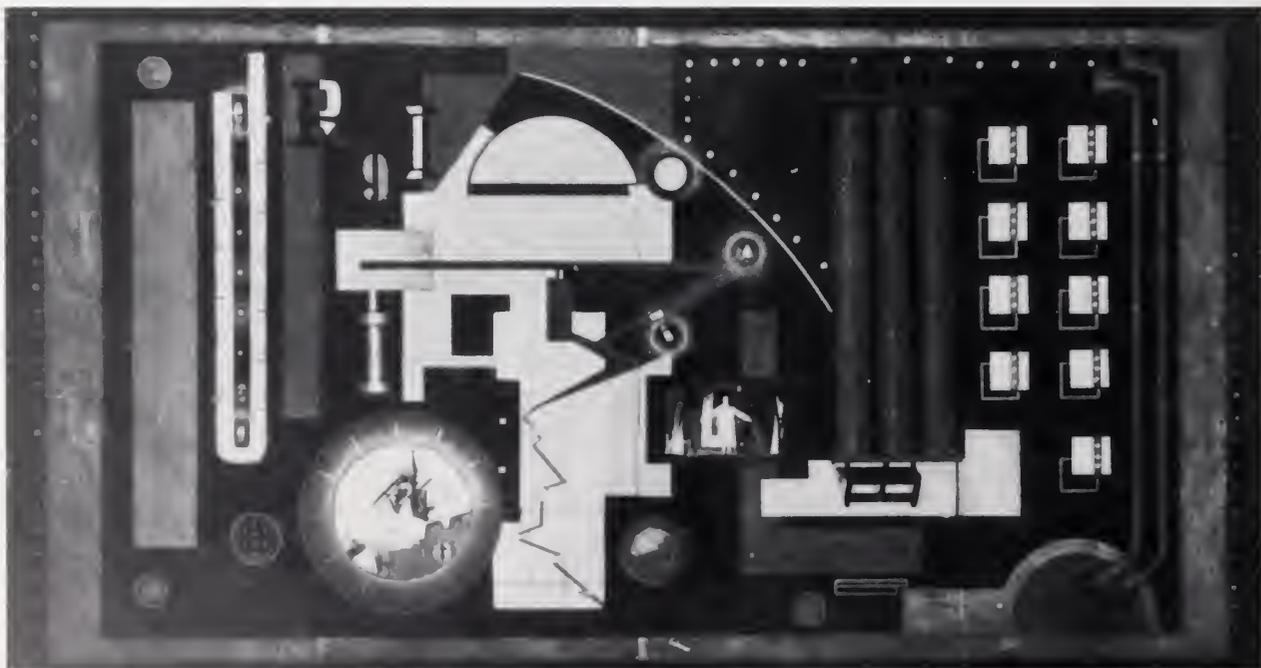


Fig. 38 Set for Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Theater am Kurfürstendamm, Berlin, 1923

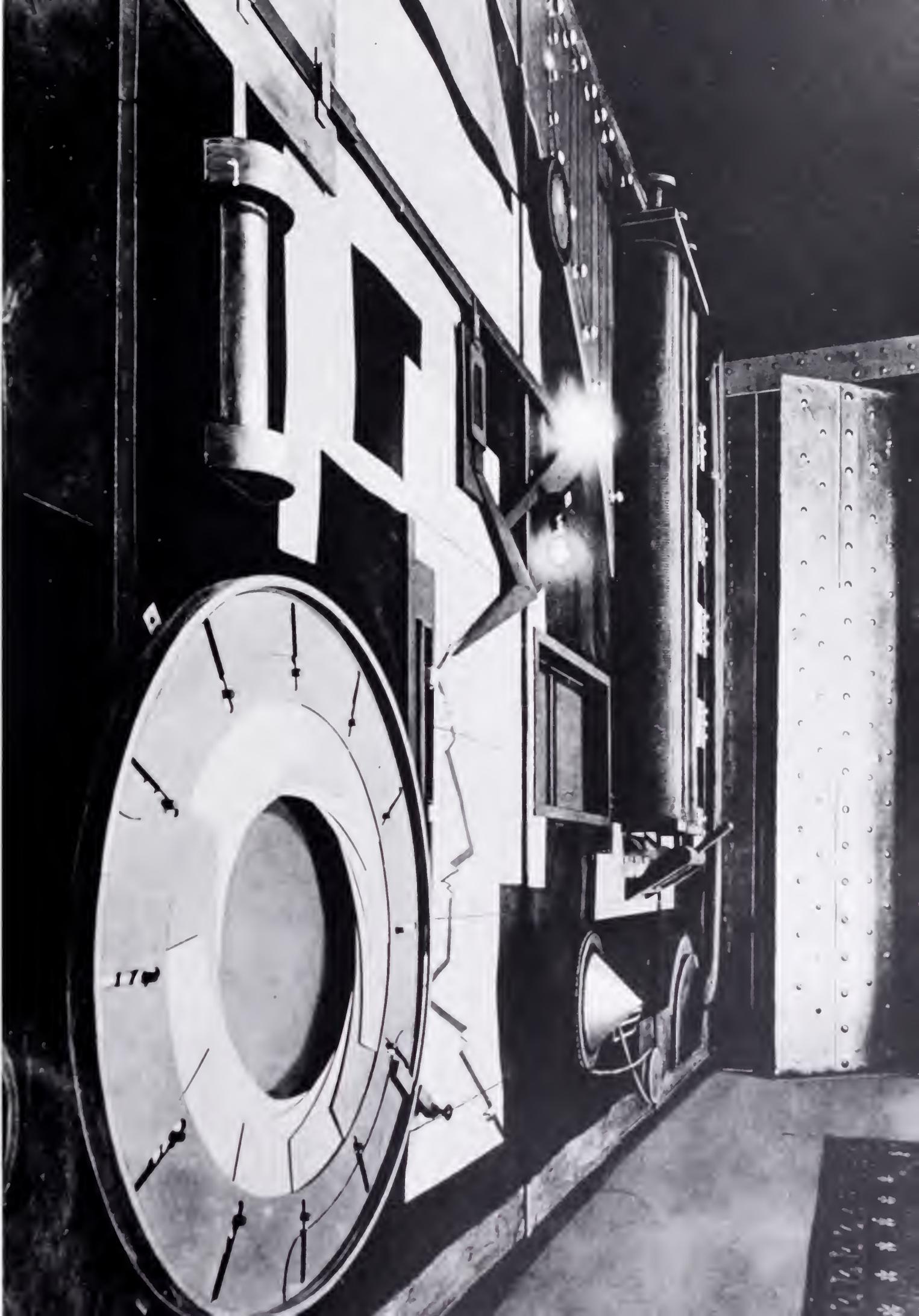




Fig. 40 Set for Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, Lustspieltheater, Berlin, 1924

The “electromechanical” set was soon declared to be the outstanding example of Western theatrical Constructivism and a counterpart to the great Russian theater models, such as Liubov Popova’s “acting apparatus” for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922). As a result, a photograph of Kiesler’s machine wall for *R.U.R.* circulated in the international avant-garde press. The Dutch painter and art theoretician Theo van Doesburg reproduced it in the journal *De Stijl*;⁴ the Futurist set designer Enrico Prampolini published it in his magazine *Rivista d’Arte Futurista*;⁵ it also appeared in Germany, in the almanac *Das Querschnittbuch*, which assembled the most important avant-garde achievements of each year.⁶

4. *De Stijl*, 6 (May–June 1923), p. 41.

5. *Rivista d’Arte Futurista*, nos. 1–2 (1924), p. 42.

6. *Das Querschnittbuch 1923* (Frankfurt am Main: 1923), n.p.

This publicity opened the door to Kiesler's participation in the international Constructivist avant-garde—and he accepted the challenge. It also created the basis for his friendship with Theo van Doesburg and the German Constructivist Hans Richter, both of whom had attended the 1923 performance of *R.U.R.*

Kiesler was to fulfill the expectations of a meteoric rise in the Constructivist heavens. For his second stage design in January 1924—also created for a Berlin theater—his ideas on the mechanization of stage decor became more radical. For the German premiere of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (directed by Berthold Viertel), Kiesler created what he called “mechanical space scenery.” The action, divided into several stations, required numerous, barely distinguishable scenes, and Kiesler staged them in an abstract setting that could be mechanically altered. Ideally, these abstract elements of stage design would require no literary model in order to demonstrate their functions. With the help of a manipulated photomontage, based on a series of photos from *Emperor Jones*, Kiesler created the impression that an ideal, mechanically abstract course of events had taken place. This photo sequence also became an important example of Constructivist theater trends in the twenties (Fig. 40).

Following his great successes in Berlin and Vienna, Kiesler was invited by the architect Josef Hoffmann to take part in the “Exposition Internationales des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes,” to take place in Paris in 1925. One of his responsibilities was to organize, and also to stage, the Austrian theater section in the Grand Palais. Kiesler created an exemplary piece of exhibition architecture in this space, designed according to the rules of De Stijl, and evolved from his own *L + T* system of installation. This, in turn, brought him to the attention of Jane Heap, publisher of the American avant-garde magazine *The Little Review*, who was in Paris at the time. She asked him to organize with her the “International Theatre Exposition,” planned for New York the following year, using his exhibition models from Vienna and Paris.

The New York exhibition opened on February 27, 1926, in Steinway Hall. In addition to pieces brought from Paris, Kiesler was represented with several new theater designs, which had probably been conceived, though not realized, in Paris (Figs. 41–43). Although these projects were still committed to a dynamic Constructivism, they went beyond its formal laws by incorporating organic forms. Kiesler had already experimented with such forms in 1925 when he designed an ovoid theater. The ovoid theater on display in the New York exhibition as a plaster model and in longitudinal section was called *The Universal: The Endless Theater Without Stage* (Fig. 3). (Even the titles of his projects were trend setting). It was a prophetic introduction of his great complex of ideas on endlessness—the *Endless House* series—which was to occupy him from the late forties until the end of his life. Kiesler demonstrated that he knew how to treat the motif of the spiral stage with flexibility, evidenced by another design in the exhibition, the *Railway Stage for Department Store (The Endless Stage)*. The department store represented to him a site of theatrical adventure; it could therefore be designed in a scenic way.

Kiesler was the undisputed *enfant terrible* of the exhibition, who understood how to get into the headlines, whether he was pro-



Fig. 41 Plan for the *Endless Theater*, Vienna, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 83 x 84 in.
(210.8 x 213.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the
architect



Fig. 42 Plan for the *Endless Theater*, Vienna, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 77 ½ x 84 in.
(196.8 x 213.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the
architect

claiming a *Four-Dimensional Theater*, in homage to Einstein's Theory of Relativity, or announcing that he intended to found an International Theatre Arts Institute together with the actress Princess Matchabelli, who was living in New York. A different interpretation of Kiesler's accomplishment within the framework of the "International Theatre Exposition" was furnished by the critic Sheldon Cheney: "This show brought up by Friedrich Kiesler, himself a prime conspirator among the newer revolutionaries, begins several jumps beyond the point where [Max] Reinhardt left off with his cleared stages and circus-theaters; and it ends in regions by turns so murky and so rarefied that one needs a considerable array of explanations."⁷ The reaction to Kiesler in New York, a city in which he would spend the rest of his life, was thus mixed, but not inauspicious.

7. Sheldon Cheney, "The International Theater Exposition," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 3 (March 1926), pp. 203–04.

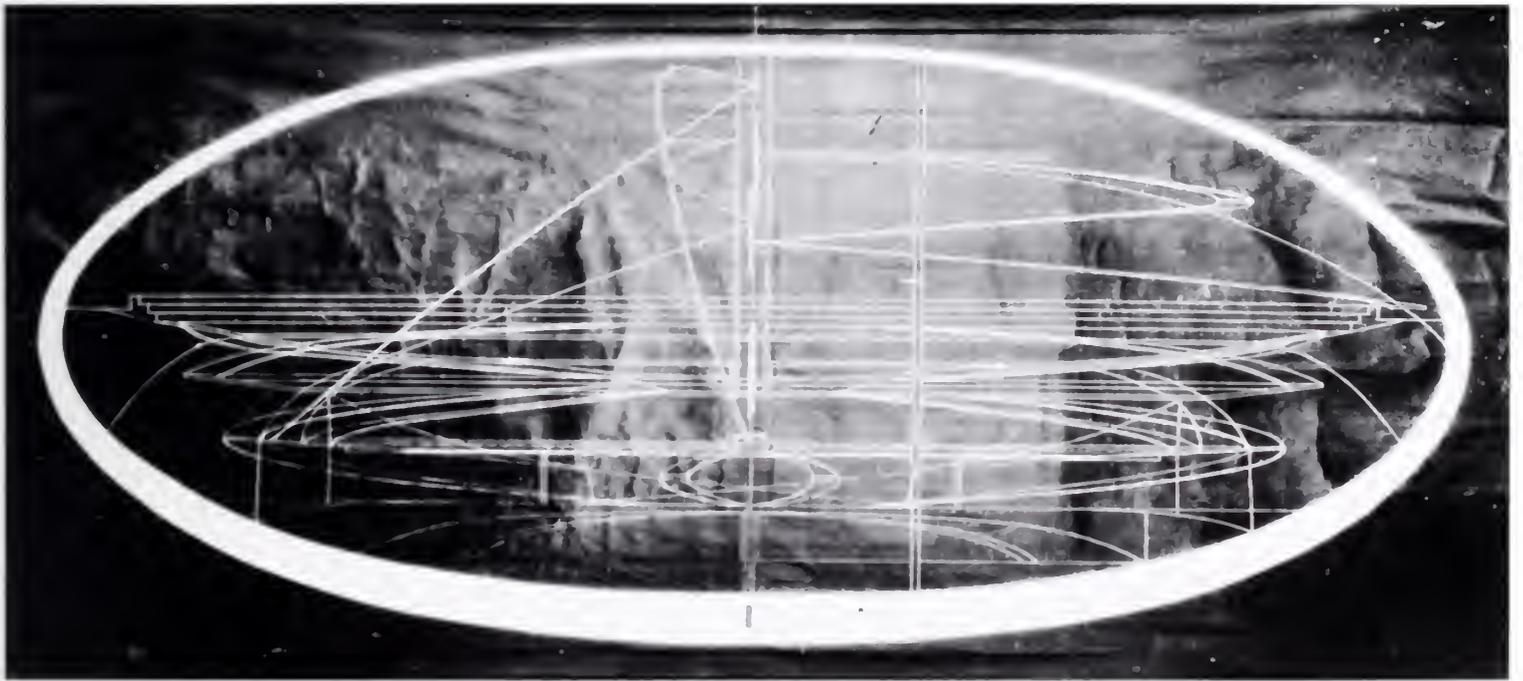


Fig. 43 Plan for the *Endless Theater*, Vienna, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 46 ¾ x 101 in
(118.7 x 256.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the
architect

Kiesler and The European Avant-garde

Dieter Bogner

Frederick Kiesler arrived in Paris from New York in the summer of 1930, after four years in America. He did not intend either to settle in France or return to Vienna. It was, rather, a highly pragmatic reason that led him to this rendezvous with his many friends of the Parisian avant-garde, among them Theo van Doesburg, Piet Mondrian, Alexander Calder, Jean Arp, Fernand Léger, Oskar Kokoschka, and Tristan Tzara: Kiesler had left the United States temporarily in order to be able, on his reentry, to satisfy certain necessary formalities for immigration. On first arriving in New York, in 1926, to mount the exhibition of theater art at Steinway Hall, he had not seen to these formalities, having intended to return to Europe after several weeks.

Kiesler had not been forced to leave his adopted homeland, Austria, or Europe itself under political pressure, as many of his artist colleagues had to do in the thirties. Rather, despite great financial difficulties and disappointments in America during his first years there—accompanied by the loss of his European property and possessions—he looked upon that country as a place where he would one day be able to realize his visionary architecture concepts. His trip to Paris in the summer of 1930 marked his final decision to begin a new life in the New World. After becoming a U.S. citizen in 1936, he would not visit Europe again until the late forties; and he never returned to Vienna.

Despite unfavorable financial circumstances, Kiesler, in the summer of 1930, could report to his Paris friends several artistic successes in America: the Film Guild Cinema had opened in 1929, causing a sensation in artistic and intellectual circles, as had his window displays for Saks Fifth Avenue; he was a member of the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC), for which he conceived a design exhibition in March 1930. In May, he received his architect's license from New York State, and his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* was published by Brentano's.

These first New York projects dealt with artistic and architectonic concepts that had been developed from the European language of form as spoken by the Constructivists and the De Stijl artists. Kiesler therefore became an intermediary for European Constructivism in America.

Ten years earlier, however, he had been totally unknown among the international avant-garde. After a rather traditional academic education, he had probably spent several years in the military press corps during World War I. But in the years immediately after the

war, he developed the artistic and theoretical concepts that made him an acknowledged member of progressive European art circles. When he was thirty-three, his stage set for Karl Čapek's play *R.U.R.* became an unexpected artistic success in Berlin (Fig. 44). The friendships he made in that city with Theo van Doesburg and Hans Richter, as well as his contacts with El Lissitzky, László Moholy Nagy, and a number of other artists involved with the Berlin stage, suddenly offered him entry to the European avant-garde. The exhibition pieces he designed for the 1924 "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques" in Vienna and his organization of the show itself reveal that Kiesler possessed an excellent overview of contemporary artistic endeavors and had the contacts necessary to assemble a representative number of plans, sketches, and

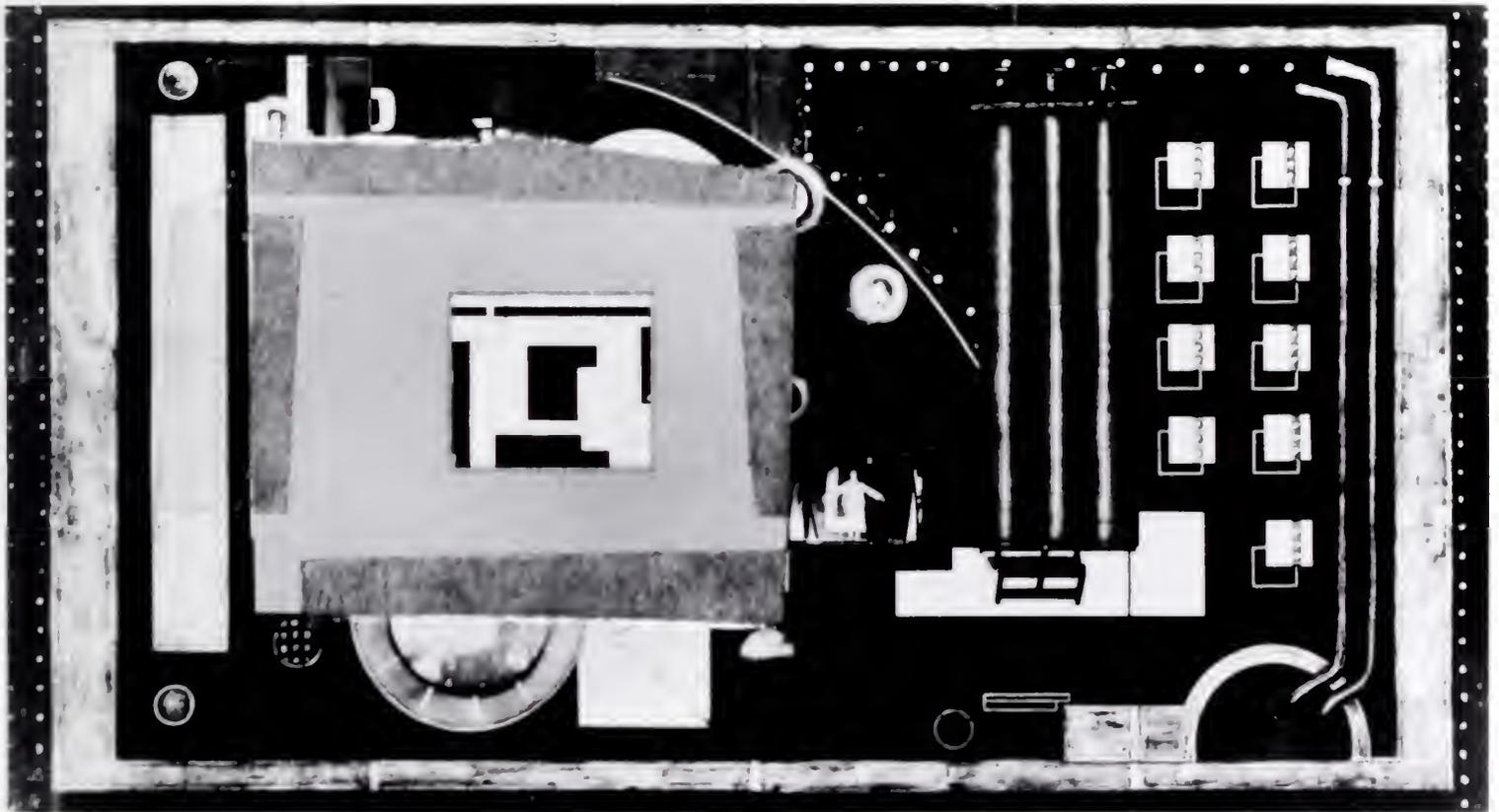


Fig. 44 Set for Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*, Theater am Kurfurstendamm, Berlin, 1923

models from all corners of Europe. Among the more than one hundred exhibitors were Fernand Leger, Oskar Schlemmer, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, George Grosz, Enrico Prampolini, Oskar Strnad, Alexander Vesnin, and Alexandra Exter.

Kiesler's knowledge of the most recent trends in art also manifested itself in the programmatic texts that he wrote about his own works. His affinity to the artistic formulations of international Constructivism cannot be understood, however, without taking into account the knowledge and experience he had previously gained from Viennese artistic and intellectual circles. Viennese culture of the second decade of the twentieth century is often viewed solely in terms of the Expres-

sionist outcries of Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, and the early Arnold Schönberg. But it had a rationalistic side, struggling from chaos toward order, which appears in the literature on Vienna as merely a marginal phenomenon, if at all. This side is represented by the continuing presence, in the intellectual and cultural milieu, of the ideal of the original Art Nouveau movement at the turn of the century, of the debate surrounding Christian von Ehrenfels' *Gestalt* theory (that form was perceived as an integrated whole), and of the structurally oriented, scientific worldview of logical positivism. To this aspect of Viennese culture also belongs the musical order of the twelve-tone scale (developed in the twenties by Joseph Matthias Hauer and Arnold Schönberg), as well as Adolf Loos' space architecture (for example, the Strasser house, 1918, and the Rufer house, 1922) and the social utopianism of the Social Democratic movement in Vienna in the years following the war.

This, then, was Kiesler's cultural background at the moment when he gained entry into the Constructivist avant-garde. The effect of this rationalist-utopian background is apparent in his concepts of elementary structural relations and in his proclivity for interdisciplinary artistic activity, itself closely tied to his lifelong penchant for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Also important in this context are his intense interest in science and his utopian social orientation. Adolf Loos and the art historian Hans Tietze, both untiring champions of modern art and prominent representatives of the rationalist movement in Vienna, are among the personalities in the Viennese milieu who encouraged and supported Kiesler.

With the two major works of his European years—the 1924 *Space Stage* in the Vienna “Theater Techniques” exhibition and the 1925 *City in Space*, commissioned by Josef Hoffmann for the Austrian theater section of the “Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes” in Paris—Kiesler formulated the definitive concepts of his artistic expression. He wanted to create, by elementary means, architectonic axioms for the polydimensional possibilities of human movement in a flexible, infinite space. He defined his *City in Space*, constructed of panels and beams suspended in space without supports, as a “system of tension in open space” and designated the three-dimensional possibility of motion in the spherical space of the *Space Stage* as the most important criterion of a future space theater. Both principles are fundamental to the full-size model of the *Space House* erected in New York in 1933 and the *Endless House*, as developed in 1950, as well as to the theory of correalism that he worked out in the thirties—the conviction that the essence of reality is manifest not in the thing itself but in its ordered, coordinated correlation to its environment. This idea of correlation can be traced back in Austrian intellectual history through many intermediary stages to Leibniz's idea of *ars combinatoria*, but it was also present in Piet Mondrian's twentieth-century theory of Neoplasticism. And it runs like a strong thread from the formal conception of Kiesler's *City in Space* to his last work, the monumental environment *Us, You, Me*. In the four intervening decades he constantly responded to new artistic, philosophical, scientific, and human experiences. This coordination between his receptiveness to the latest intellectual and artistic phenomena and his adherence to the conceptual

foundation that he laid in the early twenties characterizes the metamorphosis of his elementary works into the structurally determined works of his later years.

The significance of Kiesler's European work lies in the transformation of latent ideas on form and the theoretical conceptions of the Constructivist avant-garde into large constructions that actually could be realized spatially. With the *L + T* installation system he developed for the 1924 Vienna "Theater Techniques" exhibition (Fig. 45), the *Space Stage* he exhibited there (Figs. 33, 34), and the 1925 *City in Space* (Fig. 47), he turned the visionary utopias of Russian and Dutch artists, which were largely only ideas on paper, as well as those of the Bauhaus masters, into physical realities that aroused great astonishment and respect within the avant-garde. "You have realized that which we dreamed could one day be accomplished," commented Theo van Doesburg on the Paris *City in Space*. Manifestos, marked by a radical Dadaist style, com-



Fig. 45 *L + T* installation system, "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924 (two views)

municated Kiesler's visionary ideas and accompanied such works on the new, spherical, space and motion theater (what became the *Endless Theater*), the *Railway Theater* (a prelude to the *Space Stage*), and the mega-city floating in space.

The formal and conceptual stimulation for these works came from Russia and Holland. In contrast to the grids of Western European designs for skyscrapers (by Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilbersheimer, and others), the Russian Constructivists, such as Alexander Rodchenko, L. Chidekel, and El Lissitzky, were planning, as early as 1920, residential and office buildings that rose high above the earth on elevated supports or floated in free space (Fig. 46). The hanging constructions of Rodchenko and of G. Klucis, developed as Constructivist sculptures, also could have served as important catalysts. To transpose these ideas, however, Kiesler turned not to the dynamically slanted Russian forms but to the rectangular Constructivist system of the Dutch Neoplasticists. He was influenced by the paintings of Mondrian, the furniture design of Gerrit Rietveld (Fig. 48), and van Doesburg's house plans.

Kiesler proved his ability to convert current artistic impulses into large spatial constructions in 1924, with his *L + T* installation system for the Vienna "Theater Techniques" exhibition. Whereas the De Stijl artists' method of exhibition presentation followed a rather conventional design (Fig. 49), Kiesler translated their fixed arrangements into a flexible space and suspension system for exhibition. The meticulously planned spatial arrangement he conceived for the two- and three-dimensional objects, 12 to 15 feet high and painted red, white, and black, was the largest De Stijl environment of the twenties. Only Kiesler's *City in Space*, constructed a year later in Paris, had comparable dimensions.

The design principles Kiesler formulated in these works became, in 1925, the basis for the sketches for a horizontal skyscraper. As in the *L + T* system's treatment of the horizontal elements, long blocks of monumental planks, joined at right angles, were suspended above the ground on thin pillars (Fig. 50). Ambiguity is one of the essential characteristics of Kiesler's constructions: though he ostensibly developed each one for a particular use, he added visionary, architectonic concepts that had nothing to do with their specific function. Moreover, they could also be appreciated as pure artistic forms. The *City in Space*, for example, was planned as a support system for Austrian set and theater design. Kiesler proposed this large construction as the blueprint for a utopian mega-city: the De Stijl artists saw it, in addition, as a Neoplastic spatial effort. In this autonomous, artistic sense, the French Constructivist Jean Gorin further developed the formal principles of *City in Space* in his *Constructions Spatio-Temporelles*. By contrast, Herbert Bayer, a fellow countryman of Kiesler, took the work's structural concept as a point of departure, twenty years later, for the design of the exhibition "Modern Art in Advertising" (Chicago, 1945). What was always vital to Kiesler was the visualization of a general principle that was not limited functionally to a specific purpose but was open to the most manifold, diverse uses. The pedestal chairs with eighteen different functions that he created for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in 1942 represented this conviction in an exemplary fashion.



Fig. 46 El Lissitzky
Study for office building, Moscow, 1924

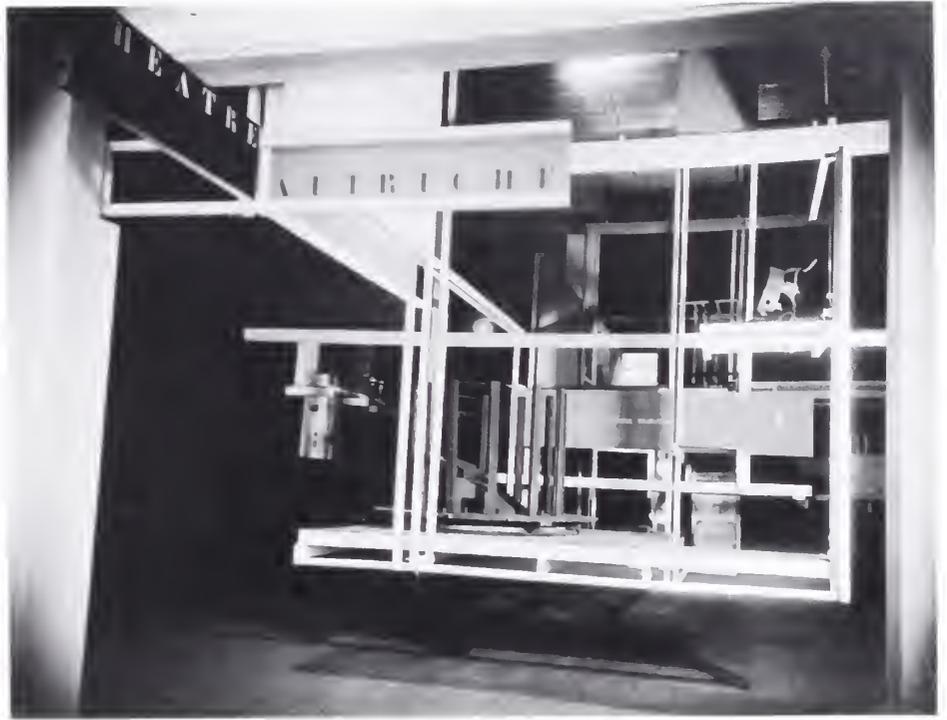


Fig 47 *City in Space*. "Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes." Grand Palais, Paris, 1925 (two views)



Fig. 48 Gerrit Rietveld
Berlin Chair, 1923.



Fig. 49 "Les Architectes du Groupe De Stijl," Galerie
L'Effort Moderne, Paris, 1923

There is a similiar connection between the model for Kiesler's *Space Stage*, designed and constructed full scale in 1924, the spiral department store project (Fig. 51), and his plan for the redesign of the Place de la Concorde in Paris (Fig. 52) (both 1925). In the latter case, a huge spiral, supported by monumental parabolic arches reaching out toward the city's suburbs and crossed by horizontal expressways, was designed to serve not only as a means of transportation but also as an "endless stage for public events of local and national importance." Kiesler developed this concept under the influence of revolutionary Russian theater art in combination with an idea dominant in Constructivism—that of striving to unify art and life. But this ambition was one that he had known from his Vienna days—the unification of art and life had been a precept of the Vienna Secessionists at the beginning of the century.

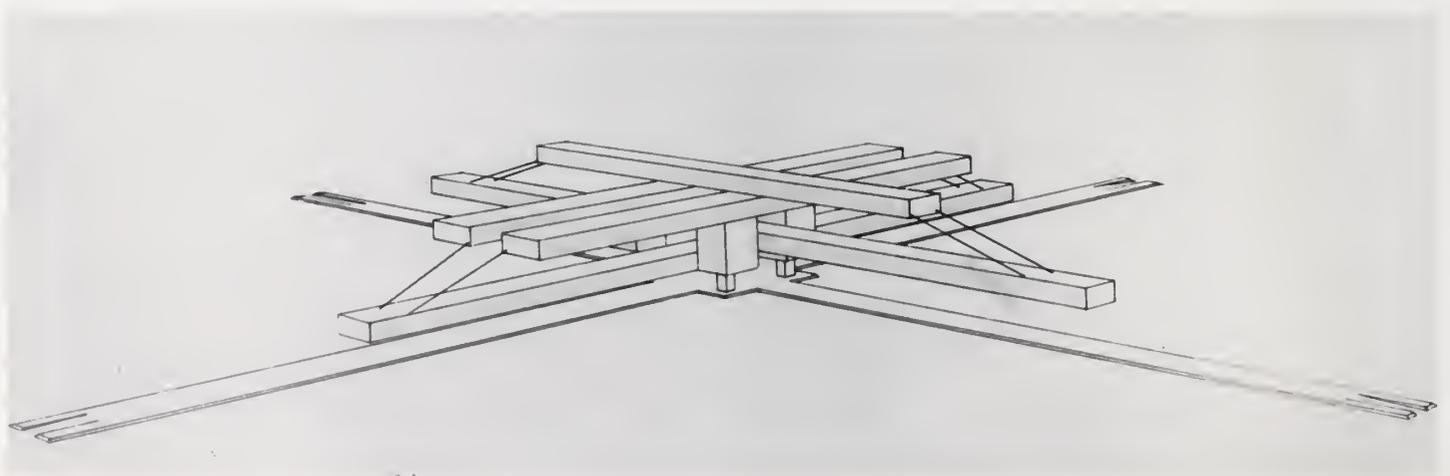


Fig. 50 Sketch for horizontal skyscraper, Paris, 1925
Whereabouts unknown

Fig. 51 *Spiral Plan*, Paris, 1925
Whereabouts unknown

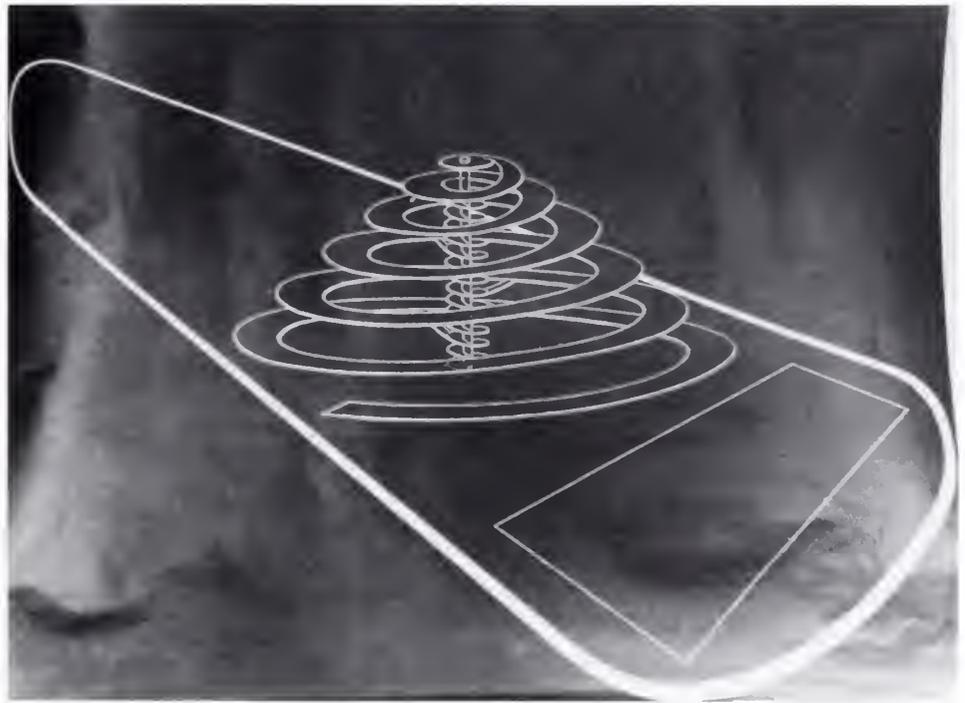
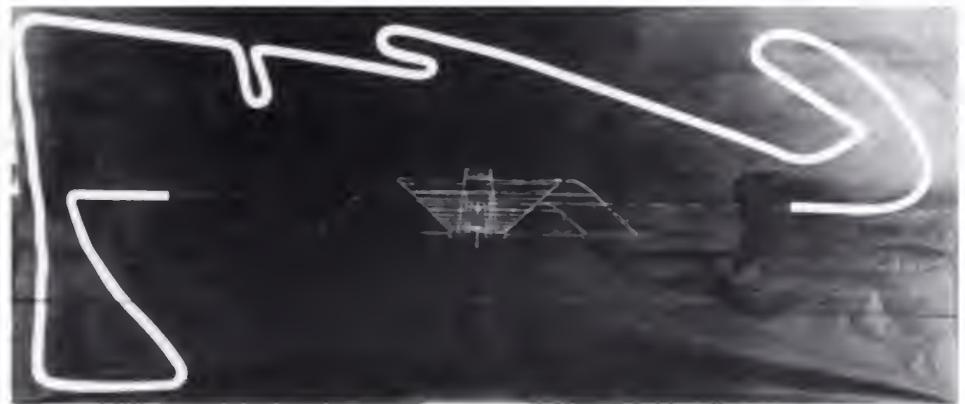


Fig. 52 Plan for Place de la Concorde, Paris, 1925
Architectural print mounted on board, 36 1/4 x 76 1/2 in.
(92.1 x 194.3 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Purchase



Kiesler's lifelong occupation with the development of new display concepts also had its roots in the work of the Vienna Secessionists. The radical reductionism of the exhibition designs and museum architecture in the work of Josef Hoffmann and Koloman Moser had been, around 1900, as revolutionary as Kiesler's European and American works. These precedents were also integral to the development of Kiesler's display concepts and to the systematic typographical designs he created for the "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," where the design of the stationery, catalogue, poster, and even the admission ticket followed the same Constructivist principle as the exhibition system, in form as well as in color (Figs. 53, 54). No other exhibition of that time had presented such distinct design or had so closely approached the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the Secessionist experiments at the turn of the century, such as the 1902 Beethoven exhibition, in which artists from all disciplines collaborated.

Stage and exhibition design in Vienna offered many more opportunities for developing and testing visionary artistic and architectonic concepts than actual concrete construction projects offered. Only in these fields could such projects as *Space Stage* and *City in Space*—commissioned by official state agencies—have been realized in conservative Vienna between the wars. That they could be accomplished at all was due to a small circle of officials, intellectuals, and artists receptive to modernism, whose goal, in a Vienna that had been governed by the Social Democrats since 1919, was that of establishing a policy of art appropriate to concurrent political changes. The model for the artists and intelligentsia was the cultural climate of revolutionary Russia.

With *City in Space* in the 1925 Paris “Exposition Internationale,” Kiesler revealed his commitment to the visionary ideals of international Constructivism and Neoplasticism. He represented, along with Le Corbusier, who built *L’Esprit Nouveau*, the French pavilion at the exposition, and Konstantin Melnikov, who built the Soviet one, the most recent trends in European architecture. Le Corbusier’s *Plan Voisin*, exhibited in his pavilion, was the most authentic counterexample to Kiesler’s visionary city suspended in free space. A comparison of the two concepts illustrates the irreconcilable difference between Le Corbusier’s feasible plan for urban development and Kiesler’s idealistic utopia.



Fig. 53 Catalogue cover for “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques,” Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924
Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst,
Vienna

Although Kiesler’s hopes for realizing his projects were to be as unfulfilled in America as they had been in Europe, he understood how to present his utopias with such conviction that they always seemed to be realizable. This attitude is reflected in the response he gave later when asked about his memories of Vienna in the twenties: “It was as if utopia would become reality.”



Fig. 54 Poster for "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924
Osterreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst,
Vienna

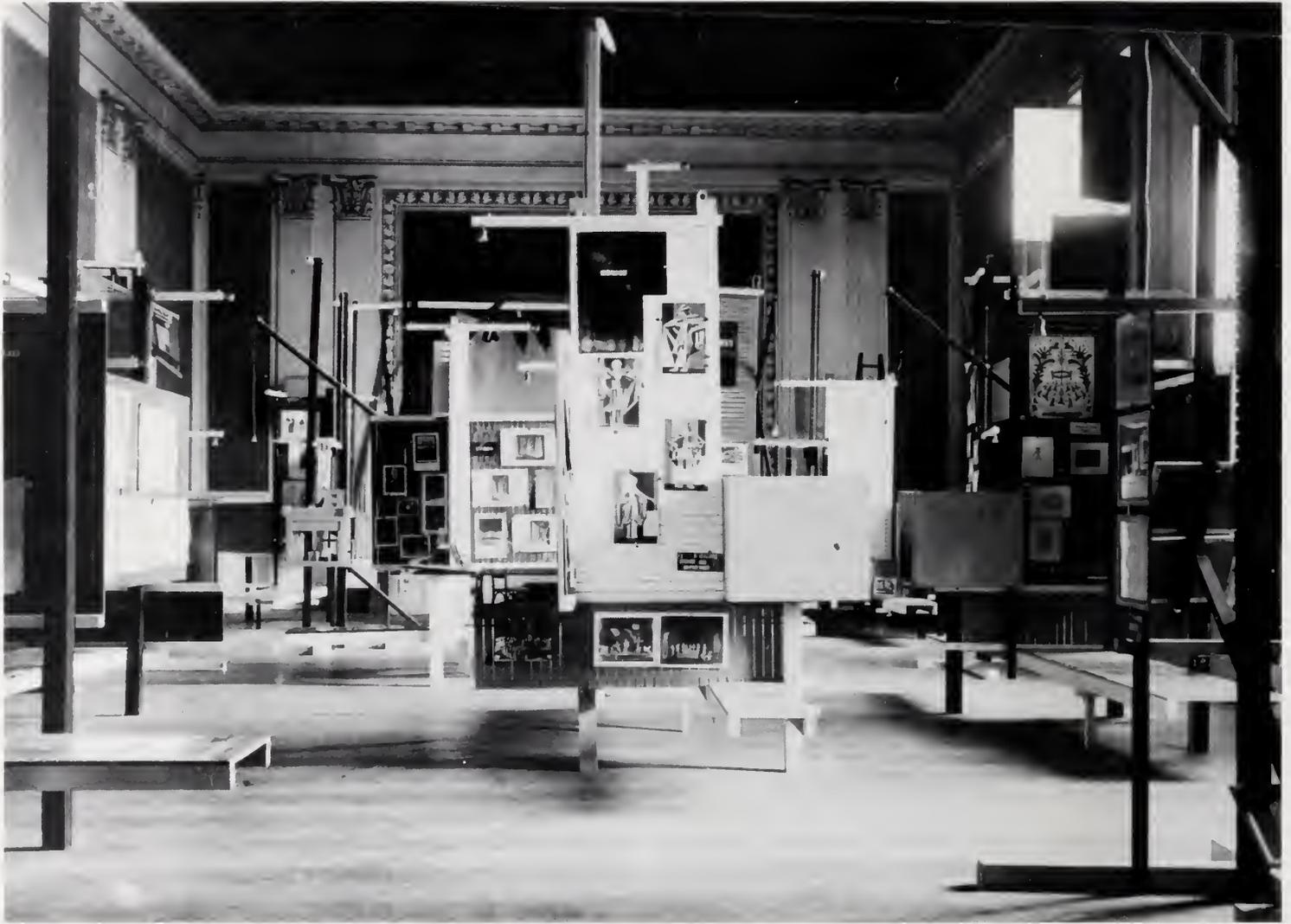


Fig. 55 "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924

The Art of Revolutionary Display Techniques

Cynthia Goodman

Frederick Kiesler's installation concepts were as radical as his architectural theories. Whether he was designing on a small or large scale—a single-family dwelling or an entire urban landscape, a public shrine or a commercial art gallery—his basic concerns were unified by his lifelong preoccupation with “continuity.” Kiesler first developed this concept in the mid-1920s. As he recalled, “It was in 1924–25, in the Vienna of Strauss waltzes, and in the Paris of the *Beaux-Arts*, that I eliminated the separation between floor, walls, and ceiling, and created floors, walls, and ceiling, as a continuous whole [*italics original*].”¹ Just as all Kiesler's designs stressed a continuous flow of architectural spaces one into the next, there was a similar flow and continuity to his aesthetic doctrines. No one was more deeply aware of the “continuity” of his creative concepts than Kiesler himself, who found it nothing out of the ordinary. As he explained, “everyone has one basic idea . . . and he will always come back to it.”² Because so few of Kiesler's architectural plans were ever realized, his numerous installations—of both his own artwork and that of others, as well as commercial displays—assume an even greater significance as a reflection of his lifetime ideals. Indeed, Kiesler's installation concepts accurately encapsulate his core aesthetic statement.

The name Frederick Kiesler is synonymous with revolutionary design concepts. As early as October 1924, Theo van Doesburg had noted the groundbreaking nature of his installation theories.

While traveling through Germany, France, Holland, and Italy, I studied the results of the newest endeavors in the field of architecture. I was completely taken by surprise when I faced the completely new form of demonstration at the International Theater Exposition of New Theatre Technique at Vienna. In no city in the world have I seen anything similar to it. In contrast to previous exhibitions in which art objects were hung next to one another without relation, in this method of demonstration the closest relations between the different works were established by their arrangement in space. It is extremely important and fortunate that the Theater and Music Festival has found a basic, practical, and economical solution to this problem in the new exhibition system created by Kiesler [Fig. 55].³

In 1928 and 1929, Kiesler, who had come to America in 1926 as director of the “International Theatre Exposition” for the opening of Steinway Hall in New York City, was commissioned by Saks Fifth Avenue to design a series of window displays. According to his account, the

fourteen windows he designed offered the public the first “extensive presentation of modern show windows.”⁴ In a manuscript he wrote entitled “Merchandise That Puts You on the Spot—Some Notes on Show Windows,” Kiesler described his operating tenet in window design as the avoidance of the commonplace. Using the window frame as an example, he wrote: “Consider the proportions of a show window frame. Here alone, a great effect can be achieved. . . . Whatever your course when choosing the proportions for a window, avoid one thing—the normal.”⁵ In addition to irregularly proportioned window frames, some of the other unusual display techniques included the asymmetrical arrangement of goods and varying heights for the objects on display, as well as varying heights for the ceilings of the individual displays.

Kiesler explained much of the philosophy that motivated his design of the Saks windows in his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display*, published in New York by Brentano’s in 1930. For the most part, he applied similar design concepts to the display of both merchandise and art. The very title of his book is an excellent indication of how integral he believed the two kinds of installations to be. Both were constructed in order to promote contact between viewers and the works on display. Kiesler wanted his window displays to exert the same sort of magnetic effect upon the passerby in the street that the art he installed would have upon the visitor in a gallery or museum (Figs. 56, 57). He was guided by his involvement with “correalism,” a term he coined that expressed his belief in the integral relationship between each object and its environment. In terms of commercial displays of merchandise, correalism would promote “contact between street and

1. Frederick Kiesler, undated, untitled manuscript in Kiesler Estate Archives.
2. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in T.H. Creighton, “Kiesler’s Pursuit of an Idea,” *Progressive Architecture*, 42 (July 1961), p. 105.
3. Theo van Doesburg, quoted in “New Display Techniques for ‘Art of This Century,’ Designed by Frederick Kiesler,” *Architectural Forum*, 78 (February 1943), p. 50.
4. Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (New York: Brentano’s, 1930), p. 67.
5. Frederick Kiesler, “Merchandise That Puts You on the Spot—Some Notes on Show Windows,” undated typescript, Kiesler Estate Archives, p. 2.
6. Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store*, p. 69.
7. Frederick Kiesler, “The Art of Architecture for Art,” *Art News*, 56 (October 1957), p. 50.
8. Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store*, p. 102.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 95.



Fig. 56 Plan for storefront for a radiator company, 1929
Whereabouts unknown



Fig. 57 Window display, Saks Fifth Avenue, New York, 1928–29

store, between passersby and merchandise.”⁶ For the art gallery, the first consideration “must be a design that would make conducive a meeting between painting and visitor.”⁷

Kiesler foresaw that in the “coming architecture everything which does not serve a function can be omitted.”⁸ As a consequence, in the Saks windows he dispensed with the traditional partitions used to demarcate space and instead displayed the clothing against a continuous architectural background. This method allowed him to think of the entire installation “as a frame as if for a picture.”⁹ He applied this same concept to the installation of works of art, where it was his habit to display paintings unframed. He had first exhibited such works in the installation of paintings and sculpture that Van Doesburg found so remarkable at the Music and Theater Festival in Vienna in 1924. By dispensing with the frames, Kiesler was able to conceive of the entire space as a unit rather than be concerned with a group of distinct elements. This concept became increasingly central to his installations of works of art.



Fig. 58 Window display, Saks Fifth Avenue, New York, 1928-29



Fig. 59 Window display, Saks Fifth Avenue, New York, 1929

Kiesler also believed in dramatizing a limited number of pieces of merchandise (Fig. 58). In one of the Saks windows, he posed a pair of white gloves and an evening bag on the lap of a dark velvet coat with a white fur collar (Fig. 59). The chair on which the coat was draped was gray wood with a red cushion and was asymmetrically positioned at an angle that echoed the zigzagging architectural structure behind it. This arrangement effectively demonstrated not only Kiesler's belief in the dynamism of asymmetry but also how an asymmetrical arrangement focuses attention better “on each of the individualized displays.”¹⁰ In

addition, this somewhat sparse display illustrated his credo: “merchandise first, decoration afterwards.”¹¹ The new look of the Saks windows did not go unnoticed in the press. Contemporary reports commented on the originality of the window designs as well as their stage-set character. According to a reviewer for *Women’s Wear Daily*, the publication of greatest interest to the fashion community, “the novelty of the background . . . instead of detracting from the merchandise, actually throws it into greater relief, the very shallowness of the window seeming to push it forward.”¹² This reaction was precisely what the designer had envisioned.

All Kiesler’s displays—no matter what the nature of the objects involved—were conceived with a particular affinity and talent for theatrical staging. During his life, Kiesler was involved in the design of several theaters as well as numerous stage sets. From 1934 to 1957 he served as director of scenic design at The Juilliard School of Music in New York, where he designed approximately seventy sets. A humorous encounter that he related in his text “Merchandise That Puts You on the Spot—Some Notes on Show Windows” indicates the extent to which he considered the design of each display an opportunity to stage a production guided by theatrical considerations: “Why doesn’t the show window hold instead of a display—a play? A stage play—Where Mr. Hat and Miss Glove are partners. The window a veritable peepshow stage.”¹³ Kiesler had been developing this idea ever since his first stage designs, and in several of his later plans for the display of art the works were exhibited in a “peepshow” manner, that is, they were visible only to someone peering through a hole in a wall or a curtain.

Kiesler’s aforementioned manuscript and his book *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* contain ideas that foretell techniques that would figure importantly in his later installations. His “Dream of a Kinetic Window” involved a push-button system that would permit the passerby “to open and close windows at will.”¹⁴ If desired, a certain piece of merchandise could either be rotated for a different angle of vision or brought closer for inspection. Intensity of illumination could also be modified.

When in 1965, Nam June Paik, the father of video art, announced that “the CRT would replace the canvas,” his prognostication was thought revolutionary. But Kiesler had made similar claims forty years earlier. In 1927, when he was asked by the Société Anonyme to design a model apartment of the future for a show at The Brooklyn Museum, his sketches included plans for the display of paintings and sculpture in the house of the future. He predicted that original works of art would be concealed, and the concept of paintings hanging permanently on walls would be a “discarded practice.” Instead, “sensitized panels . . . will act as receiving-surfaces for broadcasted pictures.”¹⁵ Kiesler had also predicted a “telemuseum” of the future in which artworks from major museums around the world such as the Prado and the Louvre would be “transmitted over the air.”¹⁶ His prediction uncannily resembles the interactive video discs on the market today that enable viewers to visit major art collections around the world on television screens in the comfort of their own homes. Thus Kiesler’s innovations were not limited to the field of design but also seem to have anticipated developments in modern communications technology.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

12. *Women’s Wear Daily*, March 24, 1928.

13. Kiesler, “Merchandise That Puts You on the Spot,” p. 2.

14. Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store*, p. 110.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

Frederick Kiesler again demonstrated the breadth of his interests beyond the world of art in a series of drawings, sketches, and notes relating to an ecology exhibition that he planned for the American Museum of Natural History in New York (Fig. 60).¹⁷ These fascinating documents include a visual outline (seemingly modeled on a photostated page from a geology text) of historical geology from early sponges and algae to man and animals such as elephants, apes, and camels that evolved most recently in the Cenozoic era. Kiesler explained his display plan simply as a “plan for the unfolding of the correlative pattern of growth and decay chiefly demonstrated on the life of the soil.”¹⁸ Although his interest in ecology was predicated on much the same philosophy as his study of correalism, he was careful to distinguish between the two. Both studies dealt with interrelationships. Correalism represented “the dynamics of continual interaction between man and his natural and technological environments,” whereas ecology dealt exclusively with the relationship “of the organism to environmental conditions, organic and inorganic, but not artificial.” The technological component, therefore, was excluded from ecological concerns.¹⁹

¹⁷ Neither the specific date of this project nor the reason why it remained unrealized is known. The relevant material is in the Kiesler Estate Archives.

¹⁸ Frederick Kiesler, undated notecard, Kiesler Estate Archives.

¹⁹ Kiesler’s definition of correalism states specifically that correalism is “distinct from ecology.” The definition was included in his article “On Correalism and Biotechnology: Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design,” *Architectural Record* 86 (September 1939), p. 61.



Fig. 60 Ecology chart, n.d.
Ink on paper, 11 x 15 in. (27.9 x 38.1 cm)
Kiesler Estate

Although this exhibition was planned for a museum of natural history and not for the display of art, once again the concepts Kiesler outlined for this project were applicable to all his installations. Among these concepts was his realization that “the attitude of the prospective visitor” must be considered “from the outset of the design.”²⁰ Otherwise the exhibition might enjoy success only in an “academic or abstract way, but it is likely to fail in its chief purpose, namely to convey its message without loss of its specific meaning.”²¹ Kiesler considered the visitor’s attitude toward such exhibitions in terms of “physical and psychological” concerns. Of the two, he considered the psychological of greater significance. He reasoned that if the visitor were psychologically stimulated, physical fatigue would be lessened.

Frederick Kiesler is best known for his designs for Peggy Guggenheim’s Art of This Century gallery in New York. His reputation for

20. Frederick Kiesler, undated notecard, Kiesler Estate Archives.

21. Ibid.



Fig. 61 Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942



Fig 62 Abstract gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942

innovative and surprising display techniques made him the logical choice for Guggenheim, who, as she stated in a letter of March 9, 1942, was desirous that "some new method be developed for exhibiting paintings, drawings, sculpture, collage, and so-called objects."²²

Kiesler's wildly imaginative solution more than lived up to her expectations (Fig. 61). His strong belief in the importance of the gallery visitor's active role in experiencing art accounts for much of the novelty of his designs. When man comes into contact with a work of art, Kiesler felt, he must "recognize his act of seeing—of 'receiving' as a participation in the creative process no less essential than the artist's own."²³ As a consequence, Kiesler did all he could to break down any possible barriers between viewers and the works of art being viewed. He not only constructed all the displays so that heights and angles could be adjusted to the observer's optimum viewing angle but he also designed flexible and comfortable seating units so that the problem of fatigue while viewing art would be minimized. He also designed all the displays to be both "mobile and demountable."²⁴ In addition, in planning the construction, he took into consideration "a minimum of expense, shortage of labor, and easy management of the gallery."²⁵ The concepts of low cost, low maintenance, and ease of assembly and disassembly were repeated concerns throughout Kiesler's installation designs.

Most important, at Art of This Century, following Peggy Guggenheim's one specific request, all the paintings were displayed without frames, a tradition Kiesler had established much earlier (Fig. 62). He explained his reasoning as follows:

Today the framed painting on the wall has become a decorative cipher without life and meaning, or else, to the more susceptible observer, an

22. Guggenheim to Kiesler, March 4, 1942, Kiesler Papers, Archives.

23. Cynthia Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler: Designer for Peggy Guggenheim," *Art of This Century Gallery*, *Art Magazine*, 51 (June 1977), p. 7.

24. Frederick Kiesler, "Principles of Mobile and Adjustable Aspects of the Gallery," *Art of This Century Gallery, 1942*, *Cynthia Goodman*, *Art of This Century Gallery*, p. 3.

25. *Ibid.*

object of interest existing in a world distinct from his. Its frame is at once symbol and agent of an artificial duality of "vision" and "reality," or "image" and "environment," a plastic barrier across which man looks from the world he inhabits to the alien world in which the work of art has its being. That barrier must be dissolved: the frame, today reduced to an arbitrary rigidity, must regain its architectural spatial significance.²⁶

Kiesler believed that it was the architect's mission to invent a means of regaining this unity and that the perfect solution for Art of This Century was the method of spatial exhibition he had been developing since 1924. In a footnote to his 1942 "Notes on Designing the Gallery," a two-page pamphlet he wrote explaining many of his design concerns, he listed his previous installations as well as the relevant display techniques.²⁷ These "Notes," as well as the preparatory sketches for the design of the gallery, show the extent to which his display techniques were influenced by his interpretation of the experiences of primitive man, who after his first graphic attempts on the walls of caves was not content to "stay on the cave wall retained."²⁸ Furthermore, as he commented in his "Notes," primitive man "knew no separate worlds of



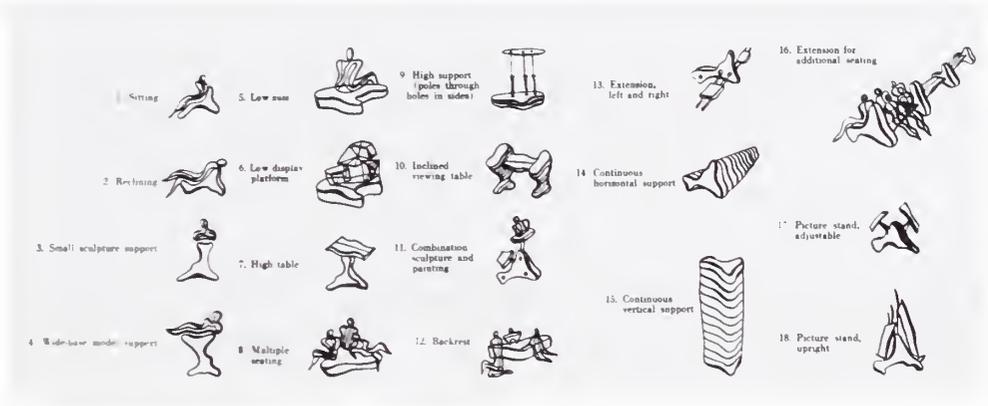
Fig. 63 Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942, detail of mounting device



Fig. 64 Biomorphic display stands, Abstract gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942

vision and of fact. When he carved and painted the walls of his cave or the side of a cliff, no frames or borders cut off his works of art from the space of life."²⁹ This integration of art and life is a recurrent refrain in Kiesler's own aesthetic doctrine, and throughout his career he strove to emulate the creative environment of primitive man.

Fig. 65 Drawing for multifunctional furniture. *Art of This Century*, New York, 1942
Whereabouts unknown



The Art of This Century gallery contained four distinct exhibition spaces. Many of the masterpieces of Guggenheim's outstanding collection of Surrealist art were hung in the Surrealist gallery. Curved wooden walls were attached to the existent walls of this gallery, and a false wooden ceiling was hung 15 inches beneath the original one. Unframed paintings were suspended from the curved walls from sawed-off baseball bats that could be adjusted to the viewer's desired height (Fig. 63). The original ceiling and walls were painted black. The elaborate lighting plan for this room called for one side to be illuminated for two minutes, then the other side after a three-and-one-half-second pause. Each area of illumination highlighted different works. This pattern was coordinated with special sound effects that created the roar of an approaching train throughout the tunnel-like exhibition space every two minutes. Kiesler lauded the dynamism of his eccentric lighting and sound system: "it pulsates like your blood. Ordinary museum lighting makes painting dead."³⁰

In addition to those works suspended from the walls, others were exhibited on biomorphic display stands designed by Kiesler (Fig. 64). These multipurpose units—which could be used either for the display of works of art or as seating—were constructed of ash covered with linoleum. Planks could be inserted into holes in these structures so that either a single work of art or several could be suspended from them. In most instances, one wooden structure was sufficient; they could, however, be joined together by the insertion of wooden poles or by stacking (Fig. 65).

These biomorphic stands were also used in the Abstract gallery, where abstract art by Wassily Kandinsky, Jean Arp, and Piet Mondrian as well as that of numerous other masters was exhibited. Most of the works in this room, however, were suspended on wooden wedges fastened to triangular arrangements of cloth tape and rope. These wedges were designed so that the sculpture and paintings they supported could be tilted in any direction or suspended at any height. Kiesler's ingenious system caused the works to seem to defy gravity and be magically suspended in midair. The architect particularly admired the "transparency" of this system. On two sides of this room, which was illuminated by direct fluorescent lighting, curvilinear walls of ultramarine canvas were attached to the floor and ceiling with rope.

26 Feb. p 1

27 *Architectural Record*, "Exhibition Designing the Gallery," transcript, 1942, Foster Busby Arch. vol. p. 2. Kiesler noted, "Theater and Music Fellows Meet the City of Vienna, 1924. Object not included in a virtual transparency of the white room called L & T. Used paintings without frames, sculpture on concrete." *World's Fair Grand Prix*, Paris, 1925, unclassified, *International Exhibition of Display*. Exhibition, New Theatre Technique, New York, 1926. L & T method produced. Prize writing competition plan for *Abstract Theater*, New York, 1928. 413 weight suspended and raised by 413 holes. *Exhibition of School of Architecture*, Columbia University, New York, 1936. *Exhibition of Art from Ceiling to Floor*. Various displays off the walls and floor for exhibit.

28 Feb. p 3

29 Feb. p 3

30 *Quincy* (Museum-Detroit) 2, 1941

The Kinetic gallery, as Kiesler explained, was “devoted to an automatic method of showing paintings.”³¹ The works in this gallery included fourteen reproductions from Marcel Duchamp’s *Boîte en Valise*, visible only if one looked into a peephole; the reproductions were on a conveyer belt which the visitor rotated by turning a large wooden wheel (Fig. 66). An actual replica of the *Valise* was also on display. An additional conveyer-belt construction displayed a succession of Paul Klee’s paintings. A third automated object was designed to display André Breton’s *Portrait of the Actor A.B.* In order to operate this shadow-box construction, the viewer lifted a lever; a portrait of André Breton swung around, and the shutter opened to reveal the poem-object within (Fig. 67).

31. Kiesler: “Notes on Designing the Gallery,” p. 2.



Fig. 66 Paternoster for viewing Duchamp’s work, Kinetic gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942



Fig. 67 Shadowbox to display André Breton’s *Portrait of the Actor A.B.*, Art of This Century, New York, 1942

The most traditional exhibition space at Art of This Century was the painting library, a room in which the visitor could sit on folding stools made of wood and ultramarine canvas and study works of art housed in open storage bins (Fig. 68). This gallery, which was illuminated by daylight, served as the temporary exhibition space. Art of This Century represented a rare opportunity for the architect to be given virtually a free rein with which to develop his installation concepts. The only unfortunate result was that in some instances, the installation caused such an uproar that it upstaged the art. Kiesler's ingenious creation, however, was to make him the logical choice for a number of subsequent and significant installations.

Kiesler was responsible for the construction and design layout for the installation of an exhibition on the history of American architecture sent to the Soviet Union in 1945 under the auspices of the Archi-



Fig 68 Storage bins in painting library of Art of This Century. New York, 1942

tects' Committee of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc., a committee chaired by Harvey Wiley Corbett. According to a text panel that accompanied the display, the "exhibit, dedicated to furthering the goodwill between the peoples of the USA and the peoples of the USSR, was prepared by the Architects' Committee of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship in collaboration with the US Office of War Information." The photographs and text panels that comprised the exhibition described the development of American architecture both structurally and sociologically. The picture and text editor for this ambitious project was Douglas Haskell, associate editor of *Architectural Record*.

Although the practicalities of the situation demanded a far more tame design than that at *Art of This Century*, the extant conceptual drawings nevertheless continue the highly innovative direction of Kiesler's designs for Guggenheim's gallery. According to these drawings, the wooden walls were to be curved rather than perpendicular and supported above the floor by angled wooden struts much like those that upheld the individual works of art in the *Abstract* gallery at Peggy Guggenheim's. One of the drawings shows Kiesler's plan to include a fairly representational rendering of a face on one of the curved walls (Fig. 69).

If Kiesler's plans had been executed according to his conceptions, the display units would have made as strong an architectural statement as the work on exhibition. An extant installation photograph, however, reveals that the actual construction was quite straightforward. The basic layout consisted of fifty panels, approximately 3 x 5 feet each, on which the images and text were arranged. What was remarkable was the collagelike presentation of maps, plans, photographs, and text that Kiesler designed for each of the ten different sections into which the exhibition was divided: introduction, transportation, homes, industry, commerce, administration, education, cities, farms, and regional planning. Kiesler arranged the different components in this sequence so that the themes would develop according to his notion of a natural progression: "first [people] traveled, then they built homes, then they developed industry, etc."³²

Kiesler had two opportunities in 1947 to display his inventiveness in designing exhibition spaces. In New York, he designed the setting for the exhibition "*Blood Flames*," which Nicolas Calas organized for the Hugo Gallery (Fig. 70). Included in this exhibition

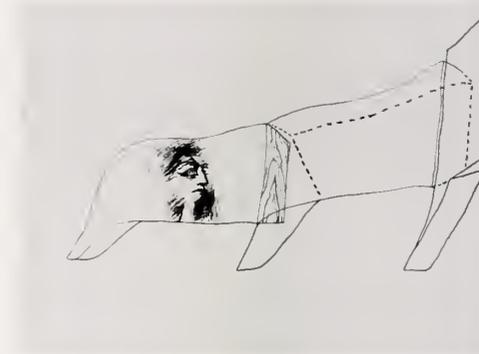


Fig. 69 Study for American architecture exhibition sent to the Soviet Union, 1944
Ink on paper, 11 x 15 in. (27.9 x 38 cm)
Kiesler Estate

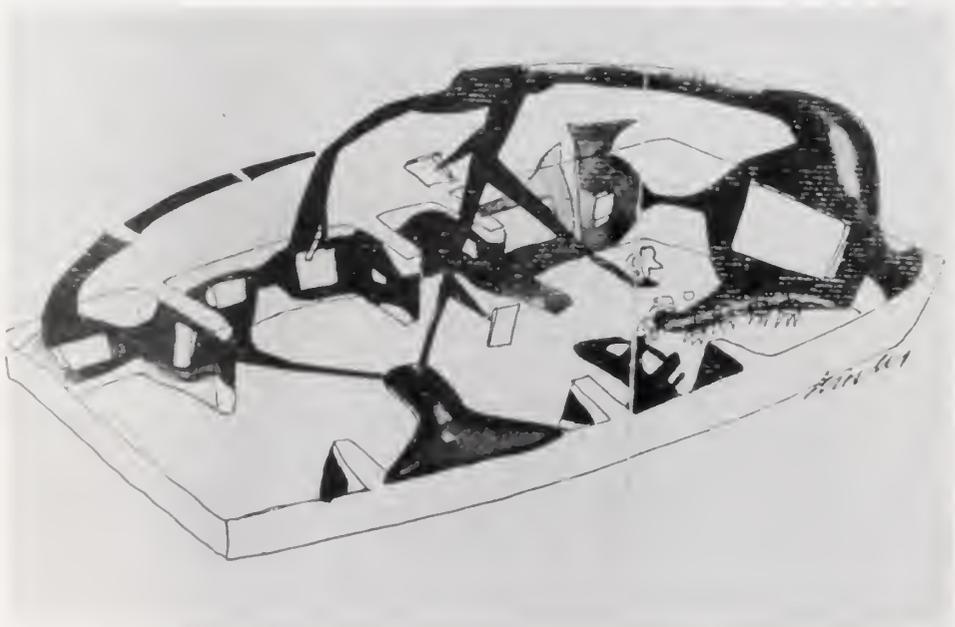


Fig. 70 Plan of layout for "*Blood Flames*," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947



Fig. 71 "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947

were the artists David Hare, Arshile Gorky, Matta, Isamu Noguchi, Jeanne Reynal, Gerome Kamrowski, Wilfredo Lam, and Helen Phillips. Calas, who espoused the necessity of emphasizing "the magic character of unexpected associations" as an antidote to what he thought of as art's "irresponsibility," was confident in his choice of Kiesler as exhibition designer.³³ Kiesler's own brief statement in the exhibition catalogue echoes thoughts similar to those of Calas.

Much like *Art of This Century*, Kiesler's installation was a work of art itself. Once again his main concerns included the integration of the painting and sculpture on display with the architectural setting in the most effective manner possible. In this installation, Kiesler established the continuity between floors, ceiling, and walls by painting the gallery with wide undulating bands of color that swooped from one architectural component to the next rather than being bound by house-painting traditions (Fig. 71). He also included typography, his own statement as well as the names of the participating artists, as part of his decorative scheme. This writing, like the color divisions, extended in some places from one wall to the next. At the Hugo Gallery, Kiesler once again showed himself more than able to adapt his somewhat grandiose plans to a particular circumstance. Because this installation was only for a temporary exhibition rather than a permanent display as at *Art of This Century*, cost and speed of execution and demolition were of utmost importance. By painting the space rather than using devices that required construction, Kiesler conformed to his observation that painting was the least expensive way to transform a space: "Color-Forms provide the simplest, least expensive and most rapid means for trans-

32 *Orderly Chaos: The Original Architecture of the American Architecture Exhibition*, Moscow Kiesler Institute of Architecture.

33 *Helen Calas: Blindfolded*, by John G. Thompson, New York (Hugo Gallery 1947), p. 6.



Fig. 72 "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947



Fig. 73 Kiesler in "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947

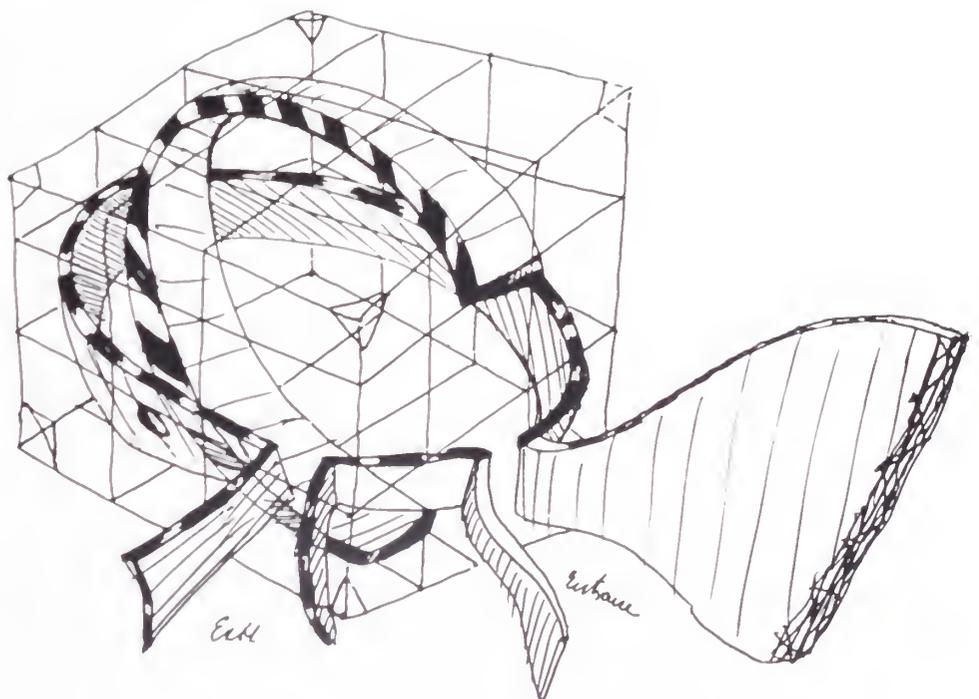
forming a room: The man of low income can at least get drunk on a pot of paint."³⁴ According to Kiesler, peasants demonstrate their understanding of this very simple concept by whitewashing their walls.

More surprising than the somewhat disorienting bands of color was the manner in which the paintings were displayed: some were on the floor, leaning against the wall; others were on the wall but installed askew; and still others were suspended from the ceiling. Matta's painting *Grave Situation*, for example, was hung from the ceiling in a corner of the room from strings of different lengths, causing the painting to appear lopsided (Fig. 72). The sexually charged subject matter of Lam's painting *Le Présent Eternel* was made all the more forceful by Kiesler's installation, which required the viewer to enter a white net tent, sit down, and gaze at the painting on the ceiling (Fig. 73). This manner of display manifested Kiesler's continued interest in peepshowlike presentations. Once again, all the paintings were displayed without frames with the exception of Jeanne Reynal's mosaics. For her works, Kiesler himself designed the frames, which were called "boomerangs," in reference to the basic configuration of the four long arc-shaped pieces of wood that surrounded the gemlike mosaic compositions.

As at Art of This Century, his display was controversial, and in the opinion of some, it rivaled the works themselves. Kiesler's installation received wide coverage in the press. One reviewer concluded: "I get the feeling that Kiesler just doesn't like paintings and has figured every way possible to make it difficult for you to enjoy them."³⁵ Ad Reinhardt, however, expressed his belief that the gallery owner, Alexander Iolas, deserved "a special big 'hat off' . . . for letting his rooms be used this freely for a unique imaginative experiment."³⁶

Also in 1947, Kiesler was invited by Andre Breton to go to Paris to design the installation of the last important Surrealist exhibition held at the Galerie Maeght. Many of the ideas for the "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," such as a *Labyrinth* and a *Salle de Superstition*, were those of Marcel Duchamp. But he had left Paris long before the exhibition opened, confident that the execution of his ideas was in able hands. Duchamp commented in an interview with Pierre Cabanne, "As an architect, [Kiesler] was far more qualified than I to organize a Surrealist exhibition."³⁷ Once again, Kiesler lived up to expectations. The following passage from a letter from Dorothea Tanning to Kiesler in Paris echoes Duchamp's confidence in Kiesler's abilities: "All reports of the surrealist show are very favorable—thanks to you, I'm sure. I can't imagine how they could have opened at all if you hadn't come to the rescue with your resourcefulness and your ideas."³⁸

The overall scheme for the exhibition was conceived by Breton. He planned the visitor's steps through the space to correspond to "a primordial concern to retrace successive stages of an INITIATION."³⁹ All the plans for the *Salle de Superstition*, which was located at the entrance to the first floor and opened the theoretical cycle of tasks, were conceived and executed by Kiesler. In order to continue the visit, one first had to overcome one's superstitions.⁴⁰ Therefore, passage through this room was a prerequisite for each visitor. The fluid space of Kiesler's conceptual design for the room echoes the flowing elasticity of



34 Frederick Kiesler, untitled architectural manuscript, Kiesler Estate Archives.

35 *New York World Telegram*, March 7, 1947, p. 6.

36 Ad Reinhardt, "Neo Surrealists Take Over a Gallery," *PM*, March 11, 1947, p. 11.

37 Marcel Duchamp, quoted in Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 86.

38 Tanning to Kiesler, August 9 [no year], Kiesler Estate Archive.

39 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme de Surréalisme 1947*, exhibition catalogue, Paris, Galerie Maeght, 1947, p. 135.

40 *Ibid.*

Fig. 74 Plan for *Salle de Superstition*, "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1947.

Ink on paper
Whereabouts unknown

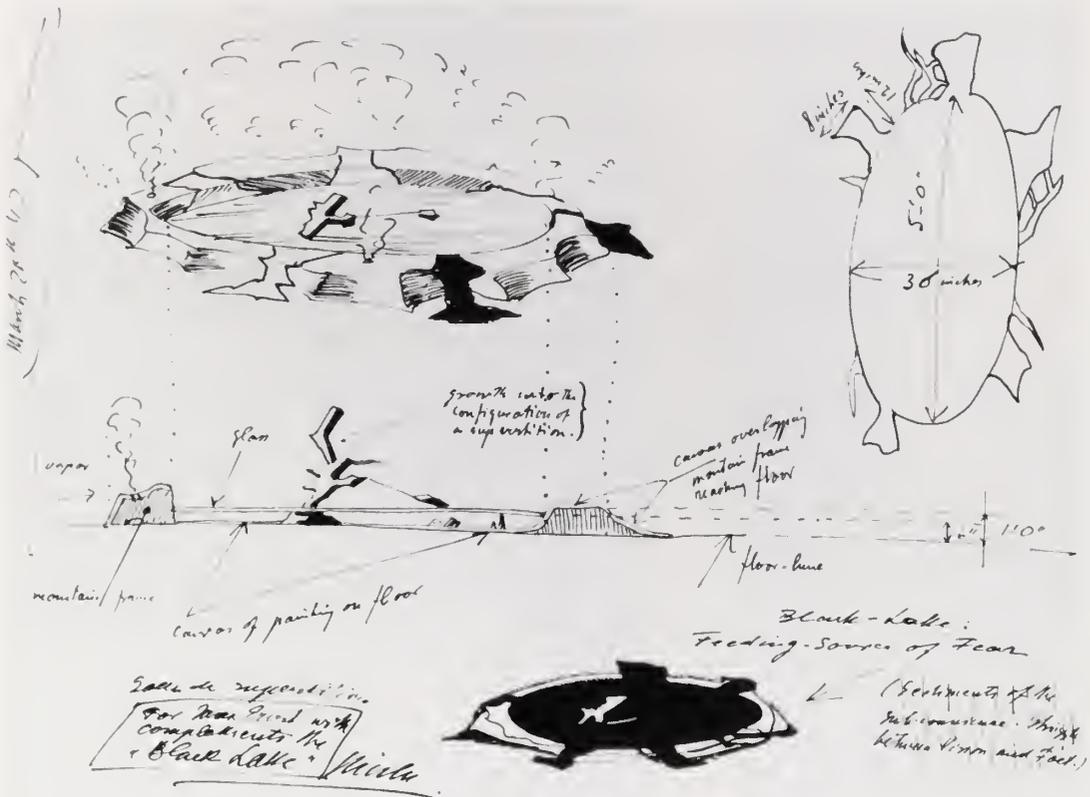


Fig. 75 Study for The Black Lake, Salle de Superposition
"Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," Galerie
Maeght, Paris, 1947
Ink on paper, 10 x 13 1/4 in. (25.4 x 33.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate

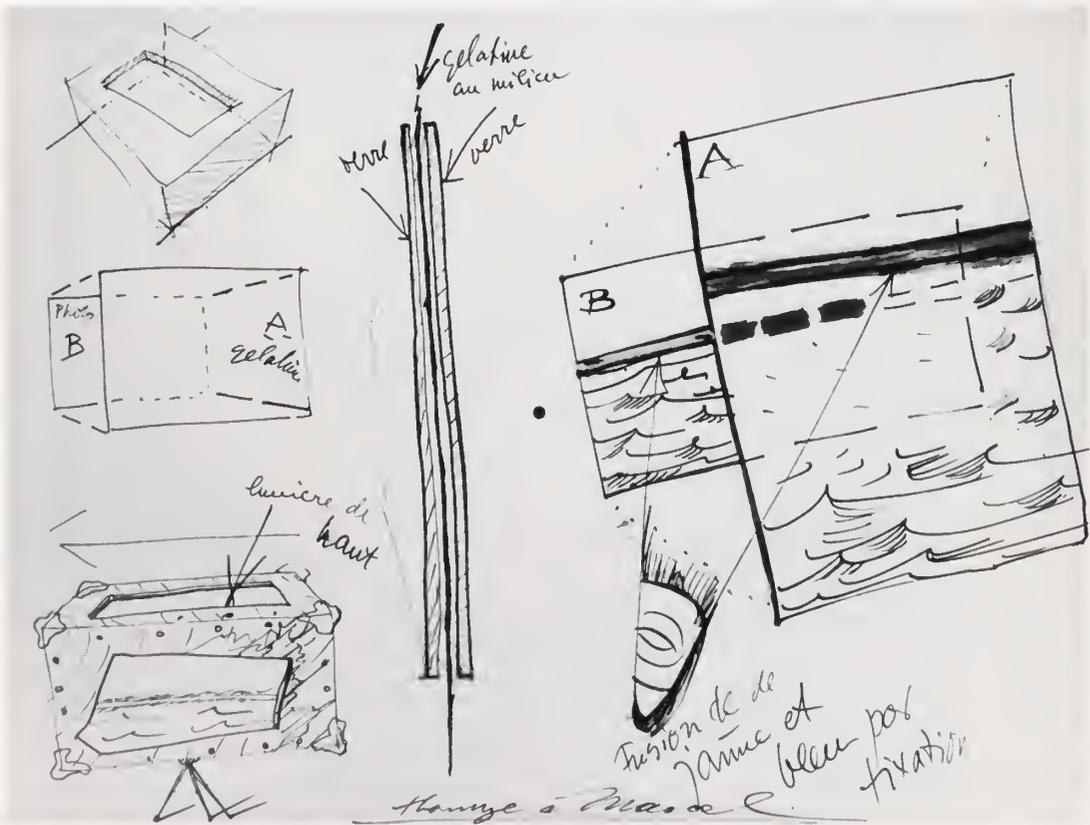


Fig. 76 Study for Green Ray, Salle de Superposition
"Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," Galerie
Maeght, Paris, 1947
Ink on paper
Kiesler Estate



Fig 77 Kiesler with Totem for All Religions, 1947

his *Endless House* (Fig. 74). According to Jean Arp, who wrote a brief essay on Kiesler's installation of the *Salle de Superstition*, Kiesler transcended traditional expectations for architecture through his incorporation of a sense of "encroaching anxiety" within the confines of this room. Kiesler aspired, said Arp, to "cure man of his anguish."⁴¹ Arp's prefatory comments demonstrate his understanding of the integral relationship between Kiesler's installation and his concepts for the *Endless House*, in which a major concern was the creation of a harmonious, stress-free environment where the inhabitants could flourish.

In a short article included in the exhibition catalogue, Kiesler explained that he set himself a dual goal in the design of the *Salle de Superstition*: "To create a unity in which the Painting-Sculpture-Architecture components metamorphose one into the other."⁴² First Kiesler designed the overall spatial configuration of the room, and then he invited the painters Duchamp, Max Ernst, Matta, Miró, and Tanguy, and the sculptors David Hare and Etienne Martin, to execute the individual pieces, each component of which he had carefully planned. These pieces were:

The black lake (source which nourishes anguish), by Max Ernst [Fig. 75]; the waterfall congealed by superstitions, by Miro; the Whist (luck of the owl, crow, bat, woman), by Matta; the green ray by Duchamp [Fig. 76]; the totem of religions (design by Kiesler), executed by Etienne Martin [Fig. 77]; the anguished man sculpture by David Hare (design by Kiesler); the vampire by De Diego; the evil eye by Donati; the anti-taboo figure by Kiesler.⁴³

Miro's construction of a "waterfall of superstitions" cascaded through the central portion of the exhibition space. Although there was no actual water in this installation, the very idea of incorporating a waterfall was reminiscent of Kiesler's numerous architectural designs in which water was considered a significant component in linking man with the cosmos in his search for inner peace. Hare's *Anguished Man* was suspended from the ceiling in front of the waterfall. As in the *Abstract gallery* at *Art of This Century*, sinuous curtains attached to the floor and ceiling by rope functioned as walls in certain parts of the exhibition area. These curtains also augmented the shapelessness of the space. In some places, Kiesler made holes in the black curtain wall. In another peepshow installation, Max Ernst's painting *Euclide* was visible only through one of these holes. Kiesler's first free-standing sculpture, the *Totem for All Religions*, was positioned against the curtain wall in one part of the room. This tall structure, constructed of driftwood and rope, was strangely reminiscent of both a crucifix and a gallows (Fig. 78). Another of Kiesler's contributions to this room, *Anti-Taboo Figure*, was a large plaster hand with one upraised finger (Fig. 79). This hand, the first object to greet the visitor at one of the entrances to the room, was supposed to ward off evil.

Although it was only in the *Salle de Superstition* that every element followed Kiesler's master plan, he oversaw the installation of all the other rooms. Somewhat magically he left his mark throughout the entire exhibition by gracefully suspending a curving thread in all the rooms and thus visually unifying the space. Duchamp had hung a dense web of thread throughout the space of the Surrealist exhibition "First Papers of Surrealism," held at the Whitelaw Reid mansion in New York

41. Jean Arp, "L'installation de Kiesler et la Salle de Superstition," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences et des Lettres*, 22 (1947), p. 365.

42. *Exposition Internationale de Surrealisme*, p. 134.

43. *Ibid.*



Fig. 78 *Totem for All Religions*, 1947
Wood and rope, 112 1/4 x 34 1/8 x 30 7/8 in. (285.1 x 86.7
x 78.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of
Mr. and Mrs. Armand P. Bartos, 1971



Fig 79 Antri-Toboo Figure, 1947
Destroyed

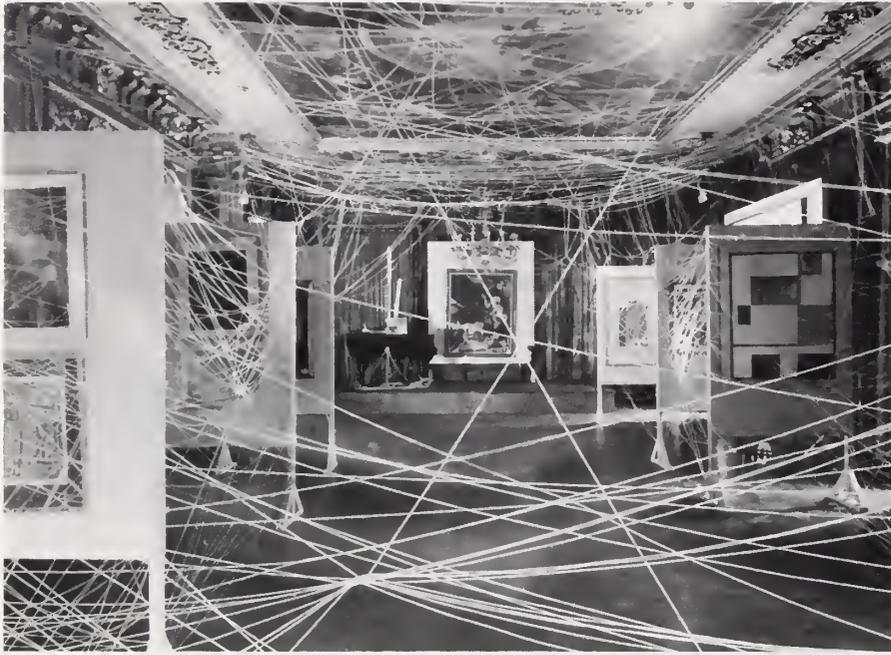


Fig. 80 Marcel Duchamp
Installation for "First Papers of Surrealism," Whitelaw
Reid mansion, New York, 1942



Fig. 81 Window display at Gotham Book Mart for the
French magazine NEON, New York, 1948

in 1942 (Fig. 80). For the Surrealists, the thread in the Maeght installation not only had a visual effect but also expressed a continuity with the previous exhibition as well as with the goals of the movement as a whole.

Despite Kiesler's extensive writing on the subject of window display, after his work for Saks Fifth Avenue he is known to have designed only one other storefront window. In 1948, after he returned to New York from Paris, he designed a window for the Gotham Book Mart to announce the publication of *NEON*, a new monthly of art and literature being published in Paris (Fig. 81). This publication, whose distinguished editors included Sarane Alexandrian, Benjamin Peret, Victor Brauner, André Breton, Enrico Donati, Marcel Jean, and Alain Jouffroy, was to be distributed in America with Kiesler's assistance.⁴⁴ The architect's construction, in true Surrealist fashion, integrated a number of seemingly unrelated sculptural elements to form a backdrop for the display of the journal. The front page of *NEON* protruded from the mouth of a somewhat menacing, painted, tusked creature with bristly hair and flaring nostrils. On either side of the creature's face, smaller fragmentary sculptures of women were attached. No matter what the literary interests of the passerby, Kiesler's window could not be ignored.

So far we have examined installations designed by Kiesler primarily to display the work of others. In 1954, he installed an exhibition of his own work at the gallery of his good friend Sidney Janis in New York (Fig. 82). Rather than being an installation of individual works, it consisted entirely of the pieces Kiesler classified as *Galaxies*, that is, fragments of pictures grouped together to form a pictorial whole. Ac-



Fig. 82 "Galaxies by Kiesler," installation view, Sidney
Janis Gallery, New York, 1954

ording to a later drawing with notes in the artist's hand in the Kiesler Estate, he had created his first *Galaxy*, a portrait of a Russian student, in Vienna in 1913.⁴⁵ Kiesler's recollection of the creation of this *Galaxy* to his wife, Lillian, many years later, is particularly revelatory; even at this early stage in his career, two-dimensional works were imbued with a three-dimensionality. As he recalled:

When I made the first "galaxial" portrait of *The Russian Student* in 1913, my psyche, feelings and vision seemed to demand I express what appeared to me [to be] the quality of the "Russian Student's" life by drawing his head on one panel and a headless body on another, coordinating the tension of space. I felt, through this concept vivid in my body, mind, and environment, a phenomenon of a three dimensional work, in continuity—time continuum, in the past, present, and future.⁴⁶

His second *Galaxy*, as recorded in the later drawing, was a portrait of Leopold Liegler, secretary to Karl Kraus, a venerated Viennese critic. His third *Galaxy* he called *The Jeweler*; in the fourth, the title is not clearly legible, but the nationality of the figure seems to be "Chines[e]." In 1918, several days before the Armistice was signed, Kiesler, who was then probably still in the press corps, learned through the Swiss papers that the war was soon to end. Instead of going to the office, he stayed home and started to build a large *Galaxy* out of pieces of gray cardboard. There were approximately twenty irregularly shaped pieces covered with white tracing paper. Once he had completed the individual components, he nailed them to the wall at varying distances from one another, then painted a huge field of human bodies in grisaille, with different parts on each piece of cardboard. The higher these bodies were positioned on the wall, the larger their size. Beginning in 1947, Kiesler returned to this galaxial method of portrayal to capture, as he explained, "personalities fixed in time—E.E. Cummings, Marcel Duchamp, Henry Laugier. These were 'families of paintings' instead of bachelors and spinsters in isolation. To do this, I had one main tool and technique: the proper dimensioning of distance between one unit and another."⁴⁷

Kiesler applied this same principle to his *Galaxies* at the 1954 Sidney Janis exhibition, where he continued his crusade to release works of art from the stranglehold of conventional framing methods and installation techniques. By varying the distances between the individual unframed components as well as setting the units at different distances from the wall, he extended the artwork into the entire space. In a statement prepared for the announcement of this exhibition, Kiesler drew an interesting analogy between his *Galaxies* and human families. Each group of paintings has the same sense of cohesive unity that a family unit does, yet despite the similarities and "familial bonds," the individuality of each member is both maintained and respected. For Kiesler, this display method had achieved his lifetime goal of a unification of the arts:

Each painted unit, particularly when protruding from the wall, and viewed from the side, will also assume the value of a plastic entity, very much in the sense of a sculpture, while the aspect of the total galaxy promotes too the idea of an architectural coordinate without destroying the main character as a painting. Thus, the traditional division of the

44. In an interview with the author, December 14, 1987, Lillian Kiesler described her husband's role in the distribution of *NEON*.

45. "The Galaxia Portraits of Frederick Kiesler as Explained by Frederick Kiesler to Lillian Kiesler in 1964" typescript, Kiesler Estate Archives, p. 1.

46. Frederick Kiesler, untitled, undated drawing, Kiesler Estate, reproduced in *Frederick Kiesler: Architekt, Maler, Bühnenarchitekt 1890–1965* exhibition catalogue, Vienna Museum, *Moderner Kunst* (1988), p. 9.

47. Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the E-Design House* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 20. Although this passage seems to indicate that the date the *Galaxies* were first made was 1944, the actual date was 1947.

plastic arts into painting, sculpture, and architecture, is transmuted and over-come.⁴⁸

The number of units in the *Galaxies* at the Sidney Janis gallery ranged from three to the seven in *Horse Galaxy* (Fig. 82), the largest and most complex piece in the show. A bird's-eye view of a horse is depicted on a flat painted panel placed on the floor; views of the same horse from different angles were painted in enamel on panels on the ceiling and on one wall. Rather than the traditional art experience of viewing an artist's interpretation of a subject from one fixed point, Kiesler's portrayal literally placed the viewer within the work of art itself. No longer a passive observer, the viewer felt engulfed by the work in a manner not unlike that of the biblical Jonah inside the whale.

The last gallery space Kiesler designed was the World House Gallery in the Carlyle Hotel, in New York, opened in 1957 (Figs. 83–85). Designed with architect Armand Bartos, with whom he had recently formed a partnership, the two-floor space was constructed for Herbert Mayer, director and owner of the gallery. It reflected the comfortable economic circumstances of Mayer as well as the flourishing and respected art gallery world of the upper east side at that time. The galleries of Paul Rosenberg, Perls, Durand-Ruel, and Rose Fried, to name a few, were already established there.

Kiesler's ability to be straightforward and practical, in spite of his far-flung schemes and wild imaginativeness, was again reflected in an essay called "Art, Money, and Architecture," which he wrote at the time he was working on World House Gallery. As he explained:



Fig. 83 Kiesler and Bartos
World House Gallery, New York, 1957

48. Frederick Kiesler, announcement for his one-artist exhibition "Galaxies by Kiesler," Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, 1964.



Fig 84 Kiesler and Bartos
World House Gallery, New York, 1957



Fig 85 Kiesler and Bartos
World House Gallery, New York, 1957

This is an essay on the role the architect, who is called upon to design a gallery-market, is to play, if he is to sell himself successfully. *Successfully* means that he must . . . make the pictures and sculpture look as good as they are supposed to, or even better.⁴⁹

In typical Kiesler fashion, his goal was not simply to design another gallery but instead to create “a new type, and furthermore, to take full responsibility for the new concept—facing our client, our artists, but chiefly ourselves—which meant, our relation to Art.”⁵⁰

Through their use of specific, carefully chosen materials, the architects planned to construct a setting both conducive to the viewing of art and respectful of the uniqueness of the experience. A bed of water, several feet deep and bordered by greenery on the far edge, separated an island of marble from the surrounding wall. Although the visitor might initially be surprised to find a pool of water in an art gallery, Kiesler thought that the end result would be to better promote the “chances of correlation” evolving in the gallery experience.⁵¹ For the opening exhibition, he installed an iron sculpture by David Smith in this pool—a setting that he felt most successfully wed gallery space and art. Above the pool of water rose the walls of a two-level space, on three walls of which paintings were to be displayed. The curved ceiling, which led into the upper area over a glass-encased staircase that seemed to float, promoted visual unity between the two floors by making the gallery visitor conscious of the upper level as soon as he approached the staircase.

The whole interior space was conceived of as a piece of continuous sculpture in which both floors worked together as a single elliptical enclosure. Preparatory drawings for this space resemble many of those for Kiesler’s *Endless House* in that the distinguishing feature is the flow of one space into another. According to Kiesler, the flow between the floors was achieved by extending the floors of the lower area in “hyperbolic curvatures upward into the ceiling of the upper floor, sliding down and rising partly again, falling suddenly as into air pockets.”⁵² The gentle undulation of one area into the next was the predominant spatial impression. One sinuous floor and wall joined in a cantilevered arching bench, which protruded from the wall and offered visitors a place to sit. The camel-colored carpet extended over the bench and served as one more means of visually unifying floor and wall areas. Another curving wall, set perpendicular to the gallery walls, had a Kandinsky painting on one side and a study for it on the other. In a seeming attempt to defy both gravity and the hallowed traditions of architecture, this wall floated above the floor, attached to the structure of the room only at the ceiling.

World House Gallery was much more formal than Kiesler’s earlier design for Peggy Guggenheim. Nevertheless, he expressed the relatedness of the two projects in his own mind in a letter to Guggenheim that described the World House Gallery as “a crowning effort based on the gallery [he] once designed” for her.⁵³ For example, although the installation of the individual works of art at World House Gallery was not designed to accommodate movement, as at *Art of This Century*, each of the seven different exhibition areas offered the maximum installation flexibility, despite the permanence of the walls.⁵⁴ The

49. Frederick Kiesler, “Art, Money, and Architecture” typescript, Kiesler Estate Archives, pp. 1–2.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

51. Kiesler, “Art of Architecture for Art,” p. 50.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

53. Kiesler to Guggenheim, n.d., Kiesler Estate Archives.

54. Armand Bartos, interview with the author, March 4, 1977.



Fig. 86 *The Last Judgment*, 1955–63
Bronze and aluminum, 164 x 204 x 207 in (416.6 x
518.2 x 525.8 cm)
The Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles

lighting system was once again partially exposed and partially hidden by the swelling forms of the ceiling, which were ample enough to hold several fixtures within each curve. And again, as at *Art of This Century*, the lighting system was designed with the understanding that artworks must be lit in the same manner as one treats a child, that is, each one must be considered as an individual.

Kiesler understood that “the waiting room of art is full of people.”⁵⁵ At the *World House Gallery*, as in all his exhibition installations—for his own work and that of others—his design concept was motivated by a desire to be spatially innovative, to make the viewing experience so vital that a correlation of viewer, art, and architecture would be achieved. Most important, the visitor should feel welcome rather than alienated by the presentation. As Kiesler explained to one reviewer: “It is a place where paintings and sculpture invite the viewer to come and see them—‘At home from 9 to 5.’”⁵⁶

In May 1964, the exhibition “Frederick Kiesler: Environmental Sculpture” was held at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. Once again, as at the *Janis Gallery* ten years earlier, Kiesler planned this installation with great exactitude. But because he was in the hospital at the time of the installation, his assistant, Leonard Pitkowsky, carefully executed a set of installation drawings following Kiesler’s instructions. These drawings indicated the precise placement of all the multipart sculptures within the exhibition space as well as the lighting system.⁵⁷ Kiesler himself both chose and bought the lighting fixtures, which resembled some of those at *Art of This Century*.⁵⁸

The most significant of the thirteen works on display was Kiesler’s *Last Judgment* (1955–63), a multipart sculpture of bronze, aluminum, pewter, lucite, gold leaf, and stainless steel, flanked by panels elevated on platforms painted to give the illusion of perspective (Fig. 86). (The placement of these curved panels in front of the actual walls of the room created an effect not unlike that of the sinuous blue curtains in the *Abstract gallery* at Peggy Guggenheim’s *Art of This Century*.) The central feature of *The Last Judgment* is a bonelike bronze shaft that gouges a hole through a rectangular piece of plexiglass supported by an upturned table of bronze. Suspended above the piece on the floor was a curved plank of white painted wood that acted as a canopy over the environment. A second bronze table was suspended from this canopy by stainless steel chains. The table above represented heaven and the one below hell. The horizontal structure of this sculpture was echoed in a group of three bronze landscape pieces, in each of which the flat tabletop was equated with the flatness of the earth. An apparent environment was created for the sculpture *Birth of a Lake* (1960) by a curved wooden structure that extended from beneath the floor to above the sculpture in the upper gallery space. Pitkowsky has pointed out that “the great lengths that Kiesler went to in order to make separate environments for each piece” represented his own way of minimizing the traditional museum experience he found so abhorrent in which each object is viewed successively and in isolation.⁵⁹

Furthermore, although the works on exhibition could be individually identified and Kiesler recognized the independent significance of each object, his installation concept called for them to be considered as a cohesive unit rather than as an arrangement of disparate elements.

55. Kiesler, “Art of Architecture for Art,” p. 54.

56. Frederick Kiesler, “Flowing Gallery,” *Time*, February 4, 1957, p. 57.

57. These drawings are currently in The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

58. Leonard Pitkowsky, interview with the author, December 20, 1987.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Frederick Kiesler, “Second Manifesto of Correalism,” *Art International*, 9 (March 1965), p. 27.

61. *Ibid.*

For Kiesler the visionary, an artwork is as much the product of its time as is any human being. In the 1960s, his thoughts, like those of many others, were turned to the unfamiliar regions of outer space. And he believed that his aesthetic concept was appropriate to this era:

The traditional art object, be it a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of architecture, is no longer seen as an isolated entity but must be considered within the context of this expanding environment. The environment becomes equally as important as the object, if not more so, because the object breathes into the surrounding and also inhales the realities of the environment no matter in what space, close or wide apart, open air or indoor.⁶⁰

Much like Hans Hofmann, who in his many writings on art proclaimed the equal pictorial significance of negative and positive space, Kiesler considered the space occupied by objects and the unoccupied space as equally significant areas.

It was Kiesler's intention that not all the elements in the Guggenheim installation could be absorbed at once; the overall effect, however, was to be that of one unified environment. It was just this recognition of the need to observe a work of art in terms of a totality that led to his interest in environmental sculpture. In his words, "No object, of nature or of art, exists without environment. As a matter of fact, the object itself can expand to a degree where it becomes its own environment."⁶¹ In fact, Frederick Kiesler had been creating environmental sculpture all his life.



Fig. 87 Model for *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61
Aluminum, 25 x 50 x 49 in. (63.5 x 127 x 124.5 cm)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Li-
brary, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Part of the Cosmos: Kiesler's Theatrical Art in America

Jeanne T. Newlin

Frederick Kiesler was fundamentally a man of the theater—spontaneous and dramatic, exuberant and romantic, grandiose, provocative, idealistic, and, always, prophetic. His impulse to reconstrue the world around him was suited perfectly to the microcosm of the theater, where his total vision could be expressed. His generation in European drama was nurtured in an atmosphere of theatrical change from the turn of the century; it found its voice after World War I in a milieu of radical theatrical experimentation. His art itself was rooted in the cosmic interrelationship he demanded of actor, playwright, and audience—the “flow of continuity,” he called it—that only could be truly satisfied in a new and advanced environment, a brave new theatrical edifice. Furthermore, Kiesler’s earliest known creative work was in the theater. He first had achieved international stature in Expressionist drama as the designer of an innovative mechanized setting for a production of Karel Capek’s *R.U.R.* (“Rossum’s Universal Robots”) in Berlin in 1923 (Fig. 38). A Berlin production of O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* followed in 1924 (Fig. 40); here he also employed continuous motion, developing a setting that began and ended as funnel-shaped but which, during the play, automatically evolved into other scenic configurations, according to a theory he called “time-space planning.”¹ With Kiesler’s further success in the Vienna and Paris exhibitions in 1924 and 1925, an international career in the theater seemed ordained.

Yet Kiesler’s subsequent theatrical work is not well known today. After he immigrated to America in 1926, his stage designing, with few exceptions, while in the vanguard of experimentation, remained in the noncommercial theater, which automatically limited its audience and thereby its exposure. Although Kiesler’s credentials had given him reason to expect the wide visibility and financial support of the American commercial theater, his nonconformist approach, his passion for complete change, and his accusation that the traditional theater was obsolete—the very qualities that made his reputation abroad—all conflicted with the entrenched provincialism and financial practicality of Broadway. Also, during the Depression and World War II, available theater work was often deflected from the flow of emigré artists seeking refuge and new opportunity, a chapter yet to be disclosed fully in our history. While the iconoclast Kiesler nevertheless was welcomed by many to the close New York artistic community, his theater work in New York was largely overshadowed by his achievements in the fields of

architecture, commercial design, and sculpture, to which he necessarily had turned.

The years he spent in Berlin, Vienna, and Paris (1922–25) Kiesler often called his most productive; they shaped the point of view that would inform his work for the rest of his life. Even throughout the reverses of fortune of his “lost years,” as he later described the period 1926–34 in America, when ambitious plans and hard work realized too little result in the promised land, Kiesler was able to maintain the integrity of his purpose and the creativity of his ideas for theatrical reform. All too often he was limited to work on paper. Unlike other artists and intellectuals of the period, his optimism, his utopian faith in mankind’s future, derived not from dependency on modern technology but from the “correlative of time and space,” from his concept of “correlation in continuity.”² Kiesler saw the universe as an inevitably endless continuum—always shifting, always moving—the past and present as the active progenitors of the future, the world a planet rotating in an infinite environ, constantly renewing itself, ever changing, reborn. “There is no outer space as far as the universe is concerned,” he declared; “it is all part and parcel of the same composition. To speak of outer space is to return the aspect of the cosmos to the pygmy perspective of man.”³ Theater, and by extension, all works of art, must be metaphors of the correlation. Hence, then, the curvilinear *Endless Theater* that he conceived in the twenties (Fig. 43), which ultimately evolved into his *Universal Theater* (Fig. 87). Kiesler’s model of *The Universal*, though unrealized in full scale, remains an incomparable example of the validity of his humanistic views. The ramifications for society of the theory of relativity, which Kiesler obviously foresaw immediately after Einstein reached prominence in 1919, were not always recognized by others as inevitably requiring a major realignment of values. The effect on him was challenging and thrilling, but his didactic pronouncements, characteristic of modernist rhetoric in Europe, sometimes struck Americans as suspicious or pretentious. Others were inspired by his genius.

When Kiesler first set foot on American soil in 1926, he arrived as the wunderkind, (although already thirty-six) of the “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques,” which he had organized for the Music and Theater Festival of Vienna in 1924. The loan exhibition, an extensive collection of drawings and maquettes from artists representing sixteen countries throughout Europe and Russia, had been mounted to display and certainly to proselytize the “New Stagecraft”—the latest in twentieth-century stage design on the Continent. Kiesler and his circle represented a second wave of modernist experimentation, and they were eager to remake the theater after the war. No doubt the idea for the huge exhibition had been prompted by the success of a 1922 exhibition on new theater art that had been held in Amsterdam. In the catalogue for the 1924 Vienna exhibition, now a considerable prize as a printed book, Kiesler first delivered his manifesto on the need for new theater. In “Debacle of the Modern Theatre,” he said that the new aesthetic called for a new era of theater. The picture frame theater, the “peepshow stage” of the gilded proscenium arch, and all it stood for were dead.

Actually, the demise of the literally realistic stage setting that was the concomitant of realistic drama from Ibsen to Chekhov and the

1. Frederick Kiesler, “A Festival Shelter: The Space Theater for Woodstock, New York: Progress of an Idea,” *Shelter* (May 1932), p. 45.

2. Frederick Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966), p. 263.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 404.

elaborate result of advanced nineteenth-century stage machinery was well underway on the Continent as a basic tenet of the new movement. The proscenium arch, which was necessary to contain the setting, permit a false visual perspective, create an illusion of the reality beyond the “fourth wall” facing the audience, and, finally, to hide the stage machinery, represented all that was anachronistic in the use of changeable painted scenery in the traditional theater. For contemporary times it was attacked as artificial, not realistic. The earliest of the visionaries of a new form of theater were Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, who, by the turn of the century, had advocated discarding literal scenery in favor of abstract settings and lighting that explored mood and subtext. Before World War I, Max Reinhardt and others were seeking to lower the artificial barrier between audience and stage by reorganizing the stage and auditorium. In effect, the advent of the age of psychology had made it impossible to accept “realism” as reality. The future of the theater—and ultimately its major preoccupation—lay in its potential to reveal meaning beneath surface superficialities and to evoke the mood that expressed this deeper reality of the unconscious.

Kiesler launched his own efforts to reconceive the theory of the playing area itself in 1924 at the Vienna festival. His experimental *Raumbühne*, or *Space Stage*, a theater-in-the-round temporarily erected in the middle of the Vienna Konzerthaus, provoked excitement and controversy. The auditorium’s original galleries remained in place to serve as seating, while the other seats were removed to allow for the provisional stage. This stage, devoid of scenery, comprised a series of ramps and platforms spiraling in a vertical construct on scaffold supports. It also introduced the concept of tension, which Kiesler relied on to provide a sense of space and motion.⁴ The following year he employed it more elaborately in his *City in Space* model, mounted for the Austrian pavilion at the Paris “Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes” through the structural system of bridge spans.⁵ Continuous tension in space not only exemplified his beliefs but theoretically made possible his spheroid *Endless* and *Universal Theaters*, the latter intended to have been constructed without the support of columns or beams, a continuous shell of reinforced concrete.

Kiesler’s precipitate move to America in early 1926 came at the invitation of Jane Heap, editor of the progressive journal *The Little Review* and director of the Modern Art Galleries. Kiesler was to accompany his Paris exhibition to New York. As co-sponsors of the “International Theatre Exposition,” Heap enlisted The Theatre Guild, a New York producing agency known for its support of new and quality drama; Otto Kahn, a financier; and three small but important New York art theaters, the Neighborhood Playhouse, the Provincetown Players, and the Greenwich Village Theatre.

Kiesler had every reason to view his visit to America as a further omen of continued success, since his stage and his exhibitions had evoked so much interest in Europe. The American response, however, was far from positive, though Kiesler may not have been entirely aware of it, since he did not then know English. The popular and critical reaction to the New York exhibition was comparable to the disquieting effect generated by the Armory Show in 1913. Just as the public laughed away Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*, so too the new stage

4. P. L. H. de E. [?], *Frederick Kiesler: Theory and Science*. Design: A. Arter. MIT Press (MIT Research Press, 1982), p. 34.

5. Reproduced in *Frederick Kiesler: Architect*, 1890-1967, exhibition catalogue, Vienna, Haus der Architektur für Angewandte Kunst (1975), p. 48.

designs, constituting one of the most important theatrical exhibitions ever mounted in America (and still unmentioned in theater history tomes), were generally criticized as the work of “wild men” and the “youth movement.” Not only theatergoers but the majority of theater practitioners, who by then should have known better, considered the collection of Expressionist drawings and models of nonillusionistic stages to be subversive examples of the breakdown of society overseas. The vast and rare assemblage of original work featured the entire gamut of Futurist, Constructivist, and Expressionist styles in the theater from Enrico Prampolini to Alexandra Exter, Oskar Schlemmer, and George Grosz (Fig. 88). But, in fact, the best received component of the “International Theatre Exposition” was, chauvinistically, the American section—more than three hundred drawings by forty-one artists that Kiesler was forced to crowd into his own show and had no part in selecting. The overwhelming majority of them were traditional in technique and wholly unrelated to his innovative theme.

Why *Theatre Arts Monthly*, the highly regarded journal established in 1916 for the very purpose of introducing and fostering the New Stagecraft and other modern European theater movements in America, chose to ignore the exhibition in its pages remains an enigma. One can speculate that it was because the exhibition had been sponsored by a rival arts journal. Whatever the case, the establishment’s neglect of the exhibition of these European artists, some of whom had been shown in *Theatre Arts Monthly* previously, and its guarded reaction to Kiesler, were detrimental to him. Not even Eugene O’Neill, Robert Edmond Jones, and Kenneth Macgowan, founding members of one of the theaters hosting the “International Theatre Exposition” and leaders of avant-garde theater in New York, developed permanent relationships with Kiesler. His virtual isolation from the community of professional designers for Broadway or the art theaters of New York was a crucial factor in the redirection of his career. He received no commission from the commercial theater until 1946.

Americans were by no means oblivious to the revolutionary changes occurring in modern drama abroad after the turn of the century, but only the most progressive artists contributed to the similar but much more slowly paced developments in this country. The springboard for the first modern generation of theater professionals in this country was George Pierce Baker’s “47 Workshop” at Harvard University. In scenic art, it produced Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, and later Donald Oenslager. Also prominent in the new theater movement among Baker’s students were Winthrop Ames, Kenneth Macgowan, and John Mason Brown, along with many others who worked with him, including Sam Hume and Eugene O’Neill. Kenneth Macgowan, particularly, contributed enormously to this country’s knowledge of European practices with his eloquent books *The Theatre of Tomorrow* (1921) and *Continental Stagecraft* (1922), both illustrated with interpretive drawings by Robert Edmond Jones, with whom he toured European theaters.

The first American exhibition of New Stagecraft was assembled by Sam Hume in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1914, well before Kiesler’s “International Theatre Exposition.” Hume had already studied theater arts in Florence with Gordon Craig—probably the first American to do so—and was recognized in the press as “a designer and



Fig 88 "International Theatre Exposition," Steinway Hall, New York, 1926

producer in the new manner . . . [who] has done interesting work on the amateur stages of Cambridge.”⁶ He assembled more than five hundred drawings and photographs of the pioneer works of Craig, Appia, Léon Bakst, Alfred Roller, Emil Orlik, and many of Reinhardt’s designers, along with American designers Robert Edmond Jones, Livingston Platt, and others. Hume had the help of Josef Urban, the Viennese stage designer who, as a proponent of the new theatrical design, was then in residence at the Boston Opera House. Twenty-three models, including those displaying new sliding German stages and techniques for diffused stage lighting, were gathered primarily for a coterie of artists and intellectuals visiting Hume’s private gallery at 38 Church Street near Harvard. The models attested to the importance of revolutionizing residual nineteenth-century realistic stage pictures in favor of “the plastic stage,” which would return synthesis and spiritual meaning to the art of the theater at the dawn of the modern age. Though Hume’s exhibition was never widely publicized, because of its enthusiastic promotion of new directions in American theater, the show traveled to New York and the Midwest.

At the time of Kiesler’s arrival in America, the designer Robert Edmond Jones ranked as the most successful as well as one of the most knowledgeable proponents of New Stagecraft, but his most progressive phase may have crested by then. His success on Broadway in the early twenties doubtless was due to the design style he developed, which blended and simplified those of Craig and Appia to suit American taste. Jones had studied at length in Germany in 1914 and later as well, but the extreme Expressionist manner he attempted in the early years of his career was much less in evidence in his later productions. Jones’ controversial productions of *Richard III* (1919–20) and *Macbeth* (1921), for which many drawings survive, represent his most experimental work. An exhibition of Jones’ own stage work was touring separately when Kiesler’s exhibition opened, so he was barely represented in the New York show.

Clearly the most exceptional of the American entries in Kiesler’s exhibition in New York was that of Norman Bel Geddes, who showed designs he had made in 1921 for a monumental but unproduced adaptation of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*; Bel Geddes proposed the production for the floor of Madison Square Garden on the occasion of the work’s six hundredth anniversary. His plans called for an advanced style of staging on a graduated, ramped, scaffolded playing area and were contemporaneous with Vladimir Tatlin’s 1920 *Monument to the Third International*, which had so interested Kiesler. Bel Geddes’ Appia-inspired stage was to be topped by vast, vertical Craig-like screens or plinths, the whole, when peopled by an elaborate arrangement of the large cast, to portray Dante’s circles of hell. *The Divine Comedy* designs still are regarded as a high point of American theater experimentation. Bel Geddes also had invented a dome enclosure for his conceptual theater of 1917 that effectively gave the audience the sense of being encompassed and contained, emphasized by the use of colored lights cast onto the dome. Boris Aronson, the Russian designer obviously well grounded in Constructivist stage principles, was just starting out in America at this time, but his work for experimental productions in a small theater in a remote section of the Bronx had already been spotted by *Theatre*

6. “Boston Sees the First American Exhibition of the New Stagecraft.” *Boston Evening Transcript* (October 1914), *Transcript Scrapbooks*, Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Arts Monthly and published in February 1926, the month of Kiesler's arrival. More than thirty years later, in 1958, Aronson's brilliant circus ring setting on ramps and scaffolds for Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.*, a play on the theme of Job, was acclaimed on Broadway as a novel experiment, proving that innovation is indeed a slow process in the conservative commercial theater.

The flurry of celebrity Kiesler enjoyed during the "International Theatre Exposition" in 1926 made him optimistic about his opportunities in America. He turned down the offer of a position in Germany with the director Erwin Piscator and made the critical decision to remain in this country. Plans for a theater school to showcase his own approach to theater arts, an International Theatre Arts Institute in Brooklyn Heights, absorbed his energies, but the project foundered financially before it began. The disappointment was crushing. Consequently, Kiesler occupied himself with conceptual theater architecture and store display until he found a regular position in 1933 as stage designer at The Juilliard School of Music. The late twenties and early thirties also proved bleak years for building the theaters for which he developed plans. Commissions were withdrawn as the whole economy failed, but the body of architectural drawings that remain testifies to his ideas in the period. Fortunately, his ingenious design for the Film Guild Cinema on 8th Street (later the Eighth Street Cinema) was realized in 1929. It contained the first screen-o-scope, shaped like the human eye or a camera lens, for large-screen projection (Figs. 89, 90). Kiesler's plans

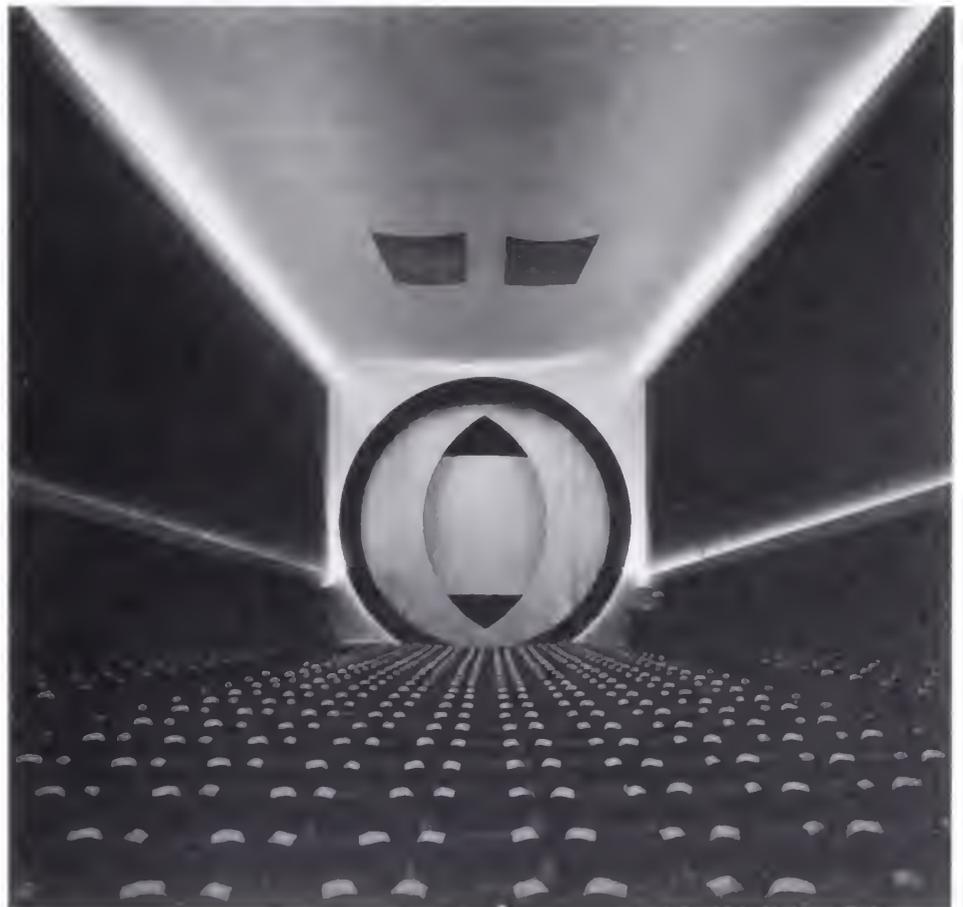


Fig. 89 Auditorium with screen-o-scope, Film Guild Cinema, New York, 1929

called for several other screens on walls and ceiling, but these could not be included for financial reasons.

Kiesler never lived to see his ideal theater built. He made a cast aluminum model of his last theater, *The Universal: An Urban Theater Center* commissioned by the Ford Foundation in 1959 for its touring exhibition, "The Ideal Theater: Eight Concepts" (1962). *The Universal Theater* (as it is also called) marks the culmination of Kiesler's thought and remains a uniquely transcendent sculpture on permanent exhibition in the Harvard Theatre Collection. It also represents a continuum

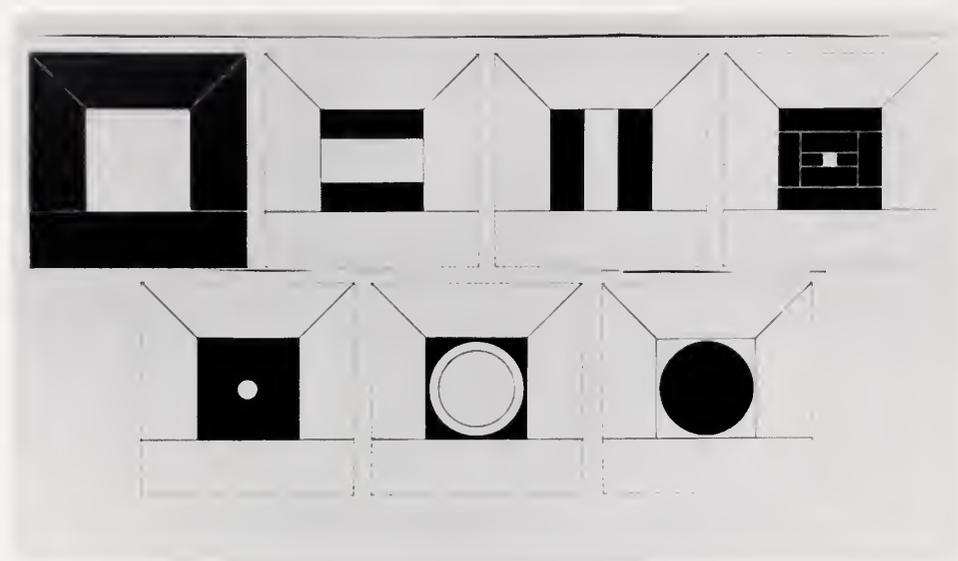


Fig. 90 Screen designs, Film Guild Cinema, New York, 1929

Ink on paper
Kiesler Estate

in many ways: first as the product of Kiesler's always evolving process of reshaping his original *Endless Theater*; then as a poised ovoid enclosure designed to exemplify the continuity of nature; and, finally, as a vehicle to provide momentum for the layer upon layer of meaning released during the course of theatrical performance by permutations within the structure. All of his earliest stages and theater plans, from the *Endless* (possibly begun as early as 1923), the *Optophon* of 1925 (Fig. 41), its concentric circles diagrammed on the cover of *The Little Review* (Winter 1926), to the Woodstock project (1931; Figs. 91, 92), and others were brought to bear on the "time-space-continuity" of *The Universal Theater* (Figs. 93, 94). Whereas Kiesler's original *Space Stage* rejected scenery, his ideal theater ultimately embodied the historical continuum of drama itself, from ancient Greek arenas to the modern open stage, with or without the proscenium. The central purpose of his theaters, however, was to prevent fake realism and do away with all the tools that engineer it.

The embracing exterior shell of *The Universal Theater* encloses a multipurpose, flexible theater positioned as the key structure in a theater center that includes high-rise television towers, studios, offices, restaurants, and another, smaller theater (Figs. 95, 96). These additional components are known from detailed architectural renderings and plans. The entire structure is curvilinear, again demonstrating Kiesler's avoidance of angles and use of surface tension. It forms a beginning and an ending at any place; top and bottom overlap; time and space, as in nature, coexist in continuity rather than by mechanization; and past and present converge in performance to elicit the world of the future.

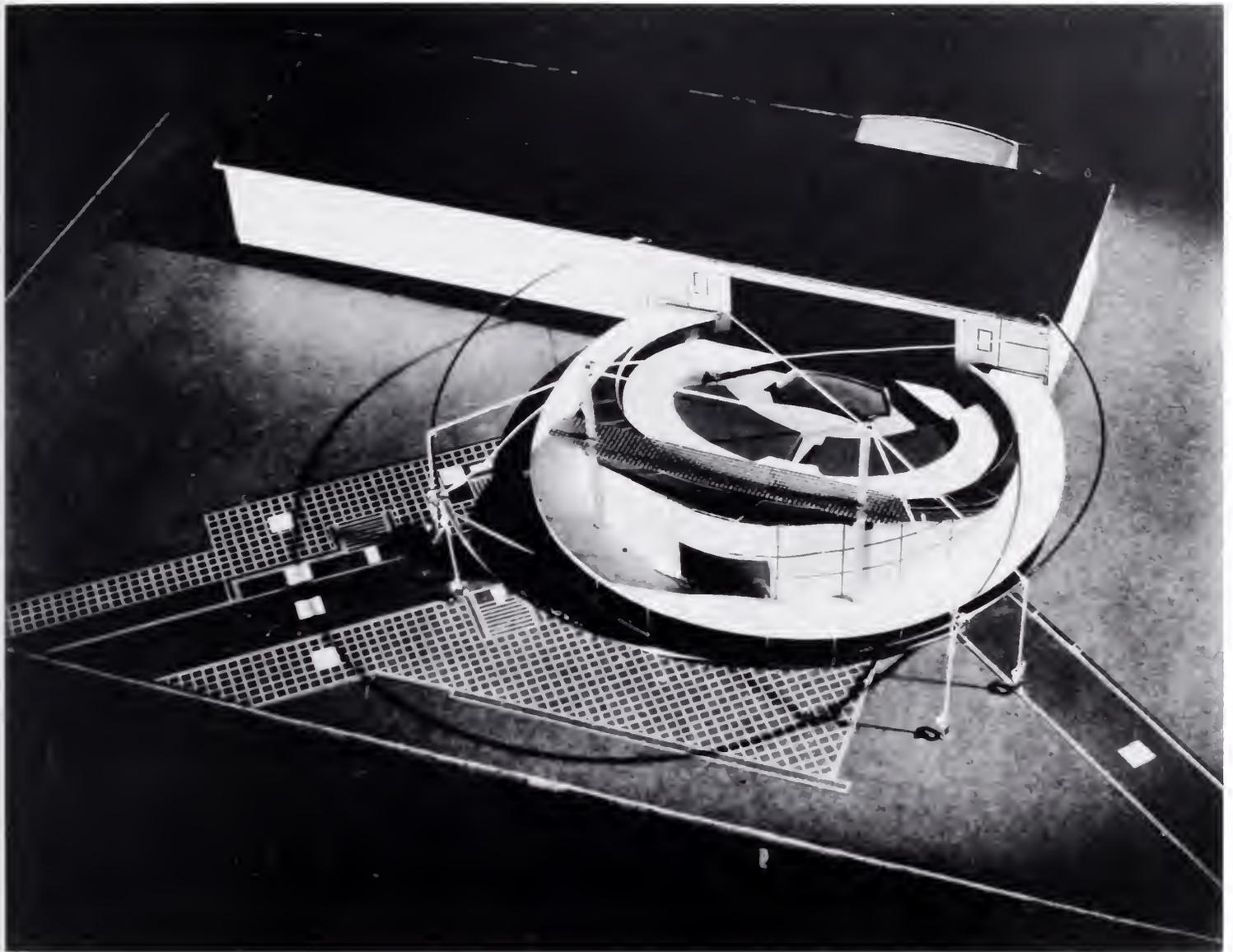


Fig 91 Model of *The Universal*, a theater for Woodstock, New York, 1931
Whereabouts unknown



Fig 92 Model of *The Universal*, a theater for Woodstock, New York, 1931
Whereabouts unknown



Fig. 93 Model of *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61
Aluminum, 25 x 50 x 49 in. (63.5 x 127 x 124.5 cm)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts



Fig. 94 Model of *The Universal Theater*, interior,
1960–61
Aluminum, 25 x 50 x 49 in. (63.5 x 127 x 124.5 cm)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

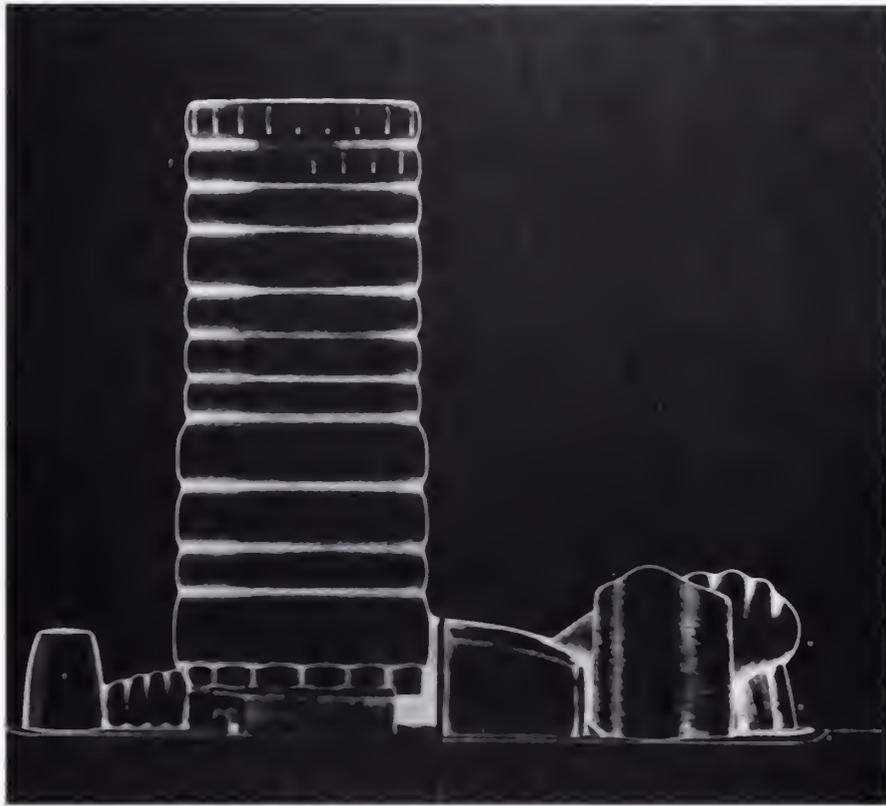


Fig 95 Elevation of *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61
Blueprint, 42 x 72 in. (106.7 x 182.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate

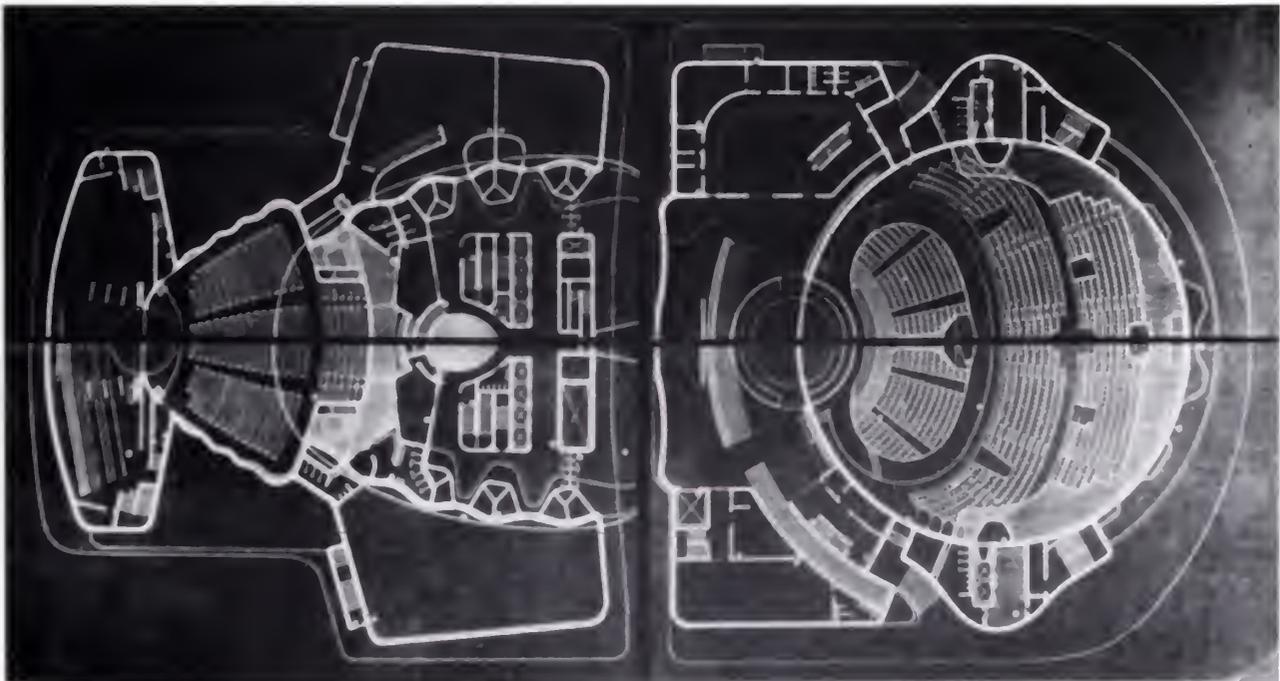


Fig 96 Plan for *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61
Blueprint, 42 x 72 in. (106.7 x 182.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate

This multiplicity of effect and function results from the application of principles long favored by Kiesler. By rearranging the seating sections, altering the stage, and eliminating the orchestra pit, the audience would be totally integrated in an encompassing relationship with the production and within the shell. Barriers are gone. Ramps and runways add playing areas on several levels; they encircle the audience and can reappportion the seating groups in novel ways. One of the central concepts of *The Universal Theater* and a cherished notion of Kiesler's was the potential for variation through the use of two auditoriums, one larger and more complex, facing each other but sharing one stage. The two theater spaces are separated by a mobile cyclorama, which can be removed whenever both houses are combined for one production. Kiesler first employed a cyclorama in the original plans for the *Space Stage*, and he continued to use it, especially when screen projections were involved.

The "Ideal Theater" exhibition was intended to stimulate a much needed breakthrough in theater planning in America. Playwright Arthur Miller, at a conference on the subject, said that drama was inhibited by fixed staging and that he himself felt limited by the "encumbrances he found in Broadway theaters, which since 1905 had not changed except the relocation of the footlights onto the first balcony."⁷ The Ford Foundation teamed architects with theater designers—Kiesler was both, so he worked alone. Kiesler's was the most original and only lasting model. None of the entries employed the proscenium arch, though the announcement in the catalogue preface that the use of traditional scenery was on the wane was hardly news in 1962.

Indirectly, Kiesler's ideas account for the first permanent flexible theater ever built, the Loeb Drama Center at Harvard University in 1960. Kiesler's was not the only multipurpose theater being prepared for the "Ideal Theater" exhibition at this time, but his theories for this type of structure were the earliest of their kind, predating Walter Gropius' well-known plans for a *Total Theater*. Like Louis Kahn, George Izenour, the designer-engineer of the Loeb stage and auditorium, has not hesitated to acknowledge publicly Kiesler's formative influence on himself and other architects.⁸ The front sections of seats in the Loeb can be changed to face each other on the house floor, creating a playing area between them, or they can be removed entirely. They do not pivot during performance, however, as Kiesler would have wished. And the second, smaller theater, a commonplace alternative in educational theater complexes as well as in many professional theaters like Dublin's Abbey Theatre today, is separate rather than coordinated with the main stage.

In 1936, an article assessing the result of twenty years of Broadway stage design complimented the accomplishments of the likes of Stewart Chaney, Jo Mielziner, and Donald Oenslager, but looked back nostalgically to the "good old days" of two decades earlier—to the excitement of the first impact of the New Stagecraft on America and its first promise of experimentation, now much modified.⁹ The fear that the designers would take over the theater and dominate the word, however, had proved unfounded. That Craig, Prampolini, and others would eliminate the actors altogether—they called them vain peacocks who only spoiled the scene—also had been a concern, especially at the

7. Quoted in *The Ideal Theater: Eight Concepts*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1962), p. 7.

8. See Izenour's remarks, quoted in Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, p. 515.

9. Daniel Rich, "The Artist Sets the Stage," *Theatre Arts Monthly*, 20 (February 1936), pp. 123–24.

“International Theatre Exposition,” but this too had never happened. On the other hand, the physical structure of New York theaters showed few gains in the movement for modernization, since the building code had not been revised since 1905 and it contained restrictions that made it impossible to alter existing theaters. Efforts to revise the code had been underway since 1928 and were still going on in 1936. Among other proposals for renovation, theater practitioners appealed for changes that would allow them to advance the apron space in front of the proscenium curtain 15 feet for flexible productions, to use storage space for scenery beneath the stage instead of alongside it, and to eliminate aisles perpendicular to the stage in accordance with newer European audience seating plans.

Kiesler returned to stage designing in 1933, fortunately still in the mood for experimentation, not modification, as scenic designer for the opera department of The Juilliard School of Music. He remained at Juilliard, responsible for stage and costume design and for teaching stagecraft, until retirement in 1957. In these twenty-four years, he built a legacy of work under circumstances that fostered his imagination and allowed him the kind of creative freedom that seldom would have been possible elsewhere. He was given the opportunity both to reconsider classic operatic works and to develop new ones in a cooperative educational environment. An additional advantage was that the New York press regularly included Juilliard productions on its reviewing circuit, so that Kiesler could build an audience for his work. The challenge at Juilliard lay in the school’s restrictive budget,¹⁰ the inexperienced, non-professional casts (although Rise Stevens and Leontyne Price were among the students), and the Juilliard Concert Hall itself. The Concert Hall, at 130 Claremont Avenue, was a real disappointment to Kiesler. Ironically, he inherited the very peepshow stage that was anathema to him, that “box appended to an assembly room,”¹¹ with its typical proscenium stage, the hated orchestra pit a yawning gap between stage and audience, and an especially long, narrow auditorium and balcony, which he found acoustically deficient. Nevertheless, the majority of Kiesler’s nearly seventy productions were staged there. Several others took place elsewhere, including a brief one-act production at the Metropolitan Opera in 1935 and two important commercial productions, the American premiere of Sartre’s *No Exit* in 1946 and a revival of Pirandello’s *Henry IV* in 1958. The latter two productions warranted the most discussion in his published diary, *Inside the Endless House*, and arguably represented his greatest opportunities. Even so, much of his work at Juilliard in many ways realized his highest goals, if not always his expectations. As early as 1941, the composer and critic Virgil Thomson, a lifelong friend, concluded that Kiesler’s work at Juilliard “represents so evidently a major contribution to our century’s already brilliant achievements in the plastic design of musico-theatrical productions.” Thomson said that “neither Broadway nor the Metropolitan Opera itself can show any such body of serious and effective stage design over the same period.”¹² An extensive collection of drawings and photographs in the Harvard Theatre Collection documents his career as stage designer and corroborates Thomson’s view. Kiesler, however, was never able to create the theater he envisioned under the conditions he considered integral to his stage design. This is not to suggest that his produc-

10 In 1941, Kiesler wrote: “Out of the two or three total designed and built open productions we have bought entirely new materials for only eight. The rest was the result of our technique of cutting or stretching apart and re-setting it, re-painting it, and filling in the gaps from our storage of platforms, steps, and curtains.” “Introduction” to *Ten Years of American Opera Design: A Treasury of the Juilliard School of Music 1931-1941* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1941), 6.

11 Frederick Kiesler, “Debate of the Modern Theatre,” *International Theatre Exposition Exhibition Catalogue* (New York: Metropolitan Hall, 1926), p. 14. “Notes on Improving Theatre Design,” *Theater Arts Monthly*, 18 (December 1934), p. 727. Kiesler suggested using the term “peepshow stage” or “assembly room” to describe traditional productions. He gave a related definition for his own work in contemporary museum and engineering magazines to explain for modernist artistic purposes. Occasionally he alluded to the peepshow stage when discussing the world of stage design in his diary.

12 Virgil Thomson, “Kiesler’s Opera Set,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 23, 1941.

tions were merely a compromise, for his stage work rings entirely true to his beliefs. Though often working under serious restrictions, he never yielded the integrity of his design principles.

Kiesler's stage design essentially was interpretive. He once explained that he drew abstractions of the musical themes of the opera he was preparing before addressing the actual scenery. His drawings, especially the Surrealist ones for the production of *No Exit*, bear out his consideration of theme. Interpretation, not decoration, is crucial to his theatrical art. His settings organically changed along with the action to support and reflect it—not to mirror it, he often explained, but to elucidate, symbolize, comment, and most important, to enclose the audience in an emotional bond. The Juilliard climate in particular made him welcome as scenic "director," alongside a stage director and the musical director. The spirit of collaboration between faculty and students, too, encouraged genuine artistic adventure and originality.

That Kiesler's stage was emblematic necessarily follows from his belief that pictorial realism was insufficient and obsolete. Nor were his settings "merely a display of stage-props," which in principle he rejected.¹³ Kiesler held this approach in common with the Shakespearean stage at the Globe, another nondecorative platform stage reaching outward for an audience bond and dependent on its own architecture for setting. The dynamic of such stages is fluid movement, in fact, speed, color, and symbol.¹⁴ In Shakespeare's case, a single emblem on stage was used to signify the larger scene: the throne indicated all of the Court, a few branches carried in represented the whole of Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane. On the twentieth-century stage, as Kiesler often demonstrated, the emblem is more complex, visually suggestive, and deliberately emotional, enhanced by a sophisticated use of light and shadow to apply mood and tone. Kiesler's special fascination with projected images on stage, such as had originated with Appia, and his original use of film on stage allowed heightened symbolism to epitomize either the theme directly or the audience's unconscious response.

The aspect of traditional scenery that Kiesler despised most and attacked from the outset was the hopeless pretense of painted canvas backdrops or the faked realism of box sets. Such settings never looked more ludicrous to him than when inhabited by live actors who, by playing to the footlights most of the time, would not even occupy them appropriately. If painted cloth was used on Kiesler's stage, as it was on occasion, it was supposed to look like itself and not be a simulacrum of another reality. When Kiesler ventured into design for a realistic period setting for an opera that called for one, the setting was invariably a highly stylized, generally asymmetrical, and distinctive one, not a literal recreation of the historical period.

Kiesler's stage settings could also be entirely abstract rather than symbolic. In these cases, his instinctual sense of composition—for the set and its relationship to the cast within it—is in greatest evidence. His version of the increasingly popular unit sets, convertible to any production, took the form of a permanent *Space Set* at Juilliard in 1948 (Fig. 97). It comprised a large number of polished wooden three-dimensional elements, most curved sculpturally into various shapes, that serve as walls, pedestals, platforms, or seats. The totality could be altered to vertical, horizontal, and angled groupings. Sculptural compositions, re-

13. Kiesler, "Notes on Improving Theatre Design," p. 727.

14. Kiesler was opposed to the usual stage movement he observed in the proscenium stage and considered it haphazard.

15. Cynthia Goodman, "Frederick Kiesler: Designs for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery," *Arts*, 51 (June 1977), p. 93.

arranged by cast and crew, transformed themselves astonishingly before the eye and added an organic effect to action. The units undoubtedly are related to the pieces with which he outfitted Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in 1942, though they are larger and somewhat simpler in form, and possibly to the flat biomorphic shapes of his costumes for *Helen Retires* in 1934 (Fig. 98).¹⁵

Kiesler designed and constructed the *Space Set* for the one-act operatic farce *Angélique* by Jacques Ibert and used variations of it several times later. The most notable was for two studio performances of *The Magic Flute* at Juilliard the following year (Fig. 99). In the program he commented on the way the *Space Set* resolved the challenging problem of thirteen different scene changes:

The *Space Set* permits the re-arrangement of the units from scene to scene by open curtain (done by the singers themselves) and thus permits a better continuous flow of action. The elements of the *Space Set* change in a choreographic manner; they interact and help to enforce the dynamics of the production.

He also said in this program that dropping curtains in the usual manner to separate one scene from another "would interrupt the action too



Fig. 97 *Space Set*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1948

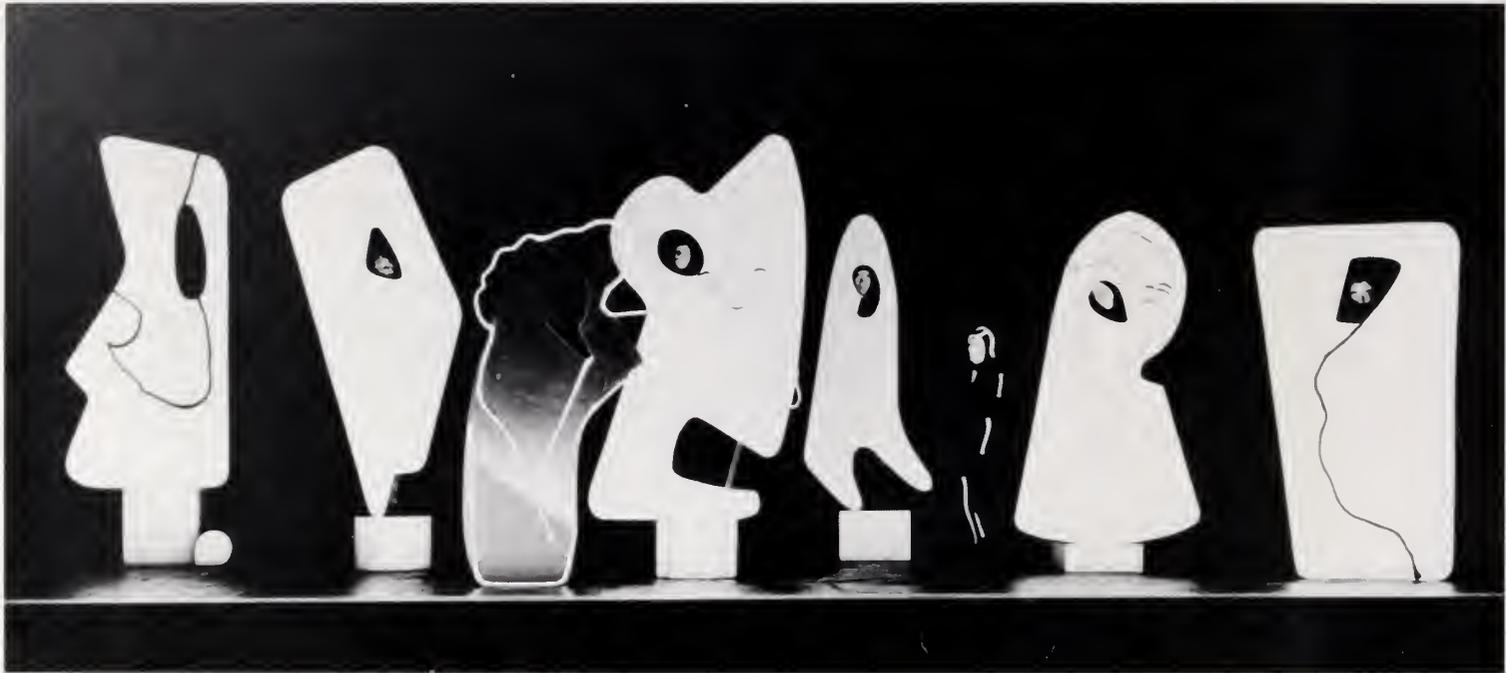


Fig. 98 Set for George Antheil's *Helen Retires*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1934



Fig. 99 Set for Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1949

often, and split the continuity of the orchestral score again and again.” While watching the rehearsals already underway, Kiesler formed his “space-variations according to the requirements of the action, instead of the customary procedure of fitting the action to the setting. This method was made possible by the Juilliard Opera Theater’s recently constructed Space Set.”

Always conscious of the relationship of audience to stage, Kiesler understood the importance of sound projection and was captivated by its problems, especially because of the acoustic concerns he faced in the Juilliard Concert Hall. These concerns also underscored some of his experiments with masks and “figure-enlarging” costumes, sometimes puppetlike, which he perceived as being “almost as old as pre-history.”¹⁶ Opera production gave him the opportunity to make visually significant the old theatrical convention of accumulating single voices into choruses for natural amplification of sound.

Kiesler’s first production for Juilliard was in 1934, the premiere of *Helen Retires*, George Antheil’s short satiric opera on Helen of Troy, with a libretto by John Erskine (Fig. 100). Kiesler’s extraordinary debut as a stage designer was recognized by a two-page spread in *Theatre Arts Monthly* and the marked attention of reviewers. Multiple stage levels with stairs and platforms were created, and multiscreen projections, which contributed changing imagery and thus contrapuntal visual commentary on the action, became in the process part of the action itself. One of the most striking effects was the film footage of a submarine descending into the deep, figuratively conveying Helen to the underworld. Kiesler announced in advance that the settings would be developed through static light or light in motion, totally coordinated with the action. There would be no painted, sculptural, or relief scenes. The

16 Frederick Kiesler, “Design Correlation: Toward Prefabrication of Folk-Spectacles,” *Architectural Record*, no. 81, September 1937, p. 93.



Fig. 100 Set for George Antheil’s *Helen Retires*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1934

second act, which takes place after Helen descends to the Isle of the Blest in search of Achilles, presented the ghostly appearance of former heroes in Hades as huge biomorphic shapes, outlined in part with cord or wire, transmogrifying the living into the dead by the strangeness of their vaguely recognizable shapes. The flat figures were moved about, or “worn,” by the actors, who were swathed in black like puppeteers. Only an occasional face appeared through an abstractly shaped hole placed in each figure. The figures were held upright when in motion, horizontally when fallen. Another odd biomorphic shape appeared in Act I, when chorus members, enveloped as a group in a single robe, wore masks with eyes but no mouths and apparently remained silent commentators throughout the scene.

In 1935, soon after his arrival at Juilliard, Kiesler had his first and only opportunity to work at the Metropolitan Opera. For *In the Pasha's Garden*, a one-act, fifty-five-minute new opera by John Seymour and Henry Tracy based on a tale by H.G. Dwight, he designed what he called not “a static, decorative setting but a setting that is exactly timed with the music, singing and acting on the stage” (Fig. 101). For the early twentieth-century scene of a kiosk on a hill overlooking the Bosphorus,



Fig. 101 Set for John Seymour's *In the Pasha's Garden*,
The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1935

Kiesler projected against a simple white cyclorama three large leaves that altered in size during action, a motif and a technique of continuous motion he was to use repeatedly. The moon rose and shone, becoming larger in symbolic meaning. A voile curtain formed the kiosk, placed at the height of the solid, spiral playing area, reminiscent of the form of his original *Space Stage*. The setting, even for a short opera, was too controversial at a traditional house like the Metropolitan, and it was criticized as being cramped, dangerous to the singers who were “perilously close to the edge” of the circle, and “pretentious nonsense.”

Kiesler’s 1948 production at Juilliard of *Le Pauvre Matelot* (*The Poor Sailor*) by Darius Milhaud and Jean Cocteau, though as emblematic as *In the Pasha’s Garden* and numerous others, must stand alone in theater history because one of its stage elements was preserved in the form of sculpture (Fig. 102). At this time, Kiesler evinced an interest in creating sculpture. For his setting of this fable of the sailor returning home to his wife after fifteen years, he was inspired by nautical imagery. An elegant suspended starfish conveying the immediacy of the sea, along with a high rope ladder, hung as if thrown over the side of a ship into the brine, dominate the set. Two units are living quarters on dif-



Fig. 102 Set for Darius Milhaud’s *Le Pauvre Matelot*,
The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1948



Fig. 103 *Galaxy*, 1948–51
Wood and rope, 144 x 168 x 168 in. (365.8 x 426.7 x 426.7 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller

ferent levels. One is a circular tent made entirely of canvas painted with pilings and shells; the other is a rakish frame shelter with wooden supports hewn into the skeletal remains of fish, either tied together with rope or intersecting. The top horizontal of the frame is the configuration of a fish bone with upper fin extended; among the four corner supports are a “dolphin’s spine, a hippocampus, a lobster claw and an ichthyosaur caressed by a boomerang,” as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., described them.¹⁷ In the production, the structure, dressed with a few gauzy curtains and a bar, stood for a tavern where the sailor’s wife lived and which she ran in his absence.

The 12 x 14-foot framework, *sans* sailor’s wife, “the supreme anti-technological gazebo,”¹⁸ was displayed separately in The Museum of Modern Art’s 1952 “Fifteen Americans” exhibition, with the structure remounted on a wooden base and named *Galaxy* (Fig. 103). In such a conception did the term “environmental sculpture” originate to describe Kiesler’s work. He wrote at the time: “My sculpture is a practical sculpture. It is both to be lived with and within.”¹⁹ This *Galaxy*, one of his truly occupied sculptures, exemplifies Kiesler’s principle of the correlation of the arts in a unique way.

17. From a 1952 poem by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., quoted in Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965): *Galaxies*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Alfred Kren Gallery and Jason McCoy, Inc., 1986), n.p.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Frederick Kiesler, “Note on Correalism,” in *Fifteen Americans*, exhibition catalogue (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1952) p. 8.

One of Kiesler's most important productions was for the American premiere of Sartre's *No Exit* at the Biltmore Theatre in New York in 1946, a commercial production directed by John Huston, noted for his direction of film as well as theater. A superb and extensive group of drawings testify to the shaping of Kiesler's ideas for the single setting required to communicate existential hell. Some of the drawings are abstractions of the drama's theme, as Kiesler pursued the practical stage concept that eventually evolved. Most of them reveal his exploration of a performance setting, including unused designs for a playing area surrounded by the audience. One design frames the scene with human lips, freely associating the hell-mouth emblem of the medieval theater with the modern stage (Fig. 104). Many of the drawings are Surrealist renderings of diabolical growths and shapes in a cell that,

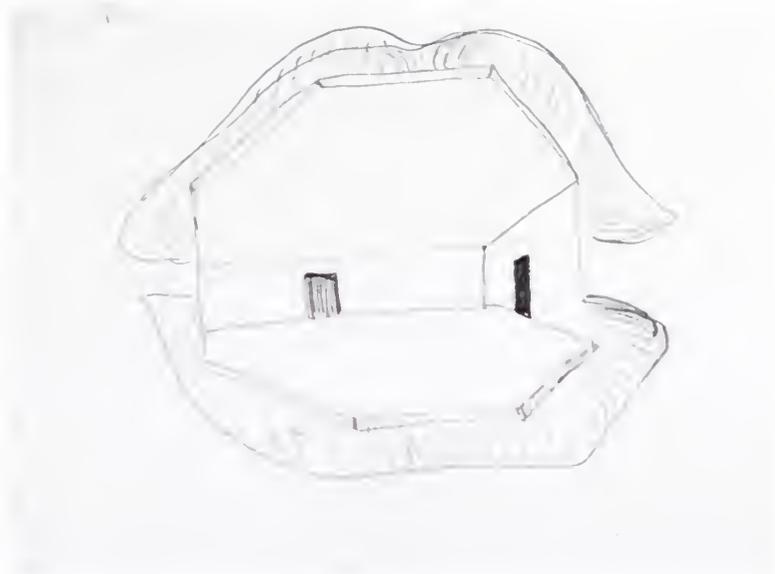


Fig. 104 "Hell-mouth," set design for Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Biltmore Theatre, New York, 1946

much reduced, would be his final choice for conveying the ultimate incarceration. The set became a single room that emotionally closed in on three damned characters whose relationship inexorably becomes their perdition. The room at first seemed recognizable, a salon or a hotel, perhaps, with one door, one window, a period chair, two sofas, and a single chandelier (Fig. 105). On second look, the tension caused by the distorted lines of the asymmetrical set, emphasized by the unusual use of a ceiling, countered the familiarity of the furniture, which suddenly seemed to be arranged too formally in a line across the front of the stage. The single high window on one wall was bricked up, to become a fearful symbol of confinement. From the wildly angled ceiling enclosure hung the single light fixture, not a glaring bulb, but a seductively fashionable chandelier that will never burn out. Kiesler blacked out the proscenium to reduce the outline of the stage to a viselike square aperture. Within it, as flooring, was placed a low platform which was raked and severely narrowed toward a central door in the back, deliberately elevating the stage. The suffocating atmosphere of infinite pressure was perceived by at least some in the audience, many of whom were attending their first existential play and were confused by it.

Kiesler's last major production was a 1958 revival of Pirandello's *Henry IV* with Burgess Meredith, also for the commercial theater. With this play about madness and sanity, disguise and reality, Kiesler closed his career in stage design by capitalizing on his lifetime fascination with the ultimate theatrical effect: multiple levels of meaning combined with magical transformations faster than the eye can see. In his journal he recorded his delight with the play and the suitability of the visual changes to his own vision of theater. For lightning-quick dramatic transformations, Kiesler did incorporate the oldest of scenic devices, the ancient Greek *periaktos*, a three-sided revolving apparatus, but within a traditional theater:

I constructed a half-circle consisting of triangular columns which pivoted. Each column had one side painted to create an eleventh-century stone interior, another side white, the third side covered with black velvet. In this manner, the décor could be transformed from that of the original stone mansion to other styles by slide projection on the white surface, while, with the depth-less absorption of the black velvet, *die Umnachtung*—the night of madness—could be created. The columns could whirl and the mood change at eye-blinking speed.²⁰

20. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, pp. 106–07.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 428–29.



Fig. 105 Set for Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Biltmore Theatre, New York, 1946

Kiesler created other dramatic sights and startling surprises throughout the production so that the play itself, not merely the individual effects, became “a magic performance in the manner of prestidigitators.”²¹ Kiesler’s magic for *Henry IV* closed out of town in Philadelphia, confirming that his career was outside Broadway. He was undaunted.

At the end of his career no less than at the beginning, Kiesler still wanted to remodel the theater to create a production environment that would represent the full scope of his thoughts. In 1961, he conjectured a new *Scenic Theater*, a “setting theater”—a combination of a theater-in-the-round with two proscenium stages and a Japanese ramp. His journal contains a rough sketch and a theoretical description from a conversation with Burgess Meredith about an Edgard Varèse project:

For this play the audience should see the characters as the same people, with only their skins changing. The chameleon-like nature of these humans prepares the audience for the violent physical turnabout, the catastrophe which should climax the play. A big crackup can be reproduced in this type of theater.²²

Kiesler envisions the members of the audience as sitting facing one another, looking up at a gauze sky (Fig. 106). There they see a giant, film-projected plane approaching amid moving clouds and lightning. As the plane grows larger, the music crescendos, until the plane crashes into the audience, by dropping the billowing ceiling onto them. Then the ceiling is raised again “and serenity restored.” Kiesler’s theatricality indeed was endless and does exist for all time . . . and space.

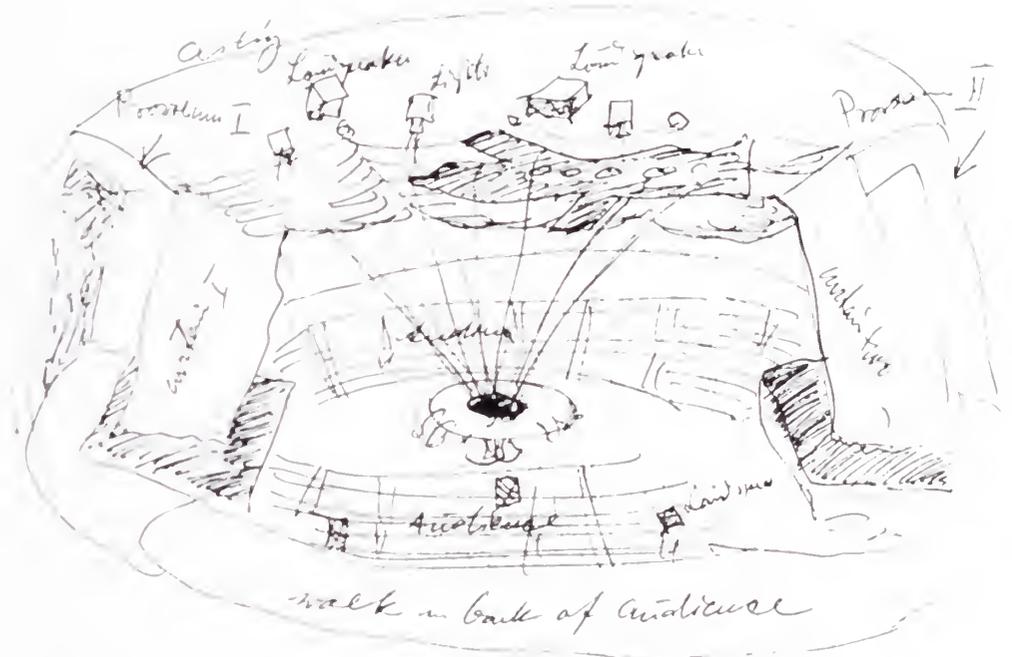


Fig. 106 Conceptual sketch for *Scenic Theater*, c. 1961
Whereabouts unknown

Environmental Artist

Lisa Phillips

Kiesler's art resists the signature style that has long been regarded as the signpost of artistic achievement and identity. Neither stylistically consistent nor bound by the limitations of a single medium or discipline, Kiesler has always been difficult to categorize. He has therefore remained an enigmatic, elusive figure despite the fact that during his lifetime he was well known in artistic circles and has been recognized as influential in most historical accounts. He was paradoxically everywhere and nowhere; he operated in so many areas at once that his work has seemed fragmentary and diffuse, known to particular groups—artists, architects, theater designers, for example—only for the work done in their respective fields. In our Postmodern era, it is precisely this interdisciplinary quality and multidimensionality that make Kiesler so intriguing, and somehow sympathetic.

An integrated approach to art was Kiesler's credo. He insisted on "correlation," not "segregation," maintaining that "in relatedness I can enjoy more, be more and give more, than in isolation."¹ This led him to conceive of an embracing "medium" that included painting, sculpture, collage, architecture, poetry, design, stagecraft, graphic design, and dance, where the multiplicity of an idea could be explored and new hybrid forms invented. This vision called for an interactive, environmental approach—not an art of illusion but an art of real space; not an art of isolation but an art of participation, where both space and the viewer would be activated. He wanted an art and architecture without boundaries, declaring in an early manifesto, "NO MORE WALLS."²

Kiesler's methodology can be seen as a culmination of the late nineteenth-century aesthetic aspiration for a synthetic environment. In this respect, he was the product of the Secessionist milieu in Vienna (of which he considered himself the third generation), where art, craft, and architecture coexisted, and the collaborative ethic of the Arts and Crafts Movement prevailed. Looking back at that time, Kiesler recalled: "not only were the plastic arts reborn but also literature and music. How rich the middle teens and early 20s were in Vienna—there were not only extraordinary individuals . . . but extraordinary groups and meeting places where we would gather. . . . There was an active criticism of all work—a fighting out of ideas which caused heat lightning and showers. . . . Every one of us drew inspiration from various fields other than our own."³

Kiesler's belief in an interactive art was bolstered by other movements he soon encountered, particularly Russian Constructivism,



Fig. 107 El Lissitzky
Proun Space, 1923, reconstruction, 1965
 Painted wood, 118 1/8 x 118 1/8 x 102 3/8 in. (300 x 300 x
 260 cm)
 Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The
 Netherlands

the Bauhaus, and De Stijl in 1913, he joined the De Stijl group (at the midpoint of its development) at the invitation of Theo van Doesburg. De Stijl, which had provided the theoretical base and much of the artistic talent behind the Bauhaus, strove for a new coordination of the arts—a “living unity between painting, sculpture, and architecture,” where basic truths and low cost (through mass manufacture) were viewed as the antidote to the human failure implicit in the disaster of World War I. The abstract environments of De Stijl artists were usually the products of collaborative relationships and often served as models for something larger—for the utopian urban environment.⁴ Through his involvement in this movement and its publication *De Stijl*, Kiesler became familiar with the synthetic environments of van Doesburg, Vilmos Huszar, Gerrit Rietveld, and Piet Zwart. Mondrian’s studio, where his unframed paintings were hung in conjunction with geometric abstract patterns painted on the walls, left a particularly strong impression on him.

When Austria opened diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1924, Kiesler was organizing his “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques” in Vienna, through which he became acquainted with the designs and mechanical sets of Constructivist artists such as V.E. Meyerhold, Liubov Popova, and the Stanberg brothers, as well as with unconventional, groundbreaking Constructivist forms of art, such as Kasimir Malevich’s “biological” portraits and Suprematist paintings, El Lissitzky’s *Proun*, and Vladimir Tatlin’s *Monument to the Third International* (Figs. 107, 108). Also at that time he would have become more familiar with the collaborative theater projects of the Cubist, Futurist, and Bauhaus artists and with Kurt Schwitters’ *Merz-Bühne*, a fusion of set, text, and score.

By 1924, Kiesler himself had already earned a reputation for daring stage designs, and it is in these that we can find the genesis of his

1. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in *Eastern Modernism*, ed. Susan S. Schmeiser (1984), p. 72.

2. Frederick Kiesler, “Museum to Be Destroyed,” *De Stijl* (April 1925), reprinted in “Frederick Kiesler, 1921–1964,” *Kiesler: A Guide to Contemporary Architecture* (1968), p. 11.

3. Frederick Kiesler, quoted in Eric Christian Kerker, *Journal of Architecture & Progressive Art* (Boston, 1927), p. 10.

4. *Architecture Today: The Open-Ended Process*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press (1961), pp. 1–4.



Fig. 108 Vladimir Tatlin
 Model for Monument to the *Third International*, 1920
 Destroyed

environmental approach. His theory of theater, formulated in the early 1920s, was predicated on a belief in the continuous flow of moving scenery, light, and color to create “tension in space.” His theater designs often incorporated several media to produce what he called a “living plastic reality.” For instance, the 1923 staging of Karel Čapek’s *R.U.R* used neon film projection, continuously moving sets (Fig. 44), and a tanagra device to create for the audience a rich, sensory experience independent of the actors. (Kiesler carried this idea further in his 1925 design for the “actorless” *Optophon* theater and his 1926 essay “The Theater Is Dead” for the “International Theatre Exposition” catalogue.⁵) He devised a kinetic set for a 1924 Berlin production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* (Fig. 40), where scenery changes occurred automatically every fifteen minutes.

5 The *Opticon* theater plan was reproduced on the cover of a special issue of *The Little Review* (Winter 1926), which served as the exhibit catalogue for the International Theatre Exposition.

6 Frederick Kiesler, "Building a Cinema Theater," *New York Evening Post*, February 2, 1929.

7 Frederick Kiesler, *Contemporary Art Applied to the Screen and Its Display* (New York: Brentano's, 1930), p. 18.

Later, in America, Kiesler continued the same kind of multimedia approach in his conceptual plan for the Film Guild Cinema in New York. He designed two unique multiple-projection systems, which he called screen-o-scope and project-o-scope. Screen-o-scope involved an expandable screen with three auxiliary screens (on the side walls and ceiling) that could be used to create a continuous screening space—an all-absorbing, architectural environmental experience in which the viewer would be surrounded by moving images. Project-o-scope was a lighting system encircling the auditorium that could be used to enhance the mood of a film or transform the architecture of the movie house.⁶ "The entire building is a plastic medium dedicated to the Art of Light," he wrote.⁷ Though neither system was ever completely installed (or entirely clear in practical terms), Kiesler's vision of the movie house as a flexible, total, interactive environment represents an application of his theater ideas to the specific conditions of the cinema. The architecture of the interior of the theater represents a fusion of De Stijl and Constructivist concerns—and bears some relation to De Stijl environments such as van Doesburg's *Café Aubette* (1926–28), where painting, architecture, and design were combined in one synthetic whole (Fig. 109). On an abstract level, the Film Guild projection system—as well as another Kiesler designed for a competition in 1934 (Figs. 110, 111)—can also be seen as precedents for the environmental light-and-sound shows of multimedia performance art in the sixties and seventies.



Fig. 109 Theo van Doesburg
Café Aubette, cinema-dance hall, Strasbourg,
1926–28

In the 1920s in America, however, Kiesler's theories met with stiff resistance. Whereas the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was a popular vanguard concept in Europe, the emphasis in industrial America was increasingly toward specialization. In part to counteract this prejudice against interdisciplinary practices, Kiesler wrote *Contemporary Art Applied to the*

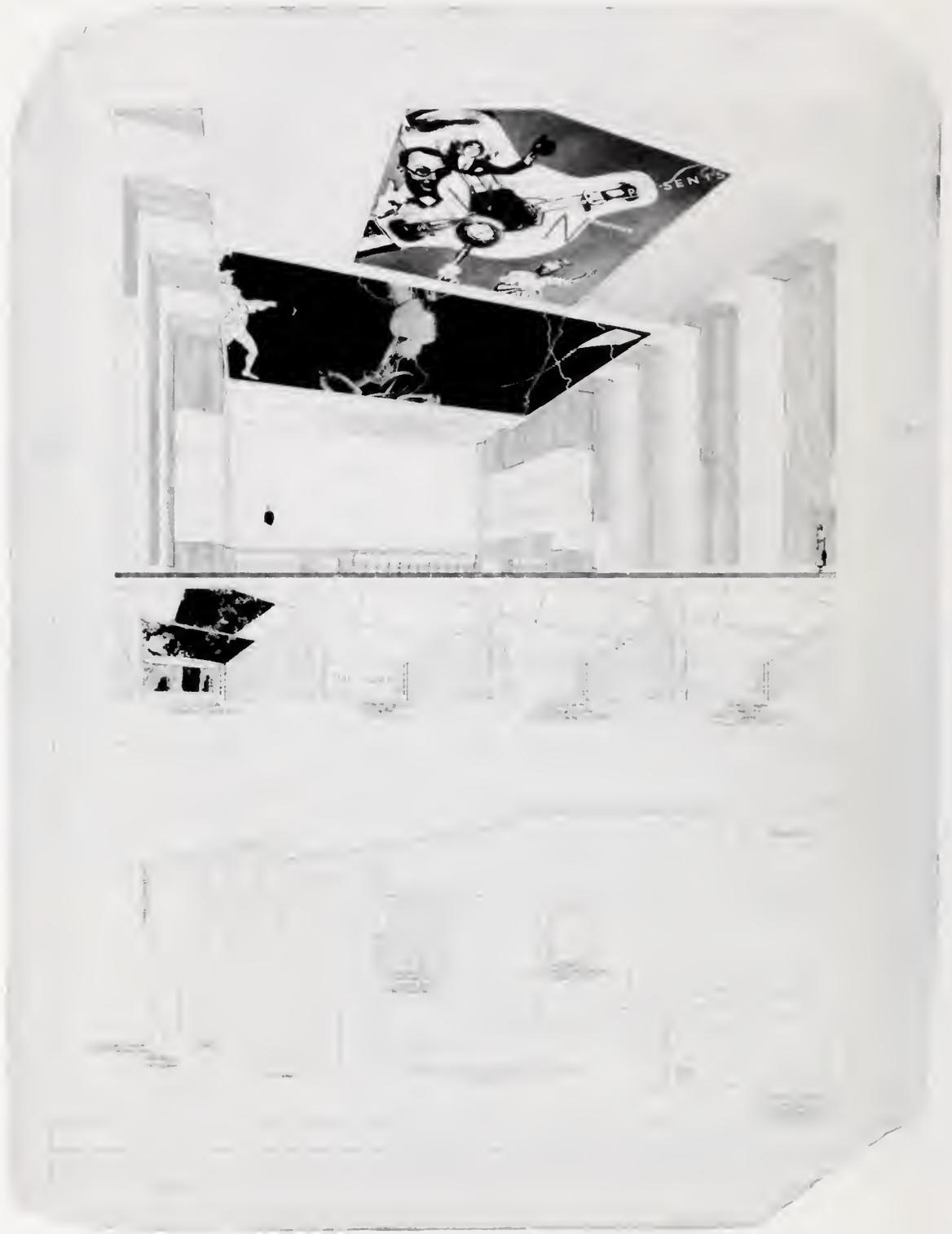


Fig 110 Presentation drawing for WGN Broadcasting Auditorium, elevation, 1934
Ink, paint, and collage on cardboard, 41 x 33 in. (104.1 x 83.8 cm)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

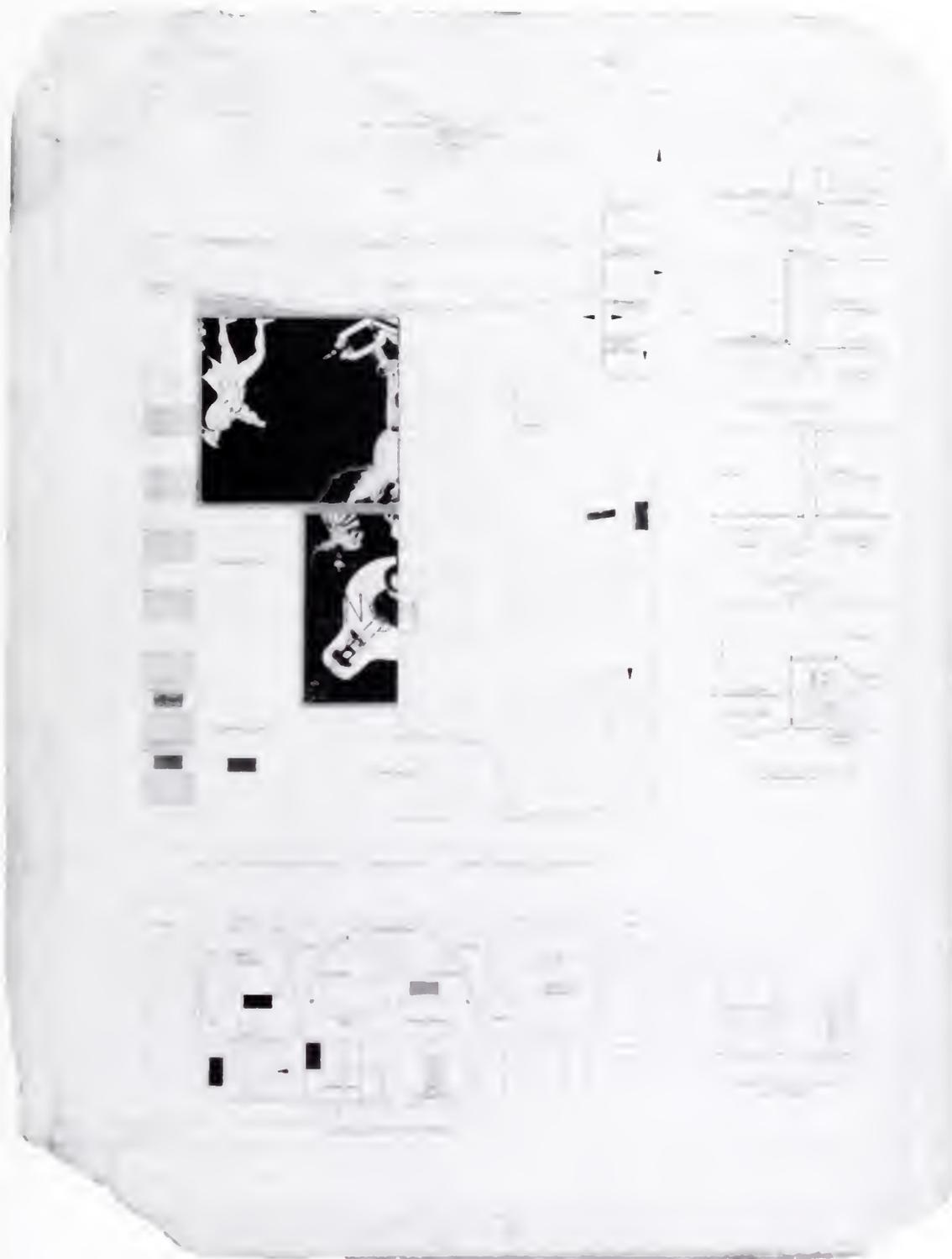


Fig. 111 Presentation drawing for WGN Broadcasting Auditorium, 1934
Ink, paint, and collage on cardboard, 41 x 33 in. (104.1 x 83.8 cm)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Store and Its Display (1930). Here he declared his intention to bring all the arts together (now including industrial design). His underlying message was that they were all moving toward the environmental condition of architecture.

It is not surprising, then, that he would soon become involved in the Works Progress Administration (WPA) art program, which represented a marriage (however compromised) between art and architecture and was an important chapter in the history of environmental art in America. Scouting suitable locations for muralists, Kiesler gained a direct, inside view into the workings of the WPA. In an article on Arshile Gorky's mural for Newark Airport, he applauded the possibilities the public mural program seemed to offer for a genuine "coordination of painting, sculpture, and architecture." Nevertheless, he lamented the way the supervising architect controlled the artist, dictating the standards of each project, which "tended towards technical neatness and sanitary bleakness."⁸ He argued that artists and architects must work together before the blueprint stage, a plea that can still be heard today in discussions of public art and is only just beginning to be heeded.

Through other published and unpublished essays of the 1930s, Kiesler continued to develop his ideas and theories about an integrated art. In a series of articles on design correlation, he began to view the world in terms of fields of energy—"what we call forms," he wrote, "whether they are natural or artificial, are only the visible trading posts of integrating and disintegrating forces mutating at low rates of speed."⁹ The space between one object and another, and how that space generates a particular interaction between the objects, was to Kiesler as real as the objects themselves—in fact, an integral part of the objects, the real power behind them. "An object doesn't live until it correlates," he said, thus advocating a continuous activation among parts as a prerequisite for a vital art and architecture.¹⁰

One work that particularly crystallized Kiesler's ambitions for what art should be was Marcel Duchamp's *Large Glass*, which he called "nothing short of the masterpiece of the first quarter of twentieth century painting." The glass read as surface and space at the same time—functioning as an optical space division and a link between spaces. "It will fit any description such as abstract, constructivist, real, super—and—surrealist without being affected. It lives on its own eugenics. It is architecture, sculpture and painting in ONE."¹¹

If Kiesler spent much of the thirties laying out his aesthetic program in writing, in the forties he finally saw some of his plans realized. The watershed was Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, where he tested unorthodox ideas about the presentation of art in a fantastic Surrealist environment that merged architecture, art, light, sound, and motion (Figs. 112–115). In this sculptural life-size model of surreal space, he devised a new system of coordinating architecture with painting and sculpture to "dissolve the barrier and artificial duality of 'vision' and 'reality,' 'image' and 'environment,' [where] . . . there are no frames or borders between art, space, life. In eliminating the frame, the spectator recognizes his act of seeing, of receiving, as a participation in the creative process no less essential and direct than the artist's own."¹²

8. Frederick Kiesler, "Murals Without Walls," *Art Front* (December 1936), pp. 10–11.

9. Frederick Kiesler, "On Correalism and Biotechnique: Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design," *Architectural Record*, 86 (September 1939), p. 59.

10. Frederick Kiesler, manuscript, 1930s, Kiesler Estate Archives.

11. Frederick Kiesler, "Kiesler on Duchamp," *Architectural Record*, 81 (May 1937), p. 54.

12. Frederick Kiesler, "Notes on Designing the Gallery," manuscript, 1942, Kiesler Estate Archives.



Fig. 112 Surrealist gallery. Art of This Century. New York, 1942

Fig. 113 Conceptual drawing for lighting system, Art of This Century, New York, 1942
 Ink on paper, 8 x 11 in. (20.3 x 27.9 cm)
 Kiesler Estate

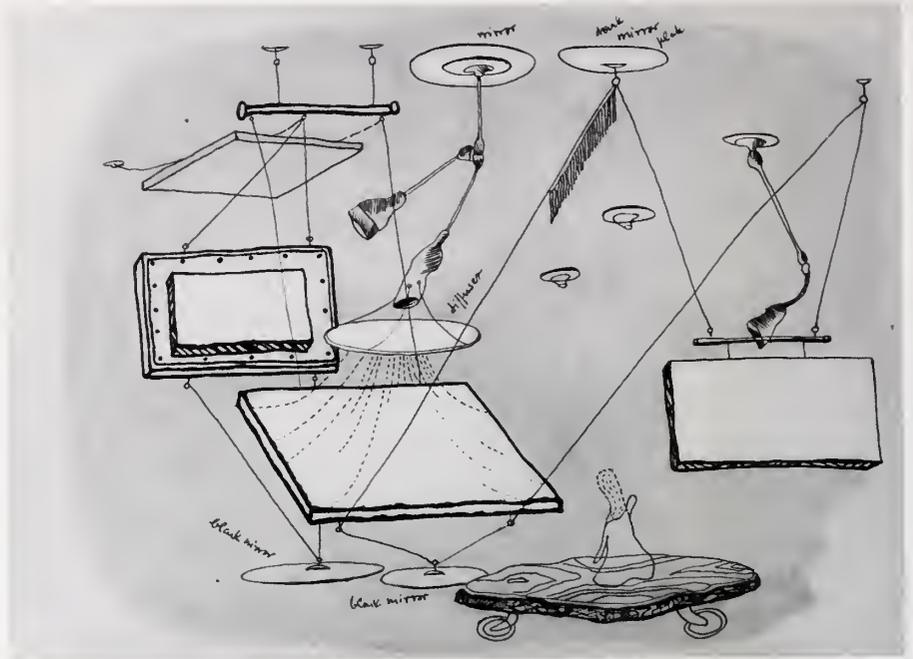


Fig. 114 Telescope view of street from gallery. Art of This Century, New York, 1942
 Ink and gouache on paper, 14 3/4 x 11 in. (37.5 x 27.9 cm)
 Kiesler Estate

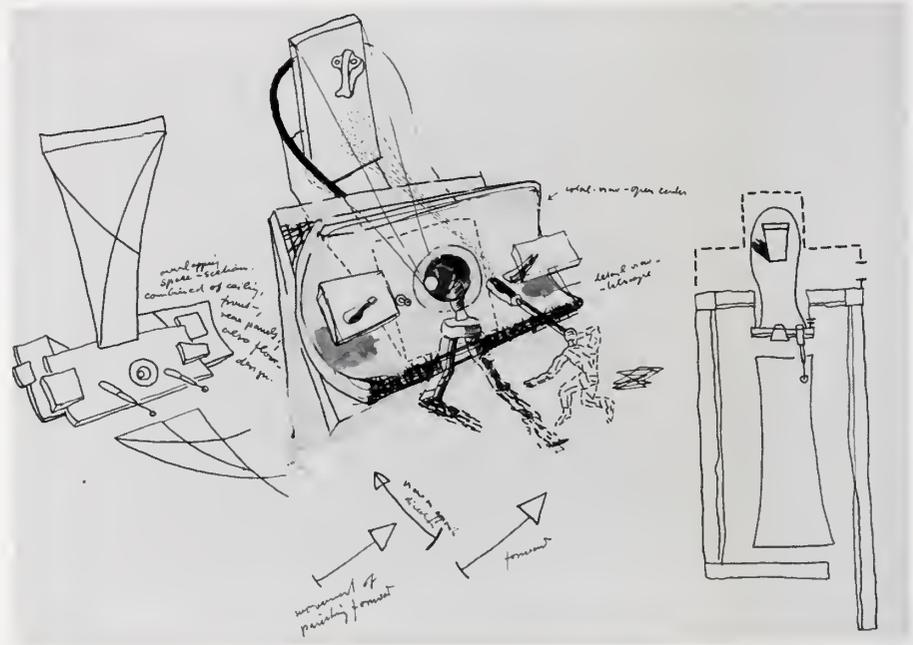
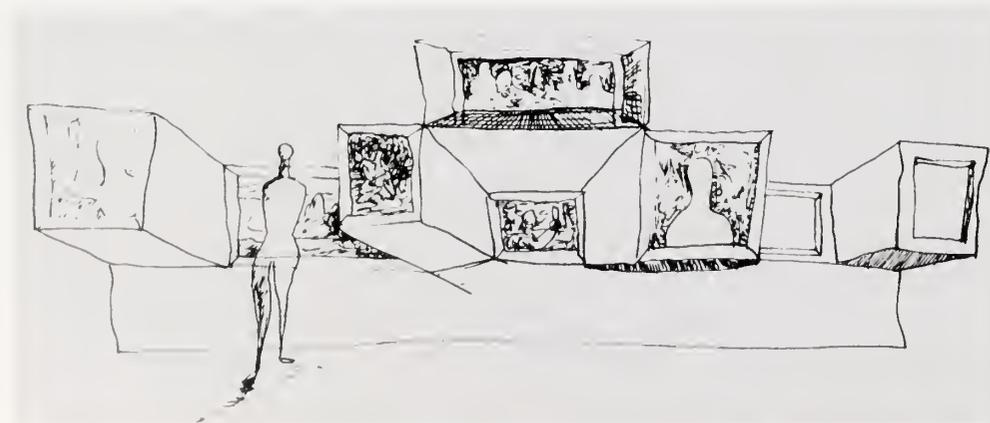


Fig. 115 Study for Kinetic gallery, Art of This Century, New York, 1942
 Pencil on paper, 5 1/2 x 8 1/2 in. (14 x 21.6 cm)
 Kiesler Estate



In *Art of This Century*, Kiesler accomplished three important things. First, he manipulated real space to create a sculptural environment. Second, he assigned viewers an active role, as they moved through space, exploring and interacting with it. And finally, he underscored the quality of art objects as real things in real space, thus completing his triangular correlation between space, spectator, and art object. One spectator, the painter-critic Manny Farber, observed at the time that "what Kiesler has done essentially is to take the frames off the paintings, the paintings off the walls and the walls away from the gallery. . . . Without either frame or wall, the spectator gets a clearer shot of the picture image and can see it immediately for what it is."¹³ Kiesler's courage to make such a bold statement in *Art of This Century* was undoubtedly spurred on by the passion of Surrealist manifestos and texts, such as Gaston Bachelard's 1936 essay "Surrationalism," which overturned logical positivism. Bachelard insisted that "in order to advance it is necessary to abandon acquired experiences, and to go against prevailing ideas. If, in any experience, one does not risk one's own reason, that experience is not worth attempting."¹⁴

In *Art of This Century* and in subsequent installations for the Hugo Gallery, New York, and the Galerie Maeght, Paris, Kiesler pushed beyond the accepted limits of installation practices (Fig. 116). In all three galleries, he worked collaboratively with artists, increasingly rejecting the traditional idea of static, discrete art objects in favor of an audience-activating, environmental art. Though precedents for sculptural environments existed in Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Lissitzky's *Proun Space*,

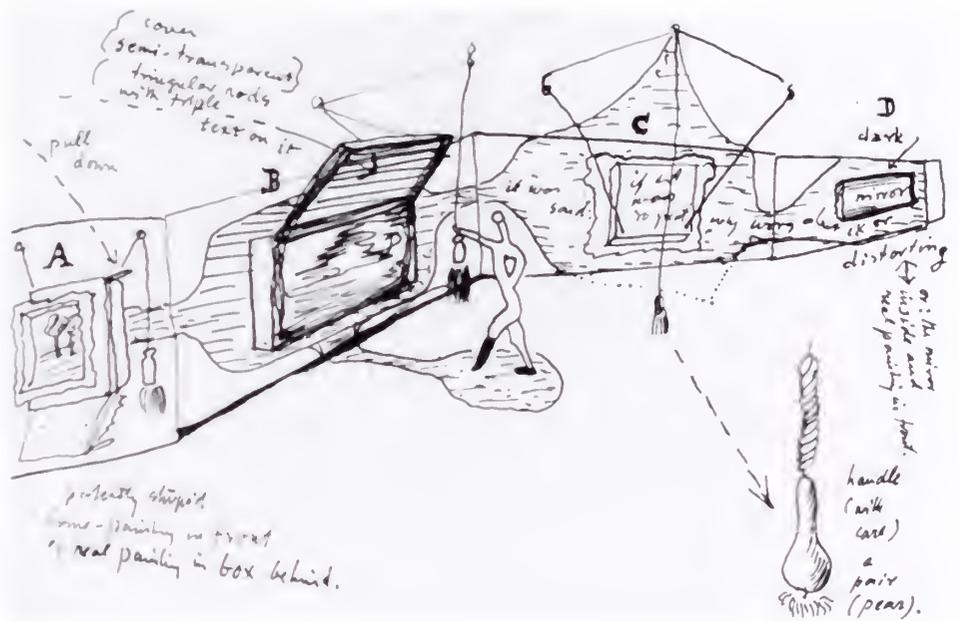


Fig. 116 Study for "Blood Flames," Hugo Gallery, New York, 1947
Pencil on paper
Kiesler Estate

for instance (Figs. 117, 107), the direct experience of Kiesler's Surrealist exhibition tableaux encouraged New York artists such as Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois to work on an environmental scale and to manipulate the real space through which the viewer moves (Figs. 118, 119).



Fig. 117 Kurt Schwitters
Merzbau, 1924
Destroyed



Fig. 118 Louise Nevelson
Installation view of Whitney Museum of American
Art, New York, 1967

Fig. 119 Louise Bourgeois with her sculpture *Blind
Leading the Blind*, 1949



Kiesler soon extended his interests beyond sculptural environments to environmental sculpture. His first such work was made in 1947–48, originally as part of a set for the Juilliard production of Darius Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot* (Fig. 120). After the opera closed, Kiesler kept part of the set intact and subsequently showed it as an independent sculptural entity, under the title *Galaxy*, in The Museum of Modern Art's 1952 "Fifteen Americans" exhibition. Like Alberto Giacometti's *Palace at 4 a.m.* (Fig. 121), the sculpture takes off from the idea of an



Fig. 120 *Galaxy*, 1948–51
Wood and rope, 144 x 168 x 168 in (365.8 x 426.7 x
426.7 cm)
Collection of Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller

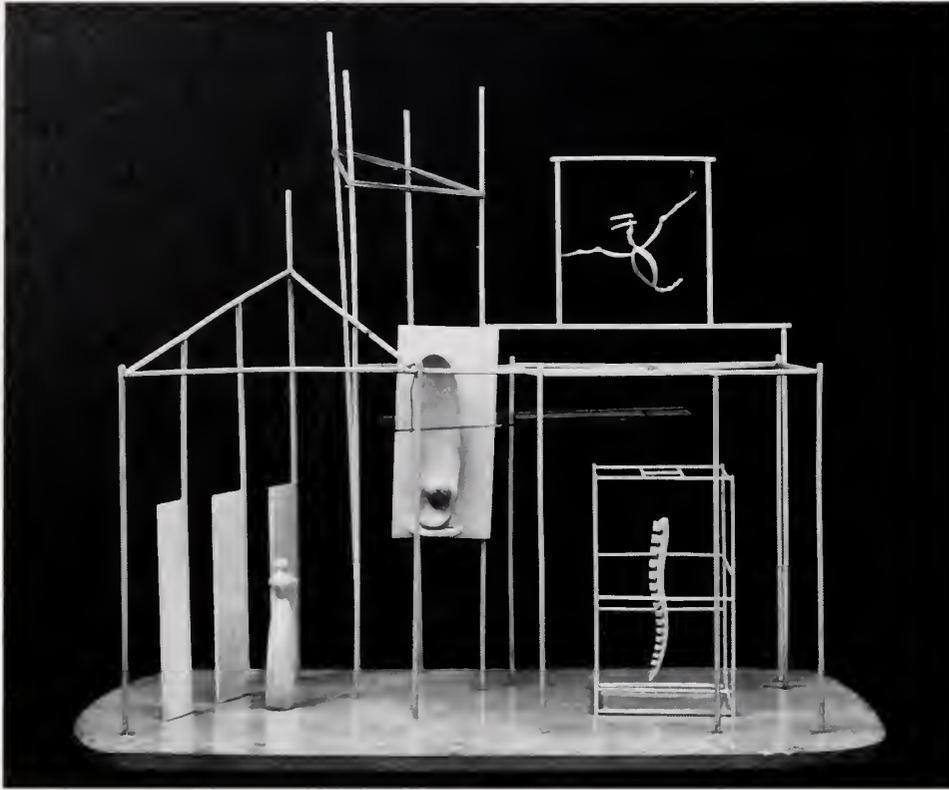


Fig. 121 Alberto Giacometti
The Palace at 4 a.m., 1932–33
 Wood, glass, wire, and string, 25 x 28 ¼ x 15 ¾ in.
 (63.5 x 71.8 x 40 cm)
 The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Purchase

architectural model but on a new, monumental scale. The wooden structure could be entered, walked through, sat on, and the open framework allowed for an interpenetration of exterior views and interior space. Despite a Constructivist structural clarity, a Surrealist mood persisted in the spiky, skeletal forms, which conveyed strong primitive associations. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., described the *Galaxy* as “architecture for sky-gazers; its plan is a cross with arms raised in amazement; its major axis slopes abruptly toward a vanishing point like Borromini’s false perspective in the Palazzo Spada; its four caryatids are a dolphin’s spine, a hippocampus, a lobster claw and an ichthyosaur caressed by a boomerang; its lintels are driftwood and comb-finned gar.”¹⁵ After the piece was purchased by Nelson Rockefeller, Kiesler became involved in “siting” the work outdoors on Rockefeller’s Pocantico Hills estate and modifying it somewhat to suit the particular conditions of its new environment. He also began planning another large wooden outdoor *Galaxy* for Philip Johnson, designed expressly for a site next to Johnson’s Glass House in New Canaan, Connecticut.

While Kiesler was involved with these larger environmental sculptures—a direction he would continue to pursue until his death in 1965—he was also making *Galaxies* of a different order—clusters of two-dimensional painted panels arranged in asymmetrical configurations on the wall. This was a form he had initially experimented with in Vienna following World War I in order to “break through the borders of the finite.”¹⁶ The idea, according to Kiesler, had first been realized back in the teens, when he made a multipaneled portrait composition using

15. Quoted in Frederick Kiesler (1890–1965): *Galaxies*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Alfred Kren Gallery and Jason McCoy, Inc., 1986), n.p.

16. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, p. 20.

17. *Ibid.*

several squares of gray cardboard arranged at intervals.¹⁷ Three decades later, following World War II, he took up the method again in a fragmented portrait of André Breton. Over the next few years, he made several other *Galaxial* portraits of close friends, among them Duchamp, Arp, Cage, Cunningham and Cummings (Figs. 122–125). This new portrait format soon led him to experiment with other subjects as well as with pure abstraction. In 1954, at the Sidney Janis Gallery, Kiesler had his first one-man exhibition, in which he presented multipaneled and irregularly shaped canvases hung in clusters—works he also called *Galaxies* (Fig. 126). These *Galaxies* broadened his activity as an environmental artist, for they represented a unique synthesis of painting, sculpture, and architecture—not “an addition to space, but an integration with space.”¹⁸ In a lecture at Yale University, Kiesler said that “the galaxial paintings are not an illusion of reality, but are real. They are anti-art and pro-life. The galaxy replaces the single painting with several continuous images which can be read in any direction. The power that binds these units together is not composition in perspective, but the observer.”¹⁹ He once again emphasized the central importance of the viewer in establishing meaning and the objectness of the artwork within the flow and reality of everyday life.

18. Frederick Kiesler, “A Story Note on the Galaxy for Sidney Janis Exhibition,” 1954, Kiesler Estate Archives.

19. Frederick Kiesler, typescript for lecture at the School of Architecture, c. 1951, Kiesler Estate Archives.



Fig. 122 Jean Arp, 1947
Pencil on paper, 25 3/4 x 19 1/4 in. (65.1 x 127.4 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of the D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation



Fig. 123 André Breton, c. late 1940s
Pencil on paper, 21 1/4 x 15 3/8 in. (54 x 39.1 cm)
Kiesler Estate

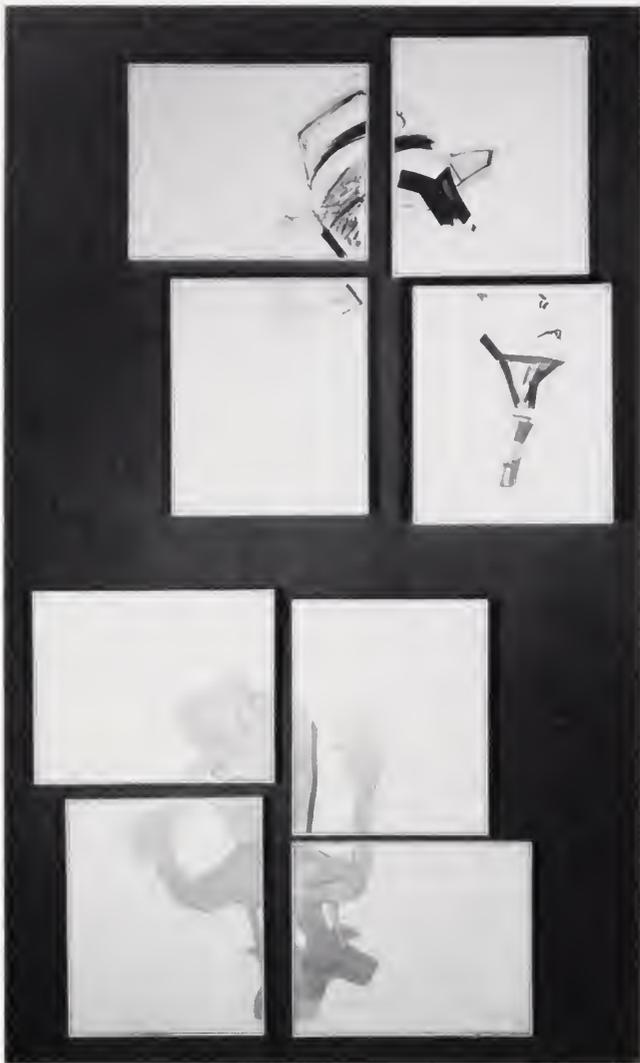


Fig. 124 *E.E. Cummings*, 1948
Metallic paint, crayon, and pencil on paper, eight parts,
approximately 20 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 17 in. (52.6 x 42.9 cm) each
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the
D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation



Fig. 125 *Marcel Duchamp*, 1947
Pencil on paper, eight parts: seven parts, 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.
(36.5 x 27.6 cm), one part, 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (27.6 x 36.5 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the
D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation



Fig 126 Installation of Kiesler *Galaxies* at André Emmerich Gallery, New York, 1979

Critical response to the Janis show was laudatory. Even though Kiesler was sometimes criticized for lapses in technique and execution, his originality and invention were widely recognized. The *Time* magazine reviewer called Kiesler's new format a "breakthrough" and added, "almost inevitably Kiesler's ideas will be taken up by other artists and carried to greater heights of execution. He has planted the seed for a new kind of art and has inevitably opened up for himself a whole new era of damnation and deification."²⁰ He was praised in the *New York Herald Tribune* by Emily Genauer, who claimed that "Kiesler is so impressive a painter that each part is a dramatic and subtle composition and the whole is the most impressive sum of its parts."²¹ Robert Coates of *The New Yorker* hailed the exhibition as "the most unusual of the season."²²

Other artists, notably Malevich, Arp, and Magritte (Fig. 127), had conceived fragmented pictures and clustered arrangements, but the realities of the atomic age, of nuclear physics and space exploration soon gave Kiesler's *Galaxies* a special urgency and relevance. He had long been interested in the miracle of how things are held together,²³ and now invisible forces—molecular structures, magnetic fields, and gravity—ignited his imagination. Similarly, the dawn of the space age forced a radical formulation of man's existence in relationship to a greatly expanded environment. "We were, up until the man-made satellites, true isolationists as far as outer space is concerned. But when the first space-niks were shot into the void of night and remained in space, this was a shock. Now our whole existence becomes more and more related to everything around us, unavoidably correlated to the fate of our solar system, or at least a part of a mighty super galaxy."²⁴

The implications of an infinitely expanding universe both on a microcosmic and macrocosmic level seem to reinforce Kiesler's long-



Fig 127 Rene Magritte
L'Evidence Eternelle, 1930
Oil on canvas, five parts
The Menil Collection, Houston



Fig. 128 Conceptual drawing for *Paris Endless*, 1947
Ink and collage on paper mounted on board, 14 x 19 ¼
in. (35.6 x 48.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 129 Conceptual drawing for *Paris Endless*, 1947
Ink and collage on paper mounted on board, 14 x 19 ¼
in. (35.6 x 48.9 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 130 Conceptual drawing for *Endless House*, n.d.
Pencil on paper, 8 ⅜ x 10 ⅞ in. (21.3 x 27.6 cm)
Kiesler Estate

- 20 Alexander Eliot, "Something New," *Time*, October 11, 1954, p. 96.
- 21 Emily Genauer "Art and Artists," *New York Herald Tribune*, October 3, 1954, p. 17.
- 22 Robert Coates, "The Art Galleries," *The New Yorker*, October 16, 1954, p. 66.
- 23 Kiesler, *Ins de the Endless House*, p. 214.
- 24 Kiesler in Creighton, "Kiesler's Pursuit of a Idea," p. 112.
- 25 *ibid*.

standing belief in "endlessness." Nuclear science and satellites "unexpectedly rocketed everybody's imagination into outer space and suddenly made the endless [house] a natural."²⁵ The *Endless House*, begun in concept in the twenties, became one of Kiesler's central preoccupations in the fifties. While in Paris in 1947, he made a series of experimental drawings for the *Endless House* that are more visionary and sculptural than architectural (Figs. 128, 129). In 1950, his first model of this theoretical house assumed a very simple, streamlined ovoid form, not unlike his 1925 *Endless Theater* model (Fig. 130). However, over the course of ten years, this smooth, egg-shaped structure was transformed into a baroque cluster of organic forms, rough in texture and expressionist in feeling (Figs. 131–134).

The model and drawings of the *Endless House* suggest a proto-architectural sculpture, as well as sculptural architecture. Though the project was never realized, Kiesler wrote extensively about his plans for its construction. His descriptions of materials for the *Endless House* give us a sense of the texture it was to have. The exterior was to be of reinforced concrete on wire mesh; the windows irregularly shaped apertures covered with a partly transparent, partly opaque molded plastic. Bathing pools would be scattered throughout, replacing conventional bathtubs. The flooring was to have many textures—such as pebbles, sand, rivulets of water, grass, planks, heated terra-cotta tiles—so that a sense of touch was continually stimulated. Part of the interior was



Fig. 131 Model of *Endless House*, 1959
 Cement and wire mesh, 38 x 96 x 42 in. (96.5 x
 243.8 x 106.7 cm)
 Kiesler Estate



Fig. 132 Model of *Endless House*, interior, 1959
Cement and wire mesh, 38 x 96 x 42 in. (96.5 x 243.9
x 106.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 133 Model of *Endless House*, interior, 1959
Cement and wire mesh, 38 x 96 x 42 in. (96.5 x 243.9
x 106.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 134 Model of *Endless House*, interior, 1959
Cement and wire mesh, 38 x 96 x 42 in. (96.5 x 243.9
x 106.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate

to be colored with frescoes and sculptures.²⁶ In addition, the planned lighting scheme was based on the prismatic colors of a color clock to make the dweller aware of the continuity of time.²⁷ Again, the *Endless House* was to be a total work of art. Whether it could have functioned in practical terms is still questionable, but architects such as Philip Johnson were quick to appreciate the idea as “a new art form of surpassing nature.”²⁸

The *Endless House* was correlated to the human body in terms of both function and form. The health and comfort of the occupant were key concerns, as was a perceptually and experientially rich environment that Kiesler felt would be spiritually and physically enhancing. Formally, the structure was anthropocentric and the metaphor of

26. Foster to Kiesler, manuscript, c. 1950, Kiesler Estate Archives.

27. “Foster on Kiesler’s *Endless House* and its Physical Symbolism,” *Architectural Record* (November 1950): p. 126.

28. Johnson to Kiesler, July 8, 1953, Kiesler Estate Archives.

the human body was implicit in its sensuous, organic, womblike character (which Kiesler compared to the female body). It seems, in fact, that Kiesler experienced and designed architecture with his body—he was observed to sketch out plans in space with his body following the lines of the imagined structure.²⁹

29. Kiesler, *Inside the Endless House*, p. 409.

Kiesler's activities flow in and out of one another in a unified way, enveloped by the continuity of endlessness. Just as the continuous tension of the shell had been the basis for the *Endless House*, so it became a foundation for his sculpture. Parts were, like the *Galaxies*, dispersed over a field—reaching up from floor to ceiling (Fig. 135), cascading from ceiling to floor (Fig. 136) or arching out from the wall (Fig. 137), embracing what Kiesler called the “heterosexual triangle” of ceiling, wall, and floor.

The iconography of organic forms became richer and more complex in Kiesler's late sculpture: bone shapes were added to his inventory, which already included the shell, tooth, and fish. In addition, he



Fig. 135 *Birth of a Lake*, 1960
Bronze, pewter, aluminum, wood, and formica, 144 x 57 x 132 in. (365.8 x 144.8 x 335.3 cm)
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



Fig. 136 *Cup of Prometheus*, 1956–59
Wood and bronze, 120 ½ x 48 x 34 ½ in. (306.1 x 121.9 x 87.6 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig 137 *The Arch as a Rainbow of Shells*, 1960–66
Bronze, 118 x 134 x 36 in. (299.7 x 340.4 x 91.4 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 138 *Landscape: The Savior Has Risen*, 1964
Bronze, glass, granite, and plastic, 57 1/2 x 49 x 35 1/2 in.
(144.8 x 124.5 x 90.2 cm)
The Whitney Museum of American Art; Purchase,
with funds from the Howard and Jean Lipman
Foundation 66.50



Fig. 139 *Arise Man*, 1964
Granite, bronze, and glass, 33 x 24 1/2 x 43 1/2 in. (83.8 x
62.2 x 110.5 cm)
Kiesler Estate

worked on a series of landscape tableaux where small objects were situated on a large stone slab (Figs. 138, 139). The horizontal extension of these works and their reference to the landscape (as well as to furniture) was, at the time, a new model for sculpture.

In a late, unbuilt project for a client in New Harmony, Indiana, Kiesler worked directly in the landscape on what could be considered, like Isamu Noguchi's landscape architecture (Fig. 140), a prototype for Earth Art. The *Grotto for Meditation*, as it was called, incorporated the elements of earth, water, and fire to produce a meditative environment in homage to the late philosopher-theologian Paul Tillich. Two symbols—the shell and the dolphin—were used as architectural forms that provided a variety of open as well as enclosed spaces. They also functioned on a symbolic level to suggest renewal and regeneration (Figs. 141–143).

During the last years of his life, Kiesler gravitated toward religious and mythological themes—particularly themes of resurrection and rebirth, as in the environments *The Last Judgment* (Fig. 144), *Cup of Prometheus* (Fig. 136), *Us, You, Me* (Fig. 145), and *Bucephalus* (Fig. 146). *The Shrine of the Book* in Jerusalem, completed shortly before his death, shares this spirit. It also fits into the landscape like an environmental



Fig. 140 Isamu Noguchi
Contoured Playground, 1941
Plaster and bronze, 3 x 26 x 26 in. (7.6 x 66 x 66 cm)
Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, Long Island City,
New York

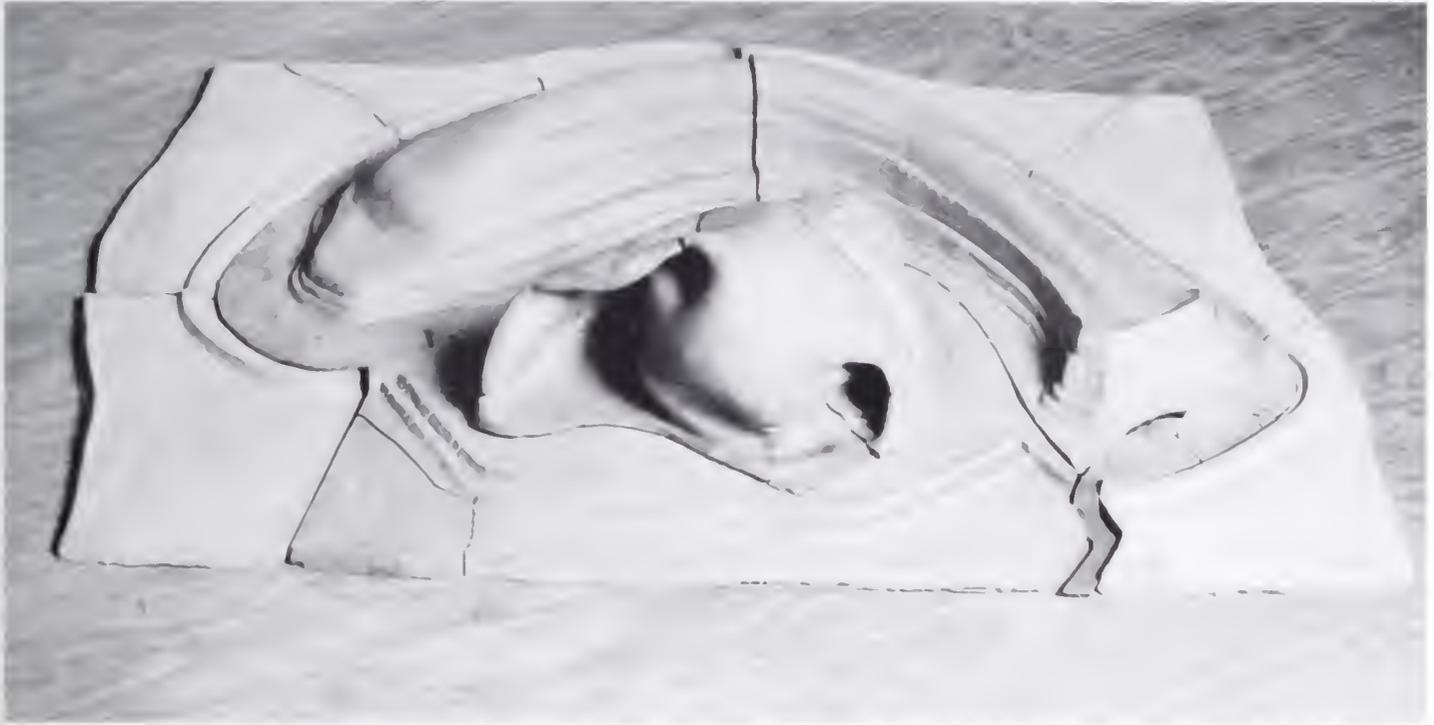


Fig 141 Model of *Grotto for Meditation*, 1963
Clay, three parts, 7 x 23 x 32 in. (17.8 x 58.4 x
81.3 cm)
Kiesler Estate

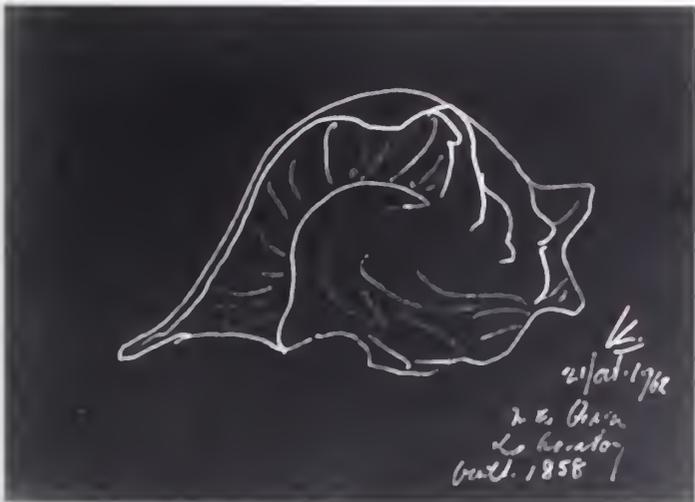


Fig 142 Conceptual drawing of shell structure for
Grotto for Meditation, 1963
Kiesler Estate



Fig 143 Conceptual drawing of dolphin for *Grotto for
Meditation*, 1963
Pencil on tracing paper, 32 x 42 in. (81.3 x 106.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate

sculpture. The highly sculptural, vessel form was intended to recall the amphora in which the Dead Sea Scrolls had been found. But it also had a dynamic visual quality. The sanctuary was planned as a double parabolic dome—not a traditional cupola resting on an understructure but a continuous, single-shell construction. The lower parabola, bulging outward from the earth, was the container, “the vessel”; the upper parabola was “the lift, the open neck.” Light was funneled into the shrine through the elongated neck down to the water below. The main interior space retained the prenatal, womblike character of the *Endless House*. From the exterior, the building appeared to be bursting with energy, its sides swelling and its top rising up to the sun (Figs. 147–151).

In a statement prepared for his 1964 exhibition of environmental sculpture at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Kiesler restated his long-standing correalistic philosophy: “A new era has begun, that is an era of correlating the plastic arts within their own realms but with the objective of integrating them with a life freed from self-imposed limitations.”³⁰

30. Frederick Kiesler, “A New Era of the Plastic Arts Has Begun” (1964), published in *Zodiac*, 19 (1969), p. 30.



Fig. 144 *The Last Judgment*, 1955–63
Bronze and aluminum, 164 x 204 x 207 in. (416.6 x 518.2 x 525.8 cm)
The Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles



Fig 145 *Us, You, Me*. 1963
Clay and wood, dimensions variable, unfinished
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 146 *Bucephalus*, 1963
Cement and wire mesh, unfinished
Kiesler Estate

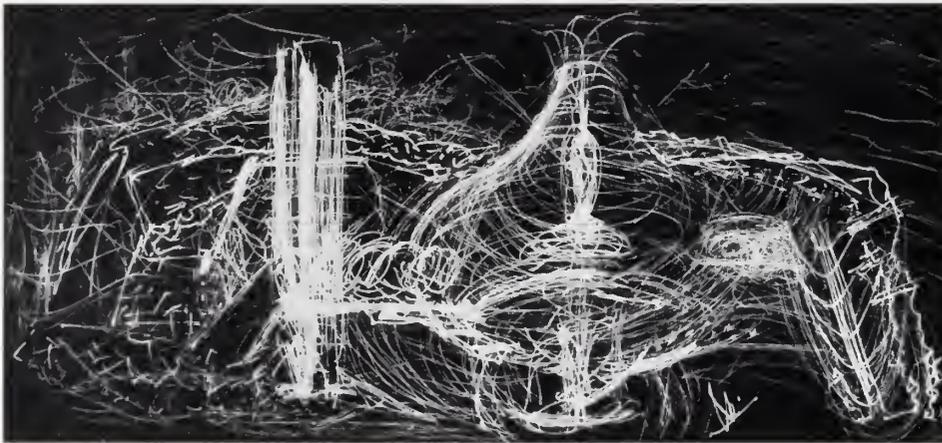


Fig. 147 Conceptual drawing for *The Shrine of the Book*, 1959
Pencil on paper, 18 x 40 in. (45.7 x 101.6 cm)
Kiesler Estate

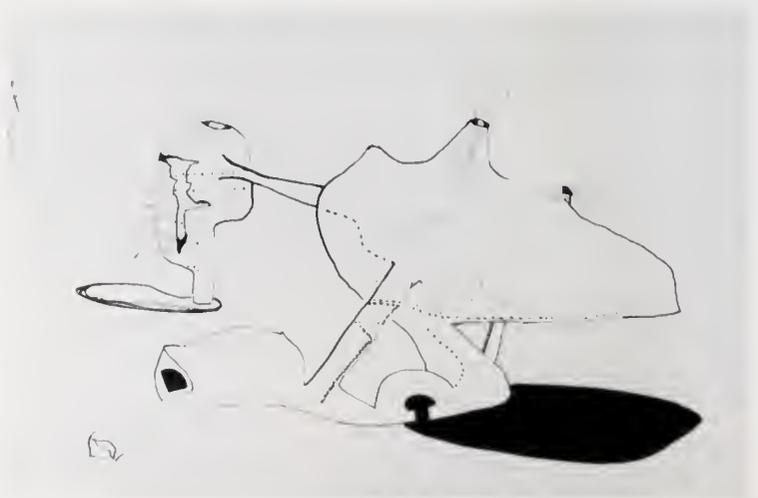


Fig. 148 Conceptual drawing for *Paris Endless*, 1947
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 in. (30.5 x 45.7 cm)
Kiesler Estate



Fig. 149 Kiesler and Bartos
The Shrine of the Book, corridor leading to interior of
sanctuary, Jerusalem, 1965



Fig. 150 Kiesler and Bartos
The Shrine of the Book, stairs leading to vessel-domed
sanctuary, Jerusalem, 1965



Fig. 151 Kiesler and Bartos
The Shrine of the Book, interior of the sanctuary,
Jerusalem, 1965

Kiesler's art, in its defiance of traditional distinctions between art and architecture, anticipated the radical experimentation of the 1960s. The notion of art as a field containing dispersed and scattered elements was subsequently adopted by Minimal, Conceptual, and Post-Minimal artists (Figs. 152, 153). The horizontal stretch of that field, based on a landscape model, also suggested a new sculptural orientation and eventually led to artists working directly in the landscape, molding, shaping, and transforming the earth (Figs. 154, 155). While Kiesler never lived to see the flourishing of these new art forms, he figures in their history. In his writings and in his work, he proposed nothing less than a total reformulation of art that would liberate it from the confines of the isolated aesthetic object.



Fig. 152 Barry Le Va
By Four Equal Quantities (within four equal spaces) arranged, rearranged, borrowed, exchanged, 1967
 Felt, aluminum, and ball bearings, 240 x 600 in.
 (609.6 x 1524 cm)
 Installation view, Daniel Weinberg Gallery,
 San Francisco



Fig. 153 Imi Knoebel
Ghent Room, 1980
 Installation view, Dia Art Foundation, New York,
 1987–88



Fig. 154 Robert Smithson
Spiral Jetty, 1970
 Great Salt Lake, Utah



Fig. 155 Michael Heizer
Isolated Mass/Circumflex, 1968
 Massacre, Dry Lake, Nevada



Frederick Kiesler

Chronology 1890–1965

1890

Born December 9 in Cernauti, Romania (now Chernovtsy, USSR), to Dr. Julius Kiesler and Maria Meister Kiesler. Kiesler gave different dates for his birth—often 1892 or 1896—and always named Vienna as his birthplace.



Kiesler, New York, 1926

1908–09

First record of Kiesler in Vienna at the Wiener Technischen Hochschule.

1910

Enters Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna. Studies painting and printmaking; none of his works from this period are known. Leaves without a degree.

1911–12

Receives Therese Dessauer Prize and Kaiser Franz Josef artist's stipend.

1914–17

By his own account, serves in the German military press corps

1918–19

Later records that in these years, he makes two portrait paintings, in which parts of the body are disconnected from one another; he also says he produced a figurative work, composed on twenty separate pieces of gray cardboard of varying sizes that he installed together on a wall (he later refers to these as *Galaxies* and claims that his first *Galaxy* was made as early as 1913)

1920

Marries Stefanie Frischer, a philology student, on August 19 in the Vienna Synagogue.



Stefi Kiesler, Paris, 1925

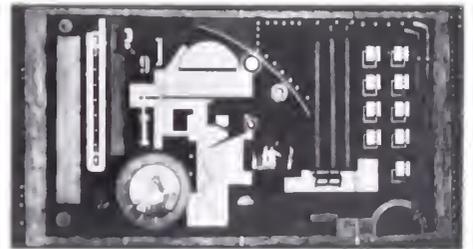
Reports that he worked with Adolf Loos on a postwar slum-clearing project, though this has not been confirmed.

1921

Goes to Berlin for three months in the fall; returns to Vienna at end of year.

1922

January–May, in Berlin. Has first discussions with City of Vienna about an "Internationale Ausstellung neuer Theatertechnik" ("International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques"), to open in 1924.



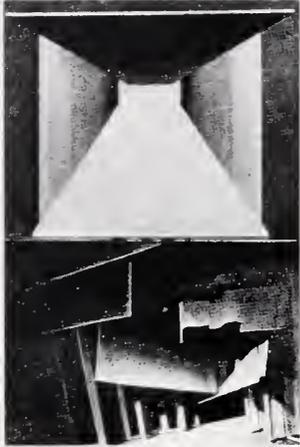
Set for *R.U.R.*, 1923

1923

Works on the stage design for Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.*, which premiered in Berlin on March 29. Receives great acclaim for his "electromechanical" stage set, which includes moving parts, projected film, and a tanagra device (a series of mirrors reflecting action backstage on a screen). Following a performance he meets Hans Richter, Theo van Doesberg, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and El Lissitzky and is asked to join the De Stijl group as its youngest member. In October, *R.U.R.* opens in Vienna.

1924

Works on another set design for Berthold Viertel's production of Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, which opens in Berlin on January 18.

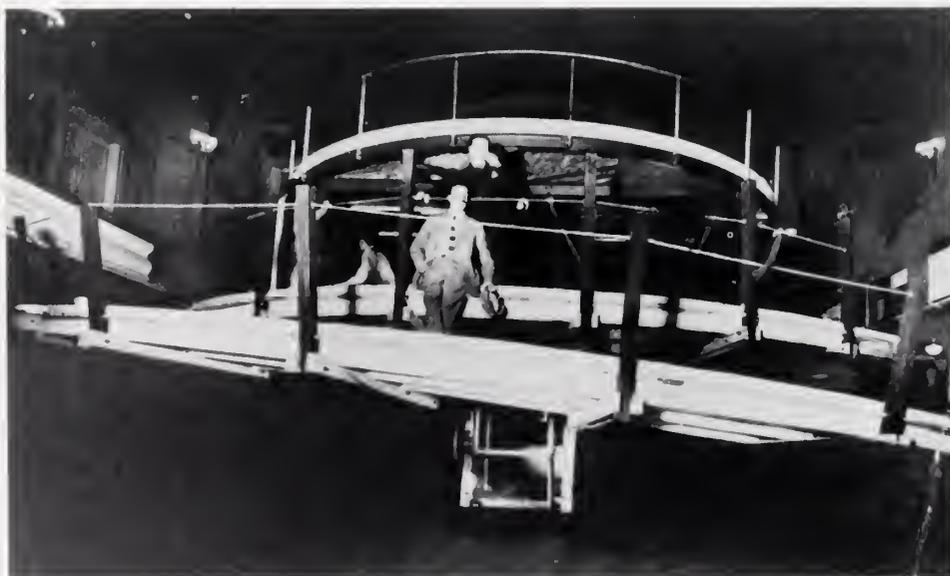


Set for *Emperor Jones*, 1924

Publishes an essay, "Actors, Set Design, and Space Stage," in the *Berliner Börsenkurier* of March 16. In June, named member of the editorial staff of the journal *G*, edited by Hans Richter.

During the summer, works on the "International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques" for the Music and Theater Festival of Vienna. This first major commission in Vienna catapults him to notoriety among the international avant-garde.

Exhibition opens September 24 and includes the revolutionary *Space Stage*, an elevated theater-in-the-round designed by Kiesler for



Kiesler and Léger (front) in front of *Space Stage*, 1924

Vienna's Konzerthaus, as well as his radical *L + T* installation system, a network of horizontal and vertical supports that contain the hundreds of stage and costume designs, posters, and models of European and Russian avant-garde theater productions he has assembled. Also designs posters, stationery, and the catalogue in a Constructivist typographic style and layout. The mayor of Vienna opens the exhibition; Fernand Léger delivers an address and shows, possibly for the first time in public, his film *Ballet Mécanique*. During the following weeks, Theo van Doesberg and film theoretician Béla Balázs give lectures in the exhibition.

In October, one play is performed on the *Space Stage*; another is rehearsed but never opens because Kiesler becomes involved in defending himself against a plagiarism suit regarding the *Space Stage* brought by Jakob Moreno-Levy, designer of the Vienna Stegreiftheater, a children's theater with a circular stage.

1925

Invited by Josef Hoffmann, director of the Austrian section of the "Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes" in Paris, to design and organize a theater display. At this time Kiesler is referred to as a painter. In a rectangular space in the Grand Palais, he constructs a monumental environment in the *De Stijl* mode. Integrated into it are stage models, theater plans, and costume designs by Austrian architects and artists. Kiesler calls his exhibition design visionary architecture for a futuristic *City in Space*; he writes a manifesto, holds a press conference, and publishes essays in the journals *G* and *De Stijl*.

During his stay in Paris, works on further architectural plans for "horizontal skyscrapers," a spiral-shaped department store, and a plan for



"International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques," 1924



City in Space, 1925



(From left) Kiesler, Mr. and Mrs. Theo van Doesberg, Mr. and Mrs. George Antheil, Augusta Perret, Mrs. Juan Gris, Tristan Tzara, and Juan Gris in front of *City in Space*, 1925



(From left) Theo van Doesberg, Stefi Kiesler, Hans Arp, Nelly van Doesberg, and Kiesler, Paris, 1925

the redesign of the Place de la Concorde. Apparently at this time, he also prepares plans for a "universal, endless theater without stage"—an elaboration of his earlier *Space Stage* concept.

Visits with Le Corbusier, Fernand Leger, Mies van der Rohe, Hans Richter, and Theo van Doesburg in Paris.

Stefi Kiesler designs geometric compositions on the typewriter and publishes them under the pseudonym Pietro de Saga in several issues of *De Stijl*.

Receives invitation to direct a major exhibition of theater design in New York from Jane Heap, editor of *The Little Review*.

1926

On January 19, Kiesler and Stefi set sail for New York with works from the Paris theater exhibition packed in more than forty crates.

"International Theatre Exposition" at Stenway Hall, West 52nd Street (February 27–March 22), under the auspices of The Theatre Guild, the Provincetown Playhouse, the Neighborhood Playhouse, and the Greenwich Village Theatre as well as *The Little Review*.

Kiesler and Jane Heap are the organizers. The catalogue and poster are designed by Kiesler, as is the installation. Kiesler contributes a provocative essay to the catalogue entitled "The Theater Is Dead" and lectures on the *Endless Theater*, a model of which is in the exhibition, and his concept for a *Four-Dimensional Theater*.

Involved in founding Film Associates, Inc., an organization devoted to showing avant-garde films in New York. Begins discussions with Symon Gould about designing a modern movie house. Lectures at the Civic Club of New York in April on "The Theater of the Future."

Changes spelling of first name from Friedrich to Frederick.

In August, founds the experimental International Theatre Arts Institute, 102 Remson Street, Brooklyn, with Princess Matchabelli (the actress Maria Carmi). Kiesler was to teach courses on theater architecture and stagecraft.

Invited by Ralph Jonas, president of the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce, to prepare plans for a performing arts center in Brooklyn Heights. As a result, postpones his plans to return to Europe. Relations with Jonas break off toward year's end, leaving Kiesler in difficult financial straits.

1927

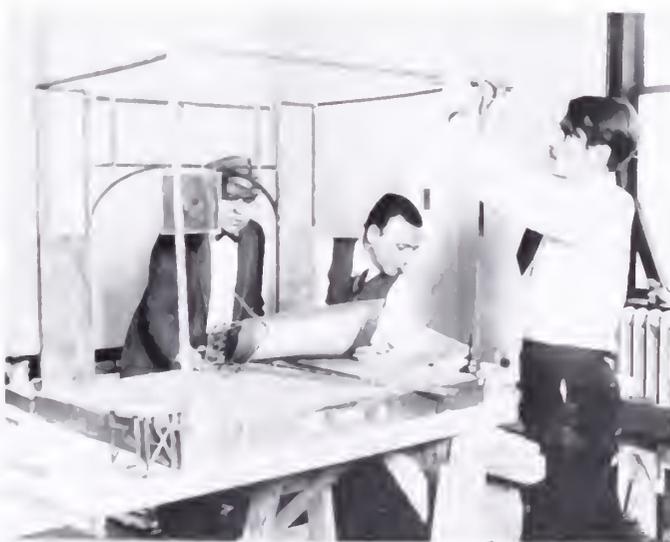
In January, Kiesler and Stefi find temporary work at the Anderson Galleries, managing an exhibition of modern art that Katherine Dreier has organized. Kiesler proposes turning one of the galleries into a "telemuseum" with



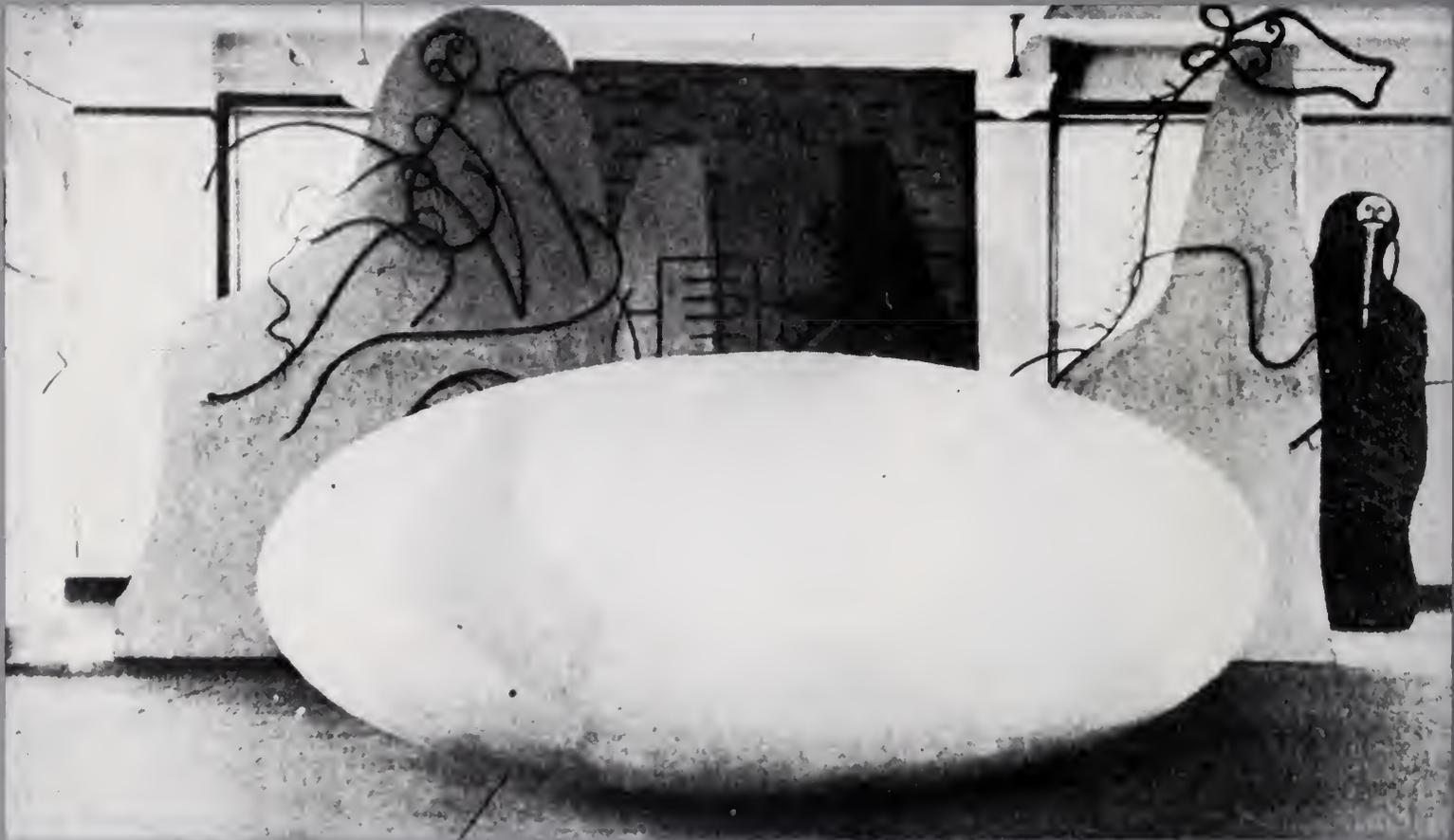
Kiesler, arriving in New York, 1926



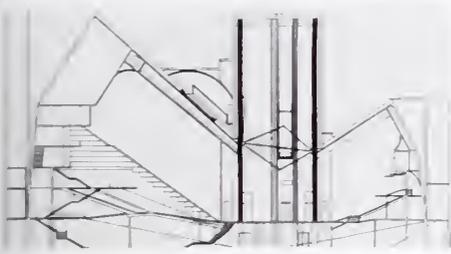
"International Theatre Exposition," 1926



Jane Heap and Kiesler (center), New York, 1926



Model of the *Endless Theater*, 1926



Performing arts center, Brooklyn Heights, 1926–27

walls designed as receiving screens for transmitting pictures.

Kiesler's letterhead reads "Frederick Kiesler architect new york 64 West 49th Street."

In March, Katherine Dreier asks the architect Harvey Wiley Corbett to meet Kiesler. It seems probable that Kiesler was then offered work with the firm of Helmle, Corbett, Harrison; his own accounts state that he worked there through 1928, although this has never been confirmed.



Kiesler (left) with Harvey Wiley Corbett, New York, late 1920s

Volunteers to design a modern museum for Katherine Dreier and the Societe Anonyme but upon delivery of the plans (copyright December 24, 1931, #5315) expects payment, which leads to a misunderstanding with Dreier

Stefi Kiesler is employed at the foreign-language desk of The New York Public Library, where she works until 1959

1928

In March, begins to design store windows for Saks Fifth Avenue (through 1930)

In May Symon Gould announces that Kiesler is designing the Film Guild Cinema building on West 8th Street. The discussions between Gould and Kiesler had begun in 1926.

Member of the American Union of Decorative Artists and Craftsmen (AUDAC), members include Donald Deskey, Paul Frankl, Norman Bel Geddes, Raymond Hood, Ilonka Karasz



Window display, Saks Fifth Avenue, New York, 1928–29

1929

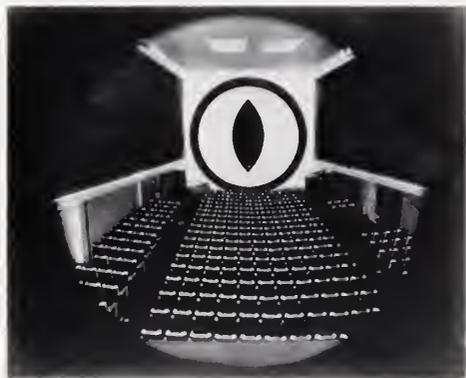
After a nine-month construction period, the Film Guild Cinema opens on February 1 to great critical acclaim.



Film Guild Cinema, original plan, 1928



Film Guild Cinema, 1929



Film Guild, Cinema, 1929

Begins to design furniture.

Kiesler's *The Modern Shaw Window and Storefront* published by Brentano's; expanded and published the following year as *Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and Its Display* (Brentano's, 1930).

During the 1930s Kiesler expands his network of close friends in America. Many of them are fellow expatriates from Europe or the Soviet Union, among them Kem Weber, Arshile Gorky (who was to become one of his closest friends), Jean Hélion, Alexander Archipenko, Marcel Duchamp, Edgard Varese, John Graham, Arnold Schonberg, and Fernand Léger. Others include

John Erskine, playwright and Juilliard School director, E.E. Cummings, Alexander Calder, Julien Levy, Al Hirschfeld, Jimmy Ernst, and Museum of Modern Art curator Philip Johnson.

1930

In March, conceives and designs the overall layout of the annual AUDAC exhibition at Grand Central Palace as a series of self-contained "rooms," each one then installed by a different designer. In his room, he installs an office setup with his suspended *Flying Desk*. Other designers included were Donald Deskey and Wolfgang and Pola Hoffmann.

Probably founds his own architectural firm, the Planners Institute, incorporated in 1934.

Moves to the Fifth Avenue Hotel in August.

August 12–October 18, in Paris with Stefi, where he meets frequently with Piet Mondrian, Edgard Varèse, Alexander Calder, Jean Arp, Le Corbusier, Michel Seuphor, Georges Vantongerloo, Fernand Léger, Oskar Kokoschka, and Tristan Tzara. Attends a performance of Calder's *Circus* and introduces him to Mondrian.

Returns to New York after receiving a letter from Wallace Harrison, a partner of Harvey

Wiley Corbett, announcing that he has received an appointment as lecturer at Columbia University's School of Architecture.

In October, rents an apartment at 320 East 40th Street.

Meets his future dealer, Sidney Janis (Janovitz). Janis' wife, Harriet (Hansi), works with Kiesler at the Planners Institute.

Receives certification as architect from New York State.

1931

January 4, attends a lecture by Richard Neutra at the New School for Social Research. In the next few months, sees Calder, Paul Frankl, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Designs floor lamp and ceiling lamp, published in the *Architectural Record* (March 3, 1931).

Works on another design in May for a museum building; model is exhibited in the annual AUDAC exhibition at The Brooklyn Museum (May–June).

Develops design for a prefabricated, standardized single-family dwelling and negotiates with Sears, Roebuck and Co., Chicago, to produce and market it.



Flying Desk, in Planners Institute office, 1930

Applies for a copyright in August, calling it *Nucleus House* (copyright #4744).

Spends much of the summer in Woodstock, New York, preparing for a competition for a theater there, which he titles *The Universal*. The plan called for a proscenium stage that could be converted into an arena (copyright August 21, #4866).

In September, wins the competition for the Woodstock theater against Frank Lloyd Wright (although the competition is not mentioned in the Wright literature). The project is never realized because of a lack of funds.

Meets regularly with his old friend Léger, who is in New York in September for an exhibition. Becomes consulting architect for the National Public Housing Conference.

1932

Lectures in January at The Brooklyn Museum on "Ornament and Crime." Gives further lectures in the spring at Columbia University, the City Woman's Club, and the Downtown Gallery.

Represented in The Museum of Modern Art's "International Exhibition of Modern Architecture" (opens February 10) with photographs of the Film Guild Cinema building.

Lives at Woodstock Tower, 320 East 42nd Street.

The Woodstock project is published in *Shelter* (May 1932) with a foreword by Buckminster Fuller.

On May 29, *The New York Times* reports on Kiesler's plans for modular housing composed of standardized, recombinable units. *The New York Herald Tribune*, under the heading "Everyman's House," calls them "Home Hotels" (July 12).

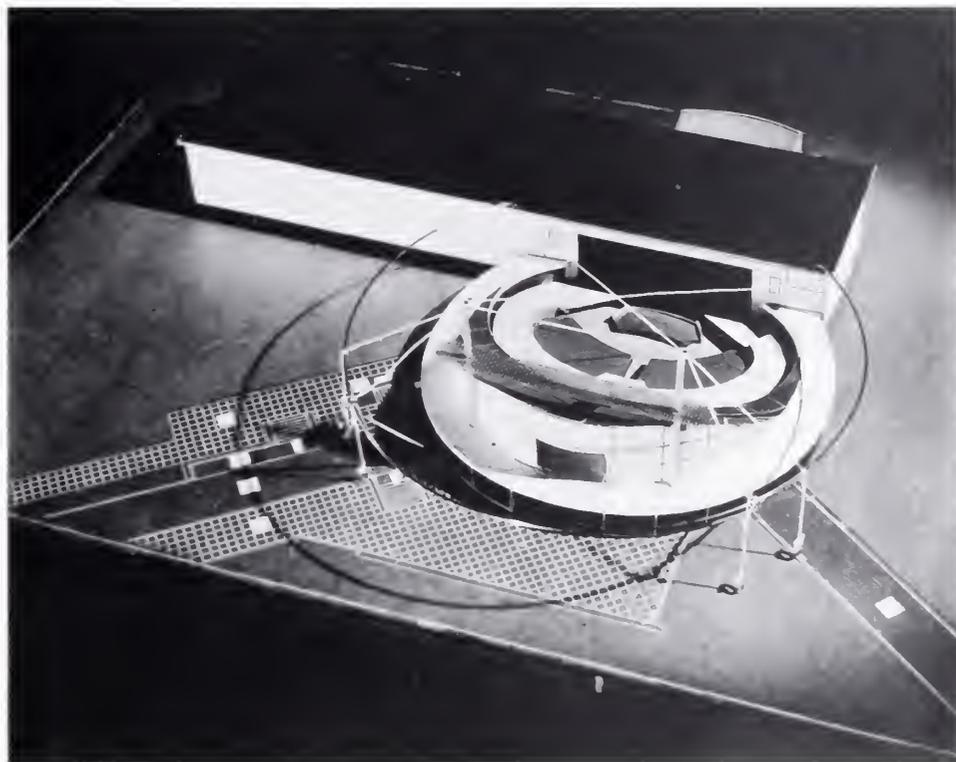
1933

In January, continues negotiations with Sears, Roebuck and Co. for the production of the *Nucleus House*.



Nucleus House, 1926–28

Writes in March to Jean Badovici, a friend from Paris, that he intends to found Correlation, Inc — a company for industrial planning — and tries to interest him in publishing a quarterly



Model for *The Universal*, Woodstock, 1931

magazine with the same name. The project never materialized.

Views the Bunuel-Dali film *L'Age d'Or*.

In June, makes first of five trips (through December) to Chicago to meet with Sears, Roebuck and Co., for whom he works as a designer.

Spends two weeks in August at Chalet Indien, a favorite Catskill resort, to which he returns frequently with Sidney and Harriet Janis throughout the 1930s.

Applies for a copyright for a *Perspective View of Flexible Partition Room*, which may be connected to a commission he was working on for the Modernage Furniture Company, New York. The project, called *Space House*, was erected in the company's showrooms on East 33rd Street on October 16. It was a 30 x 45-foot scale model of a single-family dwelling. The house was conceived as one story on four levels with an innovative lighting scheme and modern, built-in furniture.

Begins to work as a stage designer for The Juilliard School of Music.

Moves to 56 Seventh Avenue, his permanent home in America until his death.

1934

Gives two lectures in January at the Chicago Merchandise Mart's "Clinic of Modern Design" on "The Difference Between Good and Bad Modern Design." He elicits a great response in the press when he calls for a nonskid bathtub.

In February, premiere of George Antheil's opera *Helen Retires* (libretto by John Erskine), Kiesler's first set and costume design for The Juilliard School. It reveals his inventiveness, even when working with a modest budget (the sets and costumes were produced for less than \$500).



Set for *Helen Retires*, 1934

Writes an introduction for the catalogue of an Arshile Gorky exhibition at the Mellon Galleries, Philadelphia.

In Buffalo at the end of May to work on a storefront design for Jay's Shoes.

In June, designs an Institute of Art and Industrial Design to serve as a residence and workplace for students, the project is published by E.M. Benson in the *American Magazine of Art* (June 1934).



Space House, 1933



Space House, 1933

Planners Institute incorporated on September 15. In November, for the WGN Broadcasting Auditorium Competition, designs a "Floor and Ceiling Plan of a Television Auditorium" (copyright #10516, #10517).

In December, the Richard Strauss opera *Ariadne on Naxos* premieres at Juilliard with Kiesler's stage design. For an exhibition of experimental film at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, lectures on "The Motion Picture: 1914-1934" and lends films by Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling.

Appointed director of scenic design, The Juilliard School of Music, a post he holds until 1957.

Member of the WPA FAP Design Studio with William Lescaze, Meyer Schapiro, and Alfred Auerbach. Surveys locations for murals.

Joins an informal fraternity called "The Little Friends" with Virgil Thomson, writers John Latouche and Jane and Paul Bowles, composer Peggy Glenville-Hicks, and news photographer Harry Dunham.

Meets Lillian Olinsey, a young art student and future assistant to Hans Hofmann at the Hans Hofmann School; maintains a close relationship with her (they marry in 1964).

In September, moves to the penthouse at 56 Seventh Avenue.

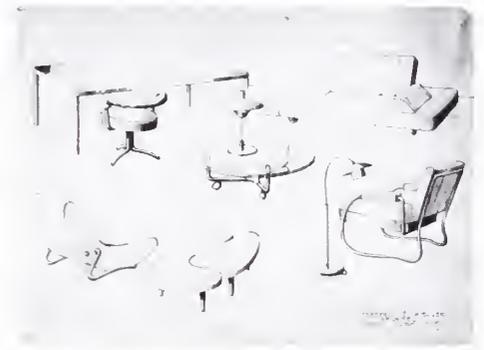
Works on furniture designs and is commissioned to furnish an apartment for the fabric designer Alma Mergentine.



Westermann Bookstore, 1935

In December, invited by the collector Walter Arensberg to draw up plans for a house in Hollywood, but rejects the offer because Arensberg doesn't want personal contact with him.

Renovates Westermann Bookstore, New York City (date uncertain).



Furniture designs, 1935

"Cubism and Abstract Art," organized by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 2. Kiesler is included in the architecture, theater, and furniture sections.

Shows John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Philip Johnson the Mergentine residence, which includes his well-known kidney-shaped aluminum table.

April 22, premiere of Karl Otto Nicolai's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at The Juilliard School.



Kiesler, New York, 1935



Set for *In the Pasha's Garden*, 1935

1935

January 24, opening of the John Seymour opera *In the Pasha's Garden*, for a Juilliard production designed by Kiesler. Gives a lecture at the Sculptor's Union on March 25. Another Kiesler production at Juilliard Robert Bennett's *Maria Malibran*, opens April 8

Receives a prize for the best commercial store design in Buffalo, for his work at Jay's Shoes, begun in May 1934

1936

Submits patents in January and February for *Party Lounge and Furniture Construction* (#60604) and *Lamp and Table Construction* (#62593).

On February 17, Stefi becomes a U.S. citizen, Kiesler is granted citizenship on December 8.

Meets frequently with Duchamp, who is in New York in June to repair the *Large Glass*, then owned by Katherine Dreier.

Teaches a course on scenic design at Columbia University School of Architecture in collaboration with The Juilliard School.

Attends lecture by Karl Jung at the Plaza Hotel, on October 2.

In December, publishes "Murals Without Walls," a defense of Arshile Gorky's Newark Airport mural, in *Art Front* (December 18).



Jay's Shoes, 1935

Begins a book entitled "Magic Architecture," which he works on intermittently for ten years (unpublished).

1937

In February, begins to work as a design critic for *Architectural Record*, publishing a series of six articles on "Design Correlation" under the subheading "The Architect in Search Of..." The May issue is devoted to Duchamp's *Large Glass*.

Submits copyright application in April for a News Stand — "to be opened for use and closed for non-use, showing display cards" (#16974).

Visits Thomas Mann at the Algonquin Hotel.

In May, buys Duchamp's painting *Thermometer* from Joseph Stella for \$1,000. Around this time he sells Duchamp's *Network of Stoppoges* (1914) to Julien Levy.

In July, appointed associate professor at the Columbia University School of Architecture and establishes the Laboratory for Design Correlation there in the fall. In the beginning, no students are accepted; instead, Kiesler devotes his time to investigating what he believes to be the primary mission of the Design Lab — to connect research on life processes with a scientific approach to design.

Begins to work on the *Vision Machine*, an investigation of visual perception and energy.

Submits copyright on July 28 for *Breakfast sketch of tables and chairs with people sitting at the table* (#26528).

Mies van der Rohe visits Kiesler in October.

1938

January 1, Beryl Rubenstein's *Sleeping Beauty* (libretto by John Erskine) opens at Juilliard with Kiesler's sets and costumes.

In January, the name of Armand Bartos, his future partner, appears for the first time in Stefi Kiesler's diary of her husband's activities. Kiesler lectures on Duchamp's *Large Glass* at the Art Students League. Speaks at a symposium on "Subway Art" in February at The Museum of Modern Art.



Mobile Home Library. 1937–39

At a symposium, "Science and Design," at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (May 2), speaks on "Biotechnique versus Architecture."



Kiesler with correlation chart, New York, c. 1937

Develop *New Functions and Don't Search for Forms for Old Functions.*

In the spring, works on the *Mobile Home Library* in cooperation with his students in the Laboratory for Design Correlation — the lab's first developed product.

Speaks at Columbia in November on *De Stijl*.

Offers to help Mondrian, then in London, to relocate to New York.

1939

The experimental filmmaker Rudolph Burckhardt films at Kiesler's home in February.

Participates in demonstration in March against Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Member of Advisory Council for the Advancement of Science and Art at Cooper Union.

Publishes the *Mobile Home Library* in an article for the September 1939 *Architectural Record*, "On Correalism and Biotechnique: Definition and Test of a New Approach to Building Design."

Jacques Offenbach's *Toles of Hoffmann*, with set designs by Kiesler, opens at Juilliard on December 8

During the 1940s, Kiesler strengthens his ties to the Surrealists, many of whom had recently im-



Breton, Ernst, Gorky, Calas, Matta, Duchamp, Kiesler, and others at Surrealist dinner, New York, early 1940s.

migrated to New York. He has close associations with Andre Breton, Kurt Seligson, Salvador Dali, Luis Bunuel, David Hore, Joan Miro, Mox and Jimmy Ernst, Motto, Nicolas Colos, and Yves Tonguy. He also becomes better acquainted with visual artists in New York, especially those who would come to be known as the New York School, he frequently socializes with William Bozities, Burgoyne Diller, Bornett Newmon, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, Isamu Noguchi, and critic Clement Greenberg. His closest friends



Kiesler crowning Max Ernst, 1940s

remained Gorky, Jahn Graham, Duchamp, Al Hirschfeld, and Cummings, with the addition of Matta. He also repeatedly saw Hans Richter, Malcolm Cawley, Edwin Denby, Joseph Campbell, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Calder, Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, and Jahn Cage during this decade.

Julien Levy sells Duchamp's *Network of Stoppages* for Kiesler at \$3,000.

1941

Mondrian, who arrived in New York in October 1940, meets with Kiesler several times in January and February.

The West Coast artist Gordon Onslow Ford gives a lecture at Kiesler's apartment on January 17, attended by Stuart Davis, Aaron Copland, and John Graham, among others.

On May 24, receives a letter from Columbia University informing him that the Design Laboratory will have to be closed for budgetary reasons. After vigorous protests and a contribution from a former student, Walter Charak of Charak Furniture Company, Kiesler is permitted to keep the laboratory open for an additional year.

In order to continue his *Vision Machine* project, begun in 1937, he forms an advisory committee to provide scientific advice as well as financial support. Advisers include Professor Rauten-

Stages four more Juilliard productions: C.W. Gluck's *Orpheus*, Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, Verdi's *Falstaff*, and Donizetti's *Dan Pasquale*.

Meets repeatedly in December with André Breton and Peggy Guggenheim. It is probably at these meetings that plans for Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery are first discussed.



Surrealist gallery, Art of This Century, 1942

1942

Does research on dream images for the *Vision Machine* and publishes "Some Testimonial Drawings of Dream Images" in the first issue of the Surrealist publication *VVV* (June 1942). Also checks out books on demonology from The New York Public Library.

February-September, Peggy Guggenheim invites Kiesler to devise "a new exhibition method for objects," for her new Art of This Century gallery at 30 West 50th Street. The first plans for this radical installation are completed in March; Kiesler meets frequently with Guggenheim as the design progresses over the next six months. Writes "Notes on Designing the Gallery" (unpublished).

Duchamp arrives in June and stays with the Kieselers until October.

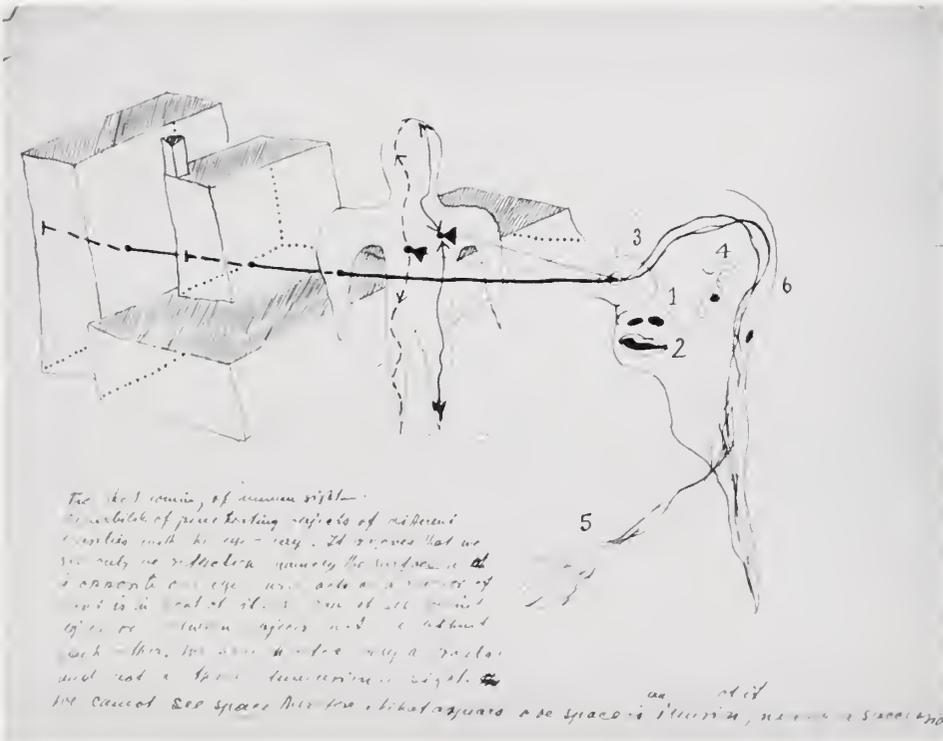
Art of This Century opens on October 20 with twentieth-century European and American works and creates a great stir. Thousands visit the gallery to view Kiesler's installation (which closes in 1947).

During this year, stages C.W. Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauris* and Hatfield's *The Mather* for Juilliard.

1943

In March, publishes another article in *VVV*, no. 2, "Design Correlation," in which he links the concept of the *Endless House* to the multifunctional stool he designed for Art of This Century. The *VVV* cover was designed by Kiesler and Duchamp as a "Twin-Touch-Test." Readers were to touch a piece of inset chicken wire and send an account of their reactions to the editors.

Attends experimental films by Maya Deren and Hans Richter.



Study for *Vision Machine*, 1938

1940

Presents a resolution, "Architecture as Bio-technique," at the Ann Arbor Design Conference in February; it is unanimously endorsed by the participants, including Walter Gropius, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Eero Saarinen.

Designs sets for Juilliard productions of Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari's *Le Donne Curiose* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.

Lectures at Yale University in November.

strauch, an industrial engineer, *New York Times* science editor Waldeman Kaempfert, neurologist Dr. Walter Klingman, and Nobel Prize chemist Dr. Harold Urey of Columbia University.

The New York Public Library exhibition "Ten Years of American Opera Design at The Juilliard School of Music" (November-December) includes many of Kiesler's Juilliard productions. Kiesler contributes an introductory text for the catalogue.

In October, prepares a layout with Surrealist typography for Leo Lerman's article "Before Bandwagons" in *Vogue* (October 1943).

1944

Attends Mondrian's funeral in February.

Publishes an article on the *Space House* in *VVV*, no. 4.

In June, helps Jacqueline Breton return to the States when immigration authorities try to prevent her reentry from Mexico. Visits Herbert Bayer and Dr. Parr at the American Museum of Natural History, possibly to discuss plans for an exhibition design. Very little information about this project exists, but some gouache studies for this project in the Kiesler Estate resemble those done for an exhibition of American architecture in Moscow, which Harvey Wiley Corbett asks him to design in September. The exhibition takes place under the auspices of the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, Inc. Kiesler receives little remuneration for his designs.

In October, designs and stages a fashion show for *The New York Times*, "Fashions of The Times."

Works on a book on biotechnique (unpublished).

Participates in "The Imagery of Chess" at the Julien Levy Gallery in December. The exhibition of painting, sculpture, and newly designed chessmen also includes works by John Cage, Calder, Ernst, Gorky, Hare, Hellon, Matta, and Man Ray.

Invited by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy to give lectures in Chicago on design correlation but does not have the time to do them.

Illustrates Andre Breton's *Ovid* (unpublished).

1945

In January, joins Alfred H. Barr, Jr., Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, and others in a simultaneous chess match at the Julien Levy Gallery against world master George Koltanowski who played blindfolded.



New York Times fashion show, 1944



Illustration for Breton's *Ovid*, 1944



Kiesler (center) at Julien Levy Gallery, 1945



(From left) Tanguy, Kay Sage, Maria Martins, Donati, Duchamp, and Kiesler at Duchamp's Connecticut home, 1940s.

Receives a letter dated April 12, 1945, from his nephew, Dr. Walter Kiesler, in Bucharest, asking if the uncle could help him immigrate to the U.S.—“The town of your father and brother is lost for us all and with it our home and any possibility to return there. From all our family, I alone remain. Father died in 1940, mother in 1945.”

Works on Moscow exhibition, which probably opens in September.

Meets with Max Ernst, Dorothea Tanning, Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Seligmann, and Matta in October to discuss possibilities for an exhibition, “The Magical!”

Prepares layout for Breton's *Ode à Charles Fourier*.

In December, the Planners Institute is closed down for nonpayment of taxes. Kiesler enters into an agreement with his former student, Armand Bartos, to produce and deliver certain designs for consideration and possible commercial production.

1946

In June, proposes an exhibition on De Stijl to the board of The Museum of Modern Art.

During the fall, prepares a stage design for John Huston's Broadway production of Sartre's *No Exit*. It opens on November 26, and Kiesler's austere stage setting receives much positive critical reaction.

Publishes an article in the winter issue of *Portion Review*, “Notes on the Spiral Theme in Recent Architecture,” to coincide with the announcement of Frank Lloyd Wright's plans for the new Guggenheim Museum.

Receives letter from Joseph Cornell: “Maybe we can get together with the films.”

1947

In January, meets with Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson.

Does further work on the layout for Breton's *Ode à Charles Fourier*.

Is profiled in the February issue of *Architectural Forum* as “Design's Bad Boy!”

March 3, designs the Surrealist “Blood Flames” exhibition at the Hugo Gallery, organized by Nicolas Calas; opens March 30.

Artists included are Gorky, Hare, Jerome Kamrowski, Matta, Noguchi, Helen Philips, and Jeanne Reynal. Kiesler also designs the catalogue and writes a short statement for it as well as a text (unpublished), entitled “Economy and Exuberance.”

Nelly van Doesburg visits the Kieslers on the occasion of the Theo van Doesburg exhibition at the Art of This Century gallery, which opens April 29.

Kiesler meets with José Luis Sert, Miró, and Hans Arp during the spring. Frequent the Cedar Tavern, a Greenwich Village bar that was a meeting place for artists through the 1950s.



“Blood Flames,” 1947



Kiesler at “Blood Flames,” 1947



Kiesler (with hat) with Surrealists in Paris, 1947

In May, becomes a member of the Children's Art Workshop Advisory Committee of the United Neighborhood Houses of New York, with Alice Hodges and Lillian Olinsey.

Departs May 27 for Paris, where he designs the installation for the “Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme” at the Galerie Maeght. Breton and Duchamp are the organizers.

In collaboration with some of the artists, Kiesler designs the *Salle de Superstition*, a fantastic, Surrealist environment. For this exhibition, he also creates his first two sculptures, the *Totem for All Religions* and the *Anti-Taboo Figure*.



Salle de Superstition, 1947

While in Paris, makes visionary drawings of the *Endless House*, which he called *Paris Endless*, and furniture sketches, as well as portraits of friends.

Writes “Manifeste du Corréalisme,” which is later published by *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* (June 1949).

Returns from Paris on September 21. That fall, Breton's *Ode à Charles Fourier* is published by Éditions de la Revue Fontaine, Collection l'Age d'Or, with a somewhat modified version of Kiesler's radical typographic designs.

Works on *Tooth House* sketches, visionary, organic schemes for buildings in the shape of teeth.

On November 8, Duchamp strips to the waist to pose for Kiesler's eight-part portrait, which Kiesler calls a *Golox*.

1948

Igor Stravinsky's oratorio *Oedipus Rex* opens at Juilliard on April 22 with Kiesler's stage design.

In June, Kiesler writes “Documentary Art-Films: A Proposal for Filming Paintings, Sculpture, and Architecture” (unpublished).



Study for *Paris Endless*, 1947



Study for *Paris Endless*, 1948

Completes a *Galaxial* portrait of Wilfredo Lam in August.

For the December premiere of Darius Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot* at Juilliard, Kiesler creates a large wooden construction, which he develops into his first sculptural, environmental *Galaxy*.

Does window display at Gotham Book Mart for NEON magazine.

1949

Arp stays with Kiesler in New York from January to mid-March during Arp's exhibition at the Buchholz Gallery.

Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, with Kiesler's stage design, opens at Juilliard on April 6. Later in the month, Kiesler lectures at The American Institute of Design.

Publishes "Pseudo-Functionalism in Modern Architecture" in the July issue of *Partisan Review*.



Set for *Le Pauvre Matelot*, 1948



Set for *The Magic Flute*, 1949



Tooth House, 1947-48

In November, delivers lectures and conducts seminar in Chicago for Serge Chermayeff's Institute of Design. The following month, the Rembrandt Lamp Company in Chicago asks him to submit six new rough sketches for light fixtures.

1950

In the first part of the year, has Merce Cunningham sit for a portrait.



Galaxy from Le Pauvre Matelot, 1948

In the fall, Kiesler begins to frequent the Eighth-Street Club, and over the next few years, lectures and participates on panels there.

"The Muralist and the Modern Architect" at the Kootz Gallery opens on October 3. The exhibition explores collaborative possibilities between painters, sculptors, and architects. Kiesler exhibits a small model of the egg-shaped *Endless House*. Other artists included are David Hare, Hans Hofmann, Robert Motherwell, Adolph Gottlieb, William Bazioties, Philip Johnson, Marcel Breuer, and George Howe.

Takes part in a symposium on October 11 at the Architectural League of New York with George Howe, Philip Johnson, and Henry Russell Hitchcock. A few days later, October 15, participates in a panel discussion broadcast on WNYC radio, about "The Muralist and Modern Architect."

In November, is included on a panel at the Sidney Janis Gallery, "Parallel Trends in Vanguard Art in the U.S. and France," with Leo Castelli, Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Nicolas Calas, Andrew Carnduff Ritchie, and others.

Publishes "The Endless House and Its Psychological Lighting" in the November issue of *Interiors*.

Writes introduction to the catalogue of the Arp exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery.

Begins to lecture regularly at Yale University (through 1952).



Model of the Endless House, 1950



Kiesler, 1940s

1951

On the board of Julian Beck's experimental Living Theater.

CBS elects Kiesler "Architect of the Year" in January.

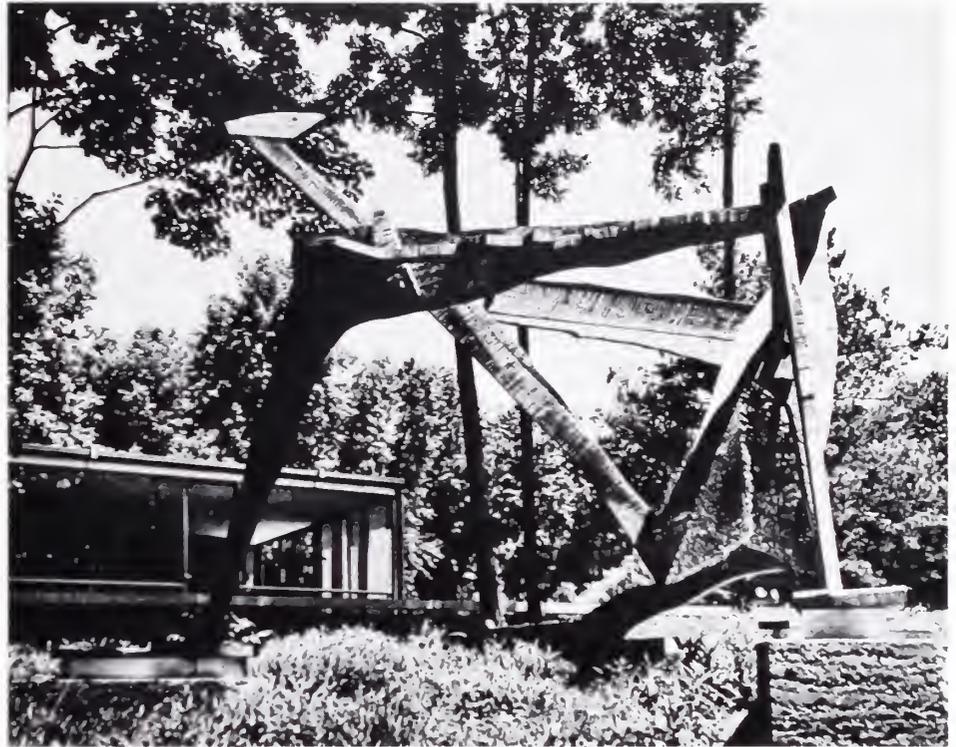
In March, participates in a symposium at The Museum of Modern Art, "The Relation of Painting and Sculpture to Architecture," moderated by Philip Johnson. Other panelists include James Johnson Sweeney, Jose Luis Sert, Ben Shahn, and Henry Russell Hitchcock.

Begins to work in May on an outdoor wooden *Galaxy* for the garden of Philip Johnson's glass house in New Canaan, Connecticut.

In June, The Museum of Modern Art acquires the small *Endless House* model and related drawings for \$250. Kiesler writes to his friend, architect and Yale University professor George Howe: "Thank heavens times have finally changed for me and after twenty years of crouching I can stand up now"; and to his friend Max Bill: "This summer strange things have happened. A veritable resurrection of the whole attitude towards my work has taken place in America."

In the fall, presents designs for a Juilliard School of Music annex (unbuilt).

Teaches design research seminar (Advanced Design III) at Yale.



Galaxy for Philip Johnson house, 1952

1952

Kiesler's *Galaxy* (designed in 1948 for *Le Pauvre Matelot* and subsequently bought by Nelson Rockefeller) is included in Dorothy Miller's "Fifteen Americans" exhibition, which opens April 3 at The Museum of Modern Art. He also exhibits a nineteen-piece *Galaxy* and contributes a "Note on Correalism" to the catalogue. Other artists in the exhibition include Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, and William Bazoties.

Also in April, as part of The Museum of Modern Art lecture series "Modern Artists on Artists of the Past," speaks about his experiences studying original Old Master drawings and engravings at the Albertina in Vienna.

In August, is included in the exhibition "Two Houses: New Ways to Build" at The Museum of Modern Art, organized by Arthur Drexler. Exhibits an *Endless House* model along with Buckminster Fuller's model of a *Geodesic Dome*.

Creates stage sets for Martha Graham's *Canticle for Innocent Comedians* and *The Triumph of St. Joan* as well as for two Juilliard opera productions.

Takes a studio on 59 East 9th Street (in the same building as de Kooning) to have more space for his painting and sculpture activities.

1953

Completes the outdoor *Galaxy* for Philip Johnson's home in New Canaan, Connecticut. Johnson telegrams him "Galaxy is a great success." (The piece was destroyed by lightning in 1956.)



(From left) Lillian Olinsey, Stefi Kiesler, and Kiesler at Empire State Music Festival, 1955

1954

First one-artist exhibition opens at the Signy Jaffe Gallery in September.

Exhibits painted *Galaxies* and environments. Writes a short text for the announcement card.

1955

In January, exhibition of *Galaxies* by Kiesler opens at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Included are the *Large House Galaxy*, *Small House Galaxy*, *White Hand Galaxy*, *Blackwood*, *White Fringed*, and *Green Correalism*.

Exhibits *Texts for All Religions* in the Skulptur-Galerie "Annual" in April.

Attempts to arrange exhibitions in Europe with little success.

In July, completes a temporary theater for the Empire State Music Festival in Ellenville, New York—an enormous tent accommodating two thousand people. The tent is a flexible structure that can serve various functions, yet is strong and durable (it withstands a severe storm). Designs stage set for a production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* there.

Spends most of August in Vallauris, France, working on a clay sculpture (subsequently lost). Has close contact with Picasso.

1956

Publishes "Mozart 1756-1956" in the January issue of *Art News*.

Performs in Hans Richter's film *8 x 8*, dressed as a minotaur.

In June, Kiesler and Armand Bartos receive a commission from the art collector and dealer Herbert Mayer to design the World House Gallery in two stories of the Carlyle Hotel (Madison Avenue and 77th Street).

Plans an extension for the John Jacob Astor house, West Palm Beach, Florida; Washington Square Village high-rise apartments, and the Steibel Building for Paul Triebman (all unbuilt).

Participates in "An Evening for Jackson Pollock" at the Eighth Street Club in November.

In December, enters into a legal agreement with Armand Bartos to establish the firm of Kiesler & Bartos.



Kiesler as minotaur in *8 x 8*, 1956



Kiesler in Central Park Zoo, New York, 1956

1957

World House Gallery opens in January with an exhibition of modern masters, "The Struggle for New Form."

In April, reconstructs a theater of Venetian Moorish design at "Caramoor," an estate in Katonah, New York.

On April 27, participates in discussion on museum architecture at the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, with Philip Johnson, José Luis Sert, Louis Kahn, and Walter Gropius.

Retires from The Juilliard School of Music in July at age sixty-five.

Publishes "The Art of Architecture for Art" in the October issue of *Art News* and "Design in Continuity" in *Architectural Forum*.

Plans a house for Karl Robbins, West Palm Beach, Florida, and another for Benjamin Javitt in Greenwich, Connecticut (both unbuilt).

On October 25, flies to Jerusalem to meet with Jerusalem University president Mazar Ben Zvi. Begins conceptual work on *The Shrine of the Book* to house the recently discovered Dead Sea Scrolls, bought by D.S. Gottesman (Celeste Bartos' father) and presented to Israel. First drawings are dated December 26 and 27, 1957. *The Shrine* was to be built on the campus of the new university then under construction—originally as part of the library, then as a separate structure.

1958

Planning of *The Shrine* continues; Barnett Newman asks to see the drawings in June.

In February, through Arthur Drexler, Kiesler receives a \$12,000 grant from the D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation to do preliminary plans for erecting the *Endless House* in the garden of The Museum of Modern Art. Begins to work on plans.

Moderates a panel discussion in March, "Patriotism and the American Home," at the Eighth-Street Club with Alan Kaprow, George Ortman, Robert Rauschenberg, and Richard Stankiewicz.

Spends August with Leo Castelli and Ileana Sonnabend in Milan on vacation.

Receives a Graham Foundation Fellowship for the *Endless House* in the fall. Is in Chicago with Mies van der Rohe and Eduardo Chillida.

Works on stage design for Pirandello's *Henry IV* (November) and on a series called *Shell Sculptures*.

1959

Works throughout the year on *Shell Sculptures*, which increase in monumental scale and complexity.

Works on drawings and wire-mesh studies for a large *Endless House* model (photo in *Time*, May 25, 1959).

In April, after Frank Lloyd Wright's death, writes a memorial poem, which is published in the winter/spring issue of *It Is*.

Flies to Montreal in July to discuss possible apartment building commission for Douglas Owen, a young entrepreneur. This project falls through, and Kiesler becomes increasingly frustrated with architecture, devoting more time to painting and sculpture.

During the summer, completes plans for *The Shrine of the Book*, though extensive revisions must be made when the site is changed in the fall. Has discussions with a Mrs. Leyden about designing a *Peace Pavilion* in Jerusalem, an international center for scientists, philosophers, and social planners; project never gets beyond discussion stage.

Goes to Brazil in September to take part in the "Congress of Art and Architecture"; visits Brasilia and São Paulo "Biennale." The following month travels to Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rome, Vaduz, and Zurich.

Stefi Kiesler retires from The New York Public Library and writes film, theater, and literary reviews for the newspaper *Aufbau*.

With Bartos, works on design for the Ullman Research Center for Health Science at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Yeshiva University, New York (unbuilt).

1960

Continues to work on the *Shell Sculptures* and large painted *Goloxies* in February.

In March, The Ford Foundation awards him \$15,000 for studies and a model of *The Universal Theater* for its competition "The Ideal Theater." CBS "Camera Three" broadcasts a half hour interview with Kiesler about the *Endless House*.

Exhibits drawings for the *Endless House* at the Great Jones Gallery in April, along with works by John Cage, Julian Beck, and Kenneth Rexroth.

June–July, travels to Assisi, Vicenza, Spoleto, Venice, Rome, Naples, Florence, Perugia, and Ravenna.

Rents a cottage in August in Amagansett, near The Springs, Long Island. Associates with artists in the area as well as with Leo Castell and



Kiesler with Piero Dorazio, Rome, 1958



World House Gallery, 1957



Model of the *Endless House*, 1959



Galaxy H, 1960



Kiesler and Willem de Kooning, 1960s



(From left) Kiesler, Castelli, and Scarpitta, East Hampton, 1960s

his artists: Sal Scarpitta, Andy Warhol, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and James Rosenquist.

“Visionary Architecture” exhibition opens in September at The Museum of Modern Art. Includes a large model of the *Endless House*, which was planned for the Museum Garden (and never built). Other architects in the exhibition include Bruno Taut, Frank Lloyd Wright, Buckminster Fuller, and Le Corbusier. Lectures in November at Bennington College in Vermont, where he also sees Tony Smith, who is teaching there.

Over the next five years, receives many letters from architecture students praising his work and offering to apprentice with him.

1961

One-artist exhibition “*Shell Sculptures and Galaxies*” opens in January at the Leo Castelli Gallery.

Moderates a panel discussion, “Environmental Sculpture,” at the Eighth-Street Club in February. Panelists include George Brecht, Herbert Ferber, and Claes Oldenburg.

March 30, negotiates with Mary Sisler for construction of an *Endless House* in West Palm Beach, Florida. He estimates it will cost around \$200,000, plus his 10 percent commission. Travels to Florida in early May with Leo Castelli and decides that too much compromise would be required on his part.

Leaves for trip in late May to Paris, Fiesole, Rome, and Liechtenstein.

Rents same cottage in Amagansett for the summer.

Delivers the plans and a model for *The Universal Theater* to the Ford Foundation. At his own expense, he has the model cast in aluminum.

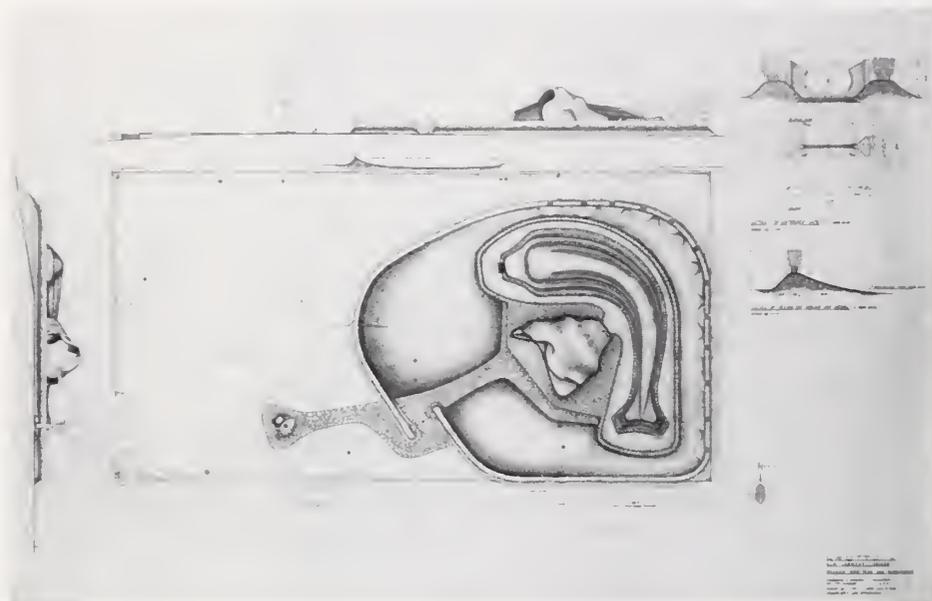
In the fall, moves to a larger studio (sublet from the artist Conrad Marca-Relli) on Broadway, at 12th Street.



Model for *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61



Model for *The Universal Theater*, 1960–61



Plan for *Grotto for Meditation*, 1963



Model for *Grotto for Meditation*, 1963

1962

Traveling Ford Foundation exhibition "The Ideal Theater: Eight Concepts" opens in January at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, New York.

Lectures in April at the University of Houston and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, on "Art and Architecture."

In Tel Aviv in May to inspect the construction site for *The Shrine*; also travels to Paris and Amsterdam.

Begins *Landscape Sculpture* series.

December 31, partnership with Armand Bartos is legally dissolved. Bartos continues construction work alone in Jerusalem.

Invited to design a *Grotto for Meditation* for Jane Owen in New Harmony, Indiana, in memory of the late theologian Paul Tillich.

1963

Begins working on the large, thirty-seven-piece environmental sculpture *Us, You, Me*. Completes *The Last Judgment* (begun 1955).

In April, exhibits in a group show at the Leo Castelli Gallery. Later this year he states, "It is my principle not to participate in group exhibitions."

Works on assembling journal notes and other writings for publication (published posthumously by Simon & Schuster in 1966 as *Inside the Endless House*).

In August, receives a letter from Clemens Holzmeister of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Vienna, asking him to participate in an exhibition, the first letter he has received from Vienna in thirty years.

The architectural historian Martin Bush asks Kiesler to donate his papers to Syracuse University.

Stefi Kiesler dies September 3 of lung disease.

1964

Suffers heart attack March 9. March 26, while still in the hospital, marries Lillian Olinsey.

"Frederick Kiesler: Environmental Sculpture," organized by Thomas Messer, opens on May 5 at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Kiesler at *The Shrine of the Book*, 1965



Kiesler and Lillian Kiesler, Jerusalem, 1965

Works on his 50-foot *Bucephalus* sculpture in Amagansett.

Actively tries to arrange exhibitions in Europe—and seeks inclusion in upcoming Venice “Biennale” and Documenta 3, Kassel.

In October, writes “A Reminder to Myself: A New Era of the Plastic Arts Has Begun” and sends it to Thomas Messer.

1965

The Shrine of the Book opens in April. Kiesler and Lillian fly to Jerusalem for the opening ceremonies. Awarded a gold medal from the Architectural League of New York for *The Shrine*.

In August, writes to authorities in Jerusalem, asking that some small details of *The Shrine* be corrected.

Dies December 27. The funeral has the spirit of a theatrical event. Eulogies are delivered by René d’Harnoncourt, Jack Lenore Larson, Sidney Kingsley, Virgil Thomson, and E. E. Cummings. Robert Rauschenberg rolls a tire down the aisle, props it near the coffin, and paints it blue, yellow, green, white, and red. The Juilliard String Quartet plays compositions by Mozart and Schonberg.

This chronology is the result of collaboration between the Whitney Museum and the Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna.



Kiesler inside *Bucephalus*, Amagansett, 1964

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Selected Bibliography

For an extensive, nearly comprehensive bibliography, including Kiesler's own published writings, see "Frederick Kiesler: Bibliography," compiled by Lillian Kiesler, copies on deposit at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. In addition, original documents and works can be found in the Archives of American Art, the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the Kiesler Estate Archives.

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Vienna, Galerie nächst St. Stephan et al. *Frederick Kiesler Architekt 1890–1965* (exhibition catalogue), 1975.

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Kiesler with Film Guild Cinema poster, New York, 1928

Works in the Exhibition

Dimensions are in inches, followed by centimeters; height precedes width precedes depth. Dimensions are of the image unless otherwise indicated. Entries marked KE belong to the Kiesler Estate and bear an estate number.

Architecture

Miscellaneous Early Projects, 1923–36

Model of the 1924 *Space Stage*, reconstruction, 1986

Balsa wood, 60 x 60 (152.4 x 152.4)
Collection of Dieter Bogner

Plan for the *Endless Theater*, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 83 x 84 (210.8 x 213.4)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the architect

Plan for the *Endless Theater*, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 77½ x 84 (196.8 x 213.4)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the architect

Plan for the *Endless Theater*, 1923–25
Architectural print mounted on board, 46¾ x 101 (118.7 x 256.5), sheet
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the architect

Plan for the Place de la Concorde, 1925
Architectural print mounted on board, 36¼ x 76½ (92.1 x 194.3)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Plan, c. 1926–30
Blueprint, 35 x 14 (88.9 x 35.6)
KE 2039

Plan, c. 1926–30
Blueprint, 36¼ x 23¾ (92.1 x 60.3)
KE 2041

Plan for department store with film projection as billboard, 1928
Ink and collage on board, 20 x 18½ (50.8 x 47)
KE 651

Plan for department store, 1928
Ink on board, 20 x 17 (50.8 x 43.2)
KE 652

Light and image presentation for Film Guild Cinema, 1929
Tempera and pastel on cardboard, 22 x 28 (55.9 x 71.1)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 839)

Light and image presentation for Film Guild Cinema, 1929
Tempera on cardboard, 22 x 28 (55.9 x 71.1)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 840)

Light and image presentation for Film Guild Cinema, 1929
Tempera on cardboard, 26 x 22 (66 x 55.9)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 1005)

Light and image presentation for Film Guild Cinema, 1929
Tempera on cardboard, 22 x 30 (55.9 x 76.2)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 1006)

Presentation drawing for WGN Broadcasting Auditorium, elevation, 1934
Ink, crayon, photographs, and collage on cardboard, 41 x 33 (104.1 x 83.8)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 899)

Presentation drawing for WGN Broadcasting Auditorium, 1934
Ink, tempera, and collage on cardboard, 41 x 33 (104.1 x 83.8)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 900)

Nucleus House, 1926–28

Study
Pencil on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 472

Study
Pencil on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 473

Study
Pencil, ink, and watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 476

Interior
Watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 477

Elevation
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 479

Study
Pencil and watercolor on paper, 15 x 22 (38.1 x 55.9)
KE 480

Utility Towers, c. 1930

Television tower
Ink on paper, 22½ x 29¾ (57.2 x 75.6)
KE 2035

Television tower
Pencil on paper, 8½ x 5½ (21.6 x 14)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 2253)

Television towers
Pencil on paper, 8½ x 5½ (21.6 x 14)
On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 2247)

Conceptual drawing for water towers
Ink on paper, 19 x 24¾ (48.3 x 62.9)
KE 623

Conceptual drawing for water towers
Ink and tempera on paper, 22 x 27½ (55.9 x 69.9)
KE 624

Conceptual drawing for water towers
Ink and tempera on paper, 22 x 27½ (55.9 x 69.9)
KE 625

The Universal, a theater for Woodstock, New York, 1931

Plan
Sepia print on board, 24 x 40¼ (61 x 102.2)
KE 2045

Plan
Sepia print on board, 24 x 40¼ (61 x 102.2)
KE 2047

Plan
Sepia print on board, 24 x 40¼ (61 x 102.2)
KE 2048

Plan
Sepia print on board, 24 x 40¼ (61 x 102.2)
KE 2049

Paris Endless, 1947

Conceptual drawing
Ink and tempera on paper, 19 x 25 (48.3 x 63.5)
KE 568

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper, 19 x 25 (48.3 x 63.5)
KE 570

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper, 19 x 25 (48.3 x 63.5)
KE 571

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper, 19 x 25 (48.3 x 63.5)
KE 573

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper, 19 x 25 (48.3 x 63.5)
KE 575

Conceptual drawing
Ink and tempera on paper, 22 x 29½
(55.9 x 74.9)
KE 576

Conceptual drawing
Ink and tempera on paper, 22 x 29½
(55.9 x 74.9)
KE 577

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 891

Conceptual drawing
Ink and watercolor on paper, 12 x 18
(30.5 x 45.7)
KE 892

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 893

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 894

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper mounted on board
14 x 19¼ (35.6 x 48.9)
KE 895

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper mounted on board
14 x 19¼ (35.6 x 48.9)
KE 896

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper, 14 x 19¼ (35.6 x 48.9)
KE 898

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 2005

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 2006

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 2307

Conceptual drawing ("For Stafi, Paris,
Kiesler")
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 2308

Conceptual drawing
Ink and collage on paper mounted on board
14 x 19¼ (35.6 x 48.9)
KE 3006

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 12 x 18 (30.5 x 45.7)
KE 3009

Tooth House, 1948

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 204

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 206

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 207

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 210

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 211B

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 216

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 217

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 218

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 219

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 220

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 230B

Conceptual drawing
Ink on paper, 8¾ x 11 (21.3 x 27.9)
KE 233

Endless House, 1950–60

Model 1950
Clay, 6 x 10 x 21 (15.2 x 25.4 x 53.3)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Purchase

Study for color clock, 1950
Gouache, watercolor, and ink on paper,
14¼ x 18¼ (37.5 x 47.6)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Purchase

Study for elevation, 1958
Pencil on paper, 8 x 11½ (21 x 29.5)
KE 176

Study for wire-mesh construction, 1959
Pencil on paper, 8 x 11½ (21.6 x 29.5)
KE 209

Study for two large light openings, 1959
Pencil on paper, 8 x 11½ (21 x 29.5)
KE 2249

Model, 1959
Cement and wire mesh, 38 x 96 x 42 (96.5 x
243.8 x 106.7)
KE 2444

Seashell textures of an *Endless* structure, 1959
Pencil on paper, 8¾ x 11½ (21 x 29.5)
KE 2446

Telescoped layers of time, 1959
Ink on paper, 8¼ x 11½ (21 x 29.5)
KE 2447

Study for stairs to mezzanine, 1959
Pencil on paper, 8¼ x 11½ (21 x 29.5)
KE 2448

The Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem, 1959–65

Conceptual drawing of basalt wall entrance
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 38 (45.7 x 96.5)
KE 2433

Conceptual drawing of basalt wall entrance
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 38 (45.7 x 96.5)
KE 2434

Conceptual drawing of interior and exterior of
dome
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 40 (45.7 x 101.6)
KE 2435

Conceptual drawing of interior and exterior of
dome
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 27 (45.7 x 68.6)
KE 2436

Conceptual drawing of foyer
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 40 (45.7 x 101.6)
KE 2438

Conceptual drawing of wall
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 40 (45.7 x 101.6)
KE 2439

Conceptual drawing of corridor
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 24 (45.7 x 61)
KE 2440

Conceptual drawing of corridor
Pencil on tracing paper, 18 x 24 (45.7 x 61)
KE 2441

Axonometric drawing
Pencil on paper, four parts, 71 x 36 (180.3 x 91.4)
each, drawn by Len Pitkowsky
KE 2442A–D

Conceptual drawing of detail for hallways
Charcoal on paper, three parts, 36 x 191 (91.4 x
485.1) each
KE 3010

The Universal Theater, 1960–61

Model
Aluminum, 25 x 50 x 49 (63.5 x 127 x 124.5)
Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College
Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Front elevation
Pencil on tracing paper, 36 x 72 (91.4 x 182.9)
KE 2417

Elevation of main auditorium
Pencil on tracing paper, 42 x 72 (106.7 x 182.9)
KE 2418A

Longitudinal section and elevation of tower
Pencil on tracing paper, two parts, 42 x 72
(106.7 x 182.9) each
KE 2418B–C

Endless House for Mary Sisler, West Palm Beach, Florida, 1961

Three sections and four elevations, floor plans of two first versions, one plot plan, and two floor plans
Pencil and collage on tracing paper, 36 x 91 (91.4 x 231.1)
KE 2419

Floor plans
Pencil on tracing paper, 36 x 81 (91.4 x 205.7)
KE 2420

Floor plans
Pencil on tracing paper, 36 x 91 (91.4 x 231.1)
KE 2421

Elevation (for Sisler *Endless House*, East-hampton, New York)
Pencil on tracing paper, 36 x 91 (91.4 x 231.1)
KE 2422

Grotto for Meditation, New Harmony, Indiana, 1963

Drawing of dolphin
Pencil on tracing paper, 24 x 42 (61 x 106.7)
KE 2427

Drawing of grotto
Pencil on paper, 32 x 44 (81.3 x 111.8)
KE 2428

Conceptual drawing of dolphin
Pencil on paper, 32 x 42 (81.3 x 106.7)
KE 2429

Drawing of dolphin
Pencil on tracing paper, 24 x 38 (61 x 96.5)
KE 2430

Section of grotto
Pencil on tracing paper, 21 x 19 (53.3 x 48.3)
KE 2431

Floor plan
Pencil on tracing paper, two parts, 71 x 152½ (180.3 x 387.3) each
KE 2432A–B

Model of grotto
Clay, 7 x 23 x 32 (17.8 x 58.4 x 81.3)
KE 2450

Model of shell structure
Clay, 12 x 24 x 36 (30.5 x 61 x 91.4)
KE 2451

Miscellaneous Architectural Projects

Correlation chart, c. 1930–39
Sepia print on paper, 31¼ x 312 (79.4 x 792.5)
KE 2094

Flying Weekend House, c. 1930–39
Ink on paper, 5½ x 8½ (14 x 21.6)
KE 2360

Flying Weekend House, c. 1930–39
Ink on paper, 5½ x 8½ (14 x 21.6)
KE 2361

Flying Weekend House, c. 1930–39
Ink on paper, 5½ x 8½ (14 x 21.6)
KE 2362

Flying Weekend House, with beds in the open, c. 1930–39
Ink on paper, 5½ x 8½ (14 x 21.6)
KE 2636

Study for The Juilliard School, New York, c. 1945–49
Ink on paper, 18 x 22 (45.7 x 55.9)
KE 465

Study for The Juilliard School, New York, c. 1945–49
Ink on paper, 18 x 22 (45.7 x 55.9)
KE 470

Steifel Building, 1956
Watercolor on paper, 19¾ x 25 (50.2 x 63.5)
KE 603

Book and Poster Design

Catalogue cover for “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques,” Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924
Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna

Poster for “International Exhibition of New Theater Techniques,” Konzerthaus, Vienna, 1924
Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna

Poster for Film Guild Cinema, 1929
86 x 41 (218.4 x 104.1)
KE 2416

Illustrations for André Breton’s *Ovid*, 1944
Ink and collage on paper, seven parts, 15 x 11 (38.1 x 27.9) each
KE 2158, 2158A–C, 2159, 2161, 2162

Layout and illustrations for André Breton’s *Ode à Charles Fourier*, 1945–46
Isidore Ducasse Fine Arts Incorporated, New York

Page for André Breton’s *Ode à Charles Fourier*, 1945–46
Tempera on monoprint, 18¾ x 12½ (47.6 x 31.8)
KE 2087

Exhibition Design

Art of This Century, New York, 1942

Free-form rocker
Wood with red leatherette lining, 33¾ x 15½ x 35 (84.8 x 39.7 x 88.9)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Free-form two-seat settee
Wood with white leatherette lining, 33¾ x 15½ x 35 (84.8 x 39.7 x 88.9)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Tabletop for use with two-seat settee
Wood, 42 x 28 (106.7 x 71.1)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Three-piece picture stand
Wood and two black cones, 4½ x 15 x 3 (11.4 x 38.1 x 7.6)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Two-seat settee
Wood with white leatherette lining, 33¾ x 15½ x 35 (84.8 x 39.7 x 88.9)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York;
Purchase

Study for seating unit
Pencil on paper, 8½ x 5½ (21.6 x 14)
KE 763

Study
Ink and tempera on paper, 10¾ x 14¾ (27.3 x 37.5)
KE 2157

Conceptual drawing for lighting systems
Ink on paper, 8 x 11 (20.3 x 27.9)
KE 2311

Study for support for paintings
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2312

Study for wall panel
Ink and tempera on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)
KE 2313

Study for suspended ceiling
Ink on paper, 11 x 15 (27.9 x 38.1)
KE 2314

Study for lighting
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2315

Study for installation
Ink on paper, 15 x 11 (38.1 x 27.9)
KE 2316

Study for installation
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14¾ (27.9 x 37.5)
KE 2317

Multiple uses of stand
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2319

Multiple uses of stand
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2320

Study for installation
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2322

Conceptual drawing
Ink and tempera on paper, 10½ x 14 (26.7 x 35.6)
KE 2323

Study for installation
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)
KE 2324

Conceptual drawing
Ink and tempera on paper, 11 x 14¾ (27.9 x 37.5)
KE 2327

Telescope view of street from gallery
Ink and gouache on paper, 14¾ x 11 (37.5 x 27.9)
KE 2366

Salle de Superstition, for the "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme," Galerie Maeght, Paris, 1947

Study
Tempera on paper, 14³/₄ x 20 (37.5 x 50.8)
KE 2003

Study
Ink on paper, 19³/₄ x 25¹/₂ (50.2 x 64.8)
KE 2084

Study
Ink on paper, 19³/₄ x 25³/₄ (50.2 x 65.4)
KE 2085

Study
Ink and tempera on paper, 14³/₄ x 20 (37.5 x 50.8)
KE 2155

Study for *The Block Lake*
Ink on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 33.7)
KE 2156

Chart
Ink on blueprint, 25¹/₂ x 17 (64.8 x 43.2)
KE 2328

Study
Ink on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)
KE 2330

Study
Ink on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)
KE 2331

Conceptual plan
Ink on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)
KE 2332

Study
Ink on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 33.7)
KE 2333

Study
Ink on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 33.7)
KE 2334

Moon-Eye
Ink and tempera on paper, 13¹/₄ x 10 (33.7 x 25.4)
KE 2336

Conceptual plan for *Totem for All Religions*
Ink and tempera on paper, 13¹/₄ x 10 (34.3 x 25.4)
KE 2337

Totem for All Religions
Wood and rope, 112¹/₄ x 34¹/₄ x 30¹/₄ (285.1 x 86.7 x 78.4)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Armand P. Bartos, 1971

Study
Ink and tempera on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 33.7)
KE 2338

Hommage to Miro
Ink on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 33.7)
KE 2339

Study
Ink on paper, 10 x 13³/₄ (25.4 x 34.3)
KE 2341

Miscellaneous Exhibition Design

Conceptual design for museum gallery, c. 1930–39
Ink and tempera on paper, 10³/₄ x 14³/₄ (27.3 x 37.5)
KE 820

Installation for an unidentified exhibition, c. 1930–39
Ink and tempera on paper, 22¹/₂ x 28¹/₂ (55.9 x 72.4)
KE 648

Study for American architecture exhibition in Moscow, 1944–45
Tempera on board, 11 x 15 (27.9 x 38.1)
KE 626

Installation plan for ecology exhibition for the American Museum of Natural History, n.d.
Ink and tempera on board, 11 x 29¹/₂ (27.9 x 74.9)
KE 645

Installation plan for ecology exhibition for the American Museum of Natural History, n.d.
Ink on paper, 22 x 30 (55.9 x 76.2)
KE 653

Furniture and Objects

For furniture designed for Art of This Century, see the section *Exhibition Design*

Desk from AUDAC exhibition, c. 1929
Macassar ebony veneer, formica on laminated wood, bakelite, chromium-plated brass and iron tubulars, 44 x 60 x 30 (111.8 x 152.4 x 76.2)
Collection of Nicholas Brown

Table Lamp, c. 1930
Chrome, bakelite, and silk, height 15 (38.1), shade 6 x 10 (15.2 x 25.4)
KE 4001

Standing Lamp, c. 1930
Chrome, 56 (142.2)
KE 4002

Standing Lamp, c. 1930
Chrome, bakelite, and silk, height 44 (111.8), shade 4¹/₂ x 9 (11.4 x 22.9)
KE 4003

Design for *Lipstick*, 1930–39
Tempera on board, 10 x 15 (25.4 x 38.1)
KE 3002

Furniture design, 1930–39
Pencil on paper, 10³/₄ x 13³/₄ (27.3 x 34.9)
KE 3006

Study for a floor lamp, 1933
Ink on paper, 9 x 6 (22.9 x 15.2)
KE 694

Study for a lamp, 1934
Ink and pencil on paper, 14 x 17 (35.6 x 43.2)
KE 741

Conceptual design for a table, 1934
Ink on paper, 8¹/₂ x 11 (21.6 x 27.9)
KE 2092

Lamp and table, 1935
Chrome and glass, 18 x 45 (45.7 x 114.3)
Collection of Martha Bartos

Armchair, 1935
Chrome and Naugahyde, 27¹/₂ x 19¹/₄ x 17¹/₂ (69.9 x 48.9 x 44.5)
Collection of Martha Bartos

Study for a floor lamp, 1935
Pencil on paper, 9 x 6 (22.9 x 15.2)
KE 696

Design for two-part cast aluminum table, 1935
Pencil on paper, 8¹/₂ x 11 (21.6 x 27.9)
KE 2091

Design for three-part cast aluminum table, 1935
Ink on paper, 5¹/₂ x 8¹/₂ (14 x 21.6)
KE 3008

Two-part nesting table, 1935–38
Cast aluminum, 9³/₄ x 34¹/₂ x 22¹/₄ (24.8 x 87.6 x 56.5)
Collection of Mrs. Isobel Grossman

Toys, 1937
Ink on paper, 8¹/₂ x 11 (21.6 x 27.9)
KE 2079

Study for a seat, 1942
Pencil on paper, 5³/₈ x 8³/₈ (13.7 x 21.3)
KE 788

Furniture design, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2094

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2095

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2096A

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2096B

Chair designs, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2097

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 10¹/₄ x 14 (26 x 35.6)
KE 2098

Chair designs, 1947
Ink on paper, 19¹/₄ x 14¹/₄ (50.2 x 36.2)
KE 2099

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 19¹/₄ x 14¹/₄ (50.2 x 36.2)
KE 2115

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 19¹/₄ x 14¹/₄ (50.2 x 36.2)
KE 3000

Chair design, 1947
Ink on paper, 14¹/₄ x 19¹/₄ (50.2 x 36.2)
KE 3001

Set and Costume Design

Costume studies for Richard Strauss' *Ariadne in Naxos*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1934

Tempera and fabric on paper, 14 x 11 (35.6 x 27.9)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 1018)

Costume studies for Richard Strauss' *Ariadne in Naxos*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1934

Tempera and ink on cardboard, 17 x 21 (43.2 x 53.3)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 1071)

Set design for "Fashions of the Times," New York Times fashion show, 1944

Tempera and ink on paper, 11 x 15 (27.9 x 38.1)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 909)

Conceptual drawing for Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Biltmore Theatre, New York, 1946

Tempera on board, 15 x 17¼ (38.1 x 45.1)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 923)

Conceptual drawing for Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Biltmore Theatre, New York, 1946

Ink on paper, 15 x 17¼ (38.1 x 45.1)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 925)

Conceptual drawing for Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*, Biltmore Theatre, New York, 1946

Tempera, ink, and watercolor on paper, 8 x 11 (20.3 x 27.9)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 2113)

Set design for C.M. von Weber's *Der Freischütz*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1946

Tempera on board, 11 x 14 (27.9 x 35.6)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 1086)

Set design for Darius Milhaud's *Le Pauvre Matelot*, The Juilliard School of Music, New York, 1948

Tempera and gouache on cardboard, 28 x 32 (71.1 x 81.3)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 843)

Set design for E.E. Cummings' *Santa Claus*, 1950s

Ink on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 962)

Set design for E.E. Cummings' *Santa Claus*, 1950s

Ink on paper, 10 x 14 (25.4 x 35.6)

On deposit at the Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard College Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts (KE 963)

Works on Paper, Paintings, and Sculpture

Early Galaxies

Study for a *Galaxy*, 1929

Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 29⅞ x 22⅞ (75.1 x 56.7) sheet

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from the Wilfred P. and Rose J. Cohen Purchase Fund 88.4

Study, 1929

Gouache and pencil on paper, 30½ x 21½ (77.5 x 54.6)

Jason McCoy Gallery, New York

Study, 1929

Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 29⅞ x 22⅞ (75.1 x 56.7)

Jason McCoy Gallery, New York

Study, 1929

Gouache, watercolor, and pencil on paper, 29⅞ x 22⅞ (75.1 x 56.7)

Jason McCoy Gallery, New York

Galaxial Portraits, 1947–49

Jean Arp, 1947

Pencil on paper, 25⅞ x 19¼ (65.1 x 127.4)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation

Morcel Duchamp, 1947

Pencil on paper, eight parts: seven parts, 14⅜ x 10⅞ (36.5 x 27.6), one part, 10⅞ x 14⅜ (27.7 x 36.5)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation

Merce Cunningham, 1947

Pencil on paper, 22 x 17 (55.9 x 43.2)

KE 2102

E. E. Cummings, 1948

Metallic paint, crayon, and pencil on paper, eight parts, approximately 20¼ x 17 (52.6 x 42.9) each

The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Gift of the D.S. and R.H. Gottesman Foundation

André Bretan, c. 1949

Pencil on paper, 15⅜ x 21¼ (39.1 x 54)

KE 2001

André Bretan, 1949

Pencil on paper, 13½ x 10 (34.3 x 25.4) framed

KE 1095

Henri Laugier, 1949

Pencil on paper, 21 x 17 (53.3 x 43.2)

KE 93

Sculpture

Galaxy, 1948–51

Wood and rope, 144 x 168 x 168 (365.8 x 426.7 x 426.7)

Collection of Mrs. Nelson A. Rockefeller

The Last Judgment, 1955–63

Bronze and aluminum, 164 x 204 x 207 (416.6 x 518.2 x 525.8)

The Lannan Foundation, Los Angeles

Cup of Prometheus, 1956–59

Wood and bronze, 120½ x 48 x 43½ (306.1 x 121.9 x 110.5)

KE 2442

Birth of a Lake, 1960

Bronze, pewter, aluminum, wood, and formica, 144 x 57 x 132 (365.8 x 144.8 x 335.3)

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

The Arch as a Rainbow of Shells, 1960–66

Bronze, 118 x 134 x 36 (299.7 x 340.4 x 91.4)

KE 2443

Galaxy H, 1961

Pastel and pencil on paper, and wood, 94 x 85⅞ x 2¼ (238.8 x 218.1 x 7)

Collection of John Shore

Landscape: The Saviar Has Risen, 1964

Bronze, glass, granite, and plastic, 57½ x 49 x 35½ (144.8 x 124.5 x 90.2)

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase, with funds from the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation 66.50

Kiesler at his summer home, in Amagansett, 1960s



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Berenice Abbott 61, 97
Barrows 124, 133
Ruth M. Bernhard 89
© 1986, Joerg T. Burger, Vienna, 35
P. Cox 107
Virginia Dortch Dorazio: p. 157 top
Carlo Edwards 101
Sam Falk 83
Gianfranco Gorgoni 154
Gottscho-Scheisner 99, 102
Berni Kaufmann 73
Alex Langley 93, 94
Lorrell 57, 58, p. 143 right
Mac-Mee Photos: p. 147 col. 2 top
Robert E. Mates 135
Herbert Mattem: p. 160 bottom left
Diana Michals 26
Gion Mili: p. 154 bottom
Ritch Moore 119
Hans Namuth 114, 146
Nesidal 32
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Matti Rolfko: p. 156 top left
Kevin Ryan 60, 69, 76, 128, 129, 130, 141, 148, p. 150
bottom, p. 151 bottom right, p. 153 col. 1 top middle
Sankar 108
John D. Schell Collection: Fairleigh Dickinson
University Library, Rutherford, N.J., 82
Robert Szeleski 152
Liza Steiner: Est. 84
Michael Tolson: p. 153 col. 1 bottom
Alvin Tolan: p. 150 col. 1 top
Sussex 30, 121
N. W. Waring: bottom 123
Vitalis Photos/Agency 114, 116



Newman (detail)