Eric Gill Artwork Collection

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2018
Descriptive Summary
Title: Eric Gill Artwork Collection
Dates: 1887-2003
Collection Number: MS Gill
Creator/Collector: Gill, Eric, 1882-1940
Extent: 2000 items
Repository: UCLA. Clark (William Andrews) Memorial Library
Los Angeles, California 90018
Abstract: Artwork and other visual material produced by or related to British artist, designer and sculptor Eric Gill. This collection contains a large amount of original art as well as reproductions, photographs and supporting documentation.
Language of Material: English
Access
This collection is open to researchers.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Eric Gill Artwork Collection. UCLA. Clark (William Andrews) Memorial Library
Acquisition Information
The Clark's first Director, Lawrence Clark Powell, began collecting Eric Gill's art and manuscripts in the late 1940s and 1950s. He arranged with a London bookseller to act as liaison with the Gill family, which eventually designated the Clark to be the major repository of Gill's manuscripts and correspondence. Along with the manuscripts came four hundred volumes from Gill's library as well as six volumes of scrapbooks and twenty folders of press clippings. The Clark also acquired Gill's own file of magazines and journals with his essays, articles and other contributions. Additional material has since been acquired by the Clark Library.
Biography/Administrative History
Son of a non-conformist minister, one of twelve children, Eric Gill was born in Brighton in 1882 and brought up in Chichester, where he attended art school and learned the rudiments of drawing. At the age of eighteen he went to London to work in an architect's office. The Arts and Crafts movement, then in its first flowering, offered an exciting alternative to the "wage slavery" of the office as well as the opportunity to make his living independently. Instead of studying architecture in the evenings, Gill learned the art of carving inscriptions in stone, attending masonry classes at Westminster Technical School & lettering courses at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. His teacher at the Central School was Edward Johnston, an expert calligrapher and an eloquent proponent of Arts and Crafts techniques. By 1904 Gill was self-employed, supporting himself and his wife by carving lettering on public buildings as well as tombstones & memorial tablets for private clients. At this time, Gill's interest in art, religion, and politics were developing in diverse, often contradictory directions. His first experiments in sculpture won the approval of influential artists and critics who admired the primitive vigor of his work and also its technical polish, a combination that prompted flattering comparisons with archaic sculpture on one hand and the newly fashionable Post-Impressionist art on the other. Gill never quite renounced his heritage in the Arts and Crafts or the patronage of the London art world, but he adamantly refused to be identified simply as a craftsman or an artist. He dabbled in socialism, attended meetings of the Fabian Society, and spoke vociferously against the factory system. But he soon wearied of the discipline and obligations of political action, left London, and joined a community of craftsmen in Ditchling, Sussex. While at Ditchling, he and his wife converted to Catholicism and founded there a reconstituted religious community linked with the Dominican order, the Guild of SS. Joseph and Dominic. Sculpture continued to occupy Gill during the Ditchling period (1907-1924) - perhaps most importantly the Stations of the Cross at Westminster Cathedral and the War Memorial at Leeds University - but at the same time Gill mastered other skills and developed other sources of income. His lettering was in great demand not just for stone inscriptions, but also for painted signs and printing, particularly buildings, title pages, and chapter headings. Characteristically, Gill learned wood engraving to have better control over how his lettering was printed. He also began to experiment with printmaking and book illustration, trying his hand at the handpress and learning the first principles of typography and composition. In 1924 Gill moved his family and studio to a deserted, half-ruined monastery in South Wales. The monastery of Capel-y-ffin provided a perfect setting for Gill to build his
ideal religious community without unwelcome publicity or intrusions from the outside world. He found a new market for his
wood engravings in the Golden Cockerel Press. Increasingly intrigued by typography and its possibilities for independent
self-expression, Gill not only catered to book collectors and bibliophiles but also to trade printers through the Monotype
Corporation, which commissioned from him a series of distinguished typefaces. As his fame and business grew, so did the
demands on his facilities, time, and energy. Gill brought his family closer to London in 1928, settling at Pigotts, near High
Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. In 1929 Gill reached the highpoint of his career: several major monographs appeared on his
sculpture; a complete collection of his engravings was published in a lavishly printed limited edition; and a selection of his
polemical essays was printed at his own press inaugurating a typeface of his own design. Within a year he suffered a
breakdown from overwork. Although he never fully recovered, he remained formidably busy during the rest of his life. He
designed and built a church, carved massive public sculptures for the BBC headquarters and of the London Underground,
as well as huge panels for the League of Nations building in Geneva. Along with these prestigious commissions came more
honors: he was elected an Honorary Associate of the Institute of British Architects, and Associate of the Royal Academy,
and one of the first Royal Designers for Industry. Despite failing health, he wrote his Autobiography during 1940 and kept
hard at work to the very end. translation of the Psalms, kept up his accounts, and wrote the last entries in his voluminous
diaries. He died on November 17, 1940 at the age of fifty-eight after an unsuccessful operation. When he died, he left
behind more than a thousand engravings; at least one hundred and fifty books with his illustrations; designs for eleven
different typefaces; and countless sculptures and inscriptions on city buildings, Catholic churches, and public squares
throughout England.

Scope and Content of Collection
This collection consists of original artwork, printing blocks, photographs and other visual material produced by or related to
artist and designer Eric Gill. Items include prints, printing blocks, drawings, sketchbooks, photographs, architectural plans,
ephemera, and artists' proofs, as well as broadsides, posters and printed reproductions.

Indexing Terms
Type and type-founding--Great Britain--20th century
Stone carving--Great Britain--20th century
Artists, British--20th century
Hague & Gill
wood blocks (printing blocks)--Great Britain--20th century
wood engravings (prints)--Great Britain--20th century
sketchbooks--Great Britain--20th century
drawings (visual works)--Great Britain--20th century
artists' proofs--Great Britain--20th century
Ephemera--Great Britain--20th century
sculpture (visual work)--Great Britain--20th century
typefaces (type forms)--Great Britain--20th century

Artwork Handlist