



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Edward Kook papers

1918-1987

*T-Mss 1990-013

Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2015

Summary

Creator: Kook, Edward

Title: Edward Kook papers

Date: 1918-1987

Size: 4.9 linear feet (11 boxes, 2 volumes, 3 oversized folders, 4 tubes)

Source: Gift of Kenneth D. Gibbs, 1990.

Abstract: Edward Kook (circa 1903-1990) was an American theatrical lighting specialist and co-founder of Century Lighting Company. The collection dates from 1918 to 1987 and contains designs, photographs, artwork, posters, and professional files.

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio material in the collection may be directed to the Billy Rose Theatre Division (theatre@nypl.org). Audio material will be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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Processing note: Compiled by Robyn Hjermsstad, 2015

Creator History

Edward Kook (circa 1903-1990) was an American theatrical lighting specialist and co-founder of Century Lighting Company. Kook's expertise was widely sought after among the theatrical community and, in 1952, he won a Tony Award for his contributions to the development of stage lighting.

Kook began his career as a bookkeeper for Display Lighting Company, where he met lighting technician and future partner, Joseph Levy. In 1929 they founded Century Lighting Company, which manufactured and distributed theatrical lighting equipment. Kook and Levy's invention of the Lekolite (1933), an ellipsoidal reflector spotlight used in stage lighting, was among their greatest achievements. Under Kook's aegis, Century Lighting became the national standard for theatrical lighting development. The company lit thousands of Broadway theater productions between 1930 and 1964, when Century Lighting was absorbed by Philadelphia's Progress Manufacturing Company. Through his work as a lighting specialist and consultant, Kook collaborated on several theatrical productions and theater building projects between the 1930s and the 1970s, including the Denver Center for the Performing Arts with Jo Mielziner and The Porto Theater, a portable arena theater, with Mielziner, Cyril Harris, and Donald Oenslager. He oversaw the implementation of the first electronic lighting system at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center.

In 1947, Edward and Hilda Kook founded the Arts of the Theatre Foundation, a non-profit membership corporation that raised funds for the study of scenic and lighting design and held annual playwriting contests. The contests were arbitrated by permanent judges Herman Shumlin and Edith J. R. Isaacs, with annually rotating guest judges, such as Robert E. Sherwood, Howard Lindsay, Lillian Hellman, Elia Kazan, Moss Hart, and Kermit Bloomgarden.

In addition his work in theater, Kook lectured at Columbia University and taught lighting classes to veterans as part of the American Theatre Wing War Service, Inc. He contributed articles on lighting to The Encyclopedia Britannica and his book, *Images in Light for the Living Theatre*, was published in 1963. He served on the American National Theatre and Academy's (ANTA) Board of Standards and Planning and was actively involved with the American Educational Theatre Association (AETA).

Edward Kook died in 1990.

Scope and Content Note

The Edward Kook papers date from 1918 to 1987 and contain designs, photographs, artwork, posters, and professional files.

Designs were created by Kook and his colleagues. They consist of theater, stage, and lighting plans; and original scenic designs for Broadway theaters and productions. Designs created by Kook consist of diazotypes for the Porto Theater (with Mielziner, Harris, Oenslager) and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts (with Mielziner), the latter of which are heavily annotated with memos, pricelists, and technical notes. Stage designs created by George C. Izenour consist of perspective section plans and designs for theaters and cultural centers, such as Kruger Hall at the University of South Carolina, the theater at Swarthmore College, an auditorium and civic cultural center in Wichita, Kansas, and the Teatro Teresa Carrena in Caracas, Venezuela.

Original scenic designs were created by Robert Davison, Wolfgang Roth, Jo Mielziner, Robert Edmond Jones, and George Jenkins. Designs by Jo Mielziner consist of a painted rendering for *Pillar of Fire* and a costume design for Martha Hunt in *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. Robert Edmond Jones's drawings for *Richard III* are present, as well as an intaglio print by Jones entitled *The Burial of Ophelia*. Art director Harry Horner's original sketchbook for the 1949 film, *The Heiress*, contains 150 pages of hand drawn storyboards for the film. The collection also holds two original mixed media artworks by scenic designer Boris Aronson.

Photographs primarily consist of signed portraits given to Kook by friends and colleagues, such as

Geoffrey Roth, Henry Dreyfuss, Jo Mielziner, Harry Horner, and David Merrick. Events documented in the photographs include Robert Edmond Jones's sixtieth birthday party and a rehearsal for *Watch on the Rhine* depicting Kook, Kermit Bloomgarden, Herman Shumlin, and Lillian Hellman. Photographs of the stage setting for *Richard III* designed by Leo Kerz are also present.

Professional files are arranged alphabetically by format or subject and contain correspondence, writings, and documents pertaining to Arts of the Theatre Foundation. The files also hold annotated articles, lighting catalogs, and audio recordings of songs for the musical *Love Me, Love My Children*, which was produced by Kook and Joel Schenker at the Mercer Arts Center 1971. Correspondence is primarily incoming and is both personal and professional in nature. Correspondents include Harry Horner, Eric Bentley, Herman Shumlin, Sidney Harmon, and Kook's son in-law, Bud Gibbs. Writings, written by Kook and other technicians and designers, consist of essays, lectures, public addresses, and annotated typescripts of published works, such as Kook's *Images in Light for the Living Theatre* and Jo Mielziner's *The Shape of Our Theatre* [sic]. Arts of the Theatre Foundation materials consist of meeting minutes, tax documents, correspondence, and announcements for the foundation's annual script writing contest. Reports on the playwriting contest include the judge's tallies and other contest information.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by format. Designs are arranged alphabetically by designer or theater; Professional Files are arranged alphabetically by format or subject.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Blueprints (reprographic copies)
Design drawings
Diazotypes (copies)

Subjects

Theaters -- Designs and plans
Theaters -- Stage-setting and scenery

Names

Mielziner, Jo, 1901-1976
Century Lighting Equipment, Inc.

Container List

Designs

- b. 1 f. 1 Davison, Robert 1947
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Denver Center for the Performing Arts 1974
 - t. 1 Denver Center for the Performing Arts 1974
- b. 5 f. 1-2 Izenour, George 1960-1970s
- b. 2 f. 3 Izenour, George 1982
 - o. 1 Jenkins, George 1950
- b. 3 f. 1-2 Jones, Robert Edmond 1920
- b. 4 f. 1 Jones, Robert Edmond 1922, 1959-1960
 - o. 2 Kerz, Leo undated
- b. 1 f. 2 Lighting Fixture undated
- b. 1 f. 3-4 Mielziner, Jo 1942-1964
- b. 6 f. 1-3 New York City Theater Plans 1932-1967

Porto Theater

- b. 2 f. 4-6 1964
 - t. 2 1964, 1969
- b. 1 f. 5 1966
- b. 7 f. 1 Repertory Theater at Lincoln Center 1959
- b. 1 f. 6 Roth, Wolfgang 1950

Unidentified Designs

- b. 1 f. 7 Undated
- b. 4 f. 2 Undated
 - t. 3 Undated
- b. 2 f. 7-8 Wake Forest University 1971, 1974
- b. 4 f. 3 Wake Forest University 1976
 - Artists' statement about the design.
- b. 7 f. 2 Yale School of Drama 1970
 - Design proposal.

Photographs

- b. 4 f. 4-5 1929-1949
- b. 3 f. 3-11 1931-1971
 - o. 3 1937
- b. 8 f. 1-2 1948, 1972

Artwork

- b. 3 f. 12 Aronson, Boris undated
 - v. 1 Aronson, Boris undated
 - v. 2 Horner, Henry
 - Sketchbook for *The Heiress* (1949).
- b. 7 f. 3 Jones, Robert Edmond 1925

Posters

Posters (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 8 1964-1981
- b. 2 f. 9 1972
- t. 4 1975

Professional Files

Articles and Publications

- b. 7 f. 5-7 1920-1929
Wendingen.
- b. 3 f. 13 1950s, 1964
- b. 8 f. 3-4 1952-1983
- b. 8 f. 5-10 Arts of the Theatre Foundation 1947-1973
- b. 7 f. 4 Arts of the Theatre Foundation 1957-1958
- b. 8 f. 11 Correspondence 1951-1987
- origsr.221830 *Give a Look* undated
By Stan Mallow.
Sound recording available by appointment only.
- b. 9 f. 1-2 Lighting Catalogs 1918-1937, undated
- origsr.221829 *Love Me, Love My Children Song Recordings* 1971-1972
Sound recording available by appointment only.
- b. 10 f. 1 Scores 1929-1958

Writings

- b. 5 f. 3 1960s
Images of Light for the Living Theatre book plates.
- b. 10 f. 2-6 1920s-1981
Typescripts of *Images in Light for the Living Theatre*, lectures, reports, addresses, and other writings.
- b. 11 f. 1 1968
The Shape of Our Theatre [sic].