Summary

Creator: Craig, Edward Gordon, 1872-1966

Title: Craig-Duncan collection

Date: 1901-1957

Size: Approximate number of items: 400 Number of folders: 360

Source: Edward Gordon Craig's collection of Isadora Duncan materials was acquired by the Dance Collection in 1962.

Abstract:

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in the NYPL's online catalog for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult: https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials

Physical Location: °ZBD 75

Conditions Governing Use: Separate application for permission to publish or reproduce in any form any part of the material must be made for each item to the Curator, Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Library for the Performing Arts.


Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Nicki N. Ostrom.

Creator History

Biographical History: Gordon Craig
Gordon Craig
Date Event  1872 Jan. 16 Born at [UNK], [UNK], son of Ellen Terry and Edward William Godwin. Christened “Edward Henry Gordon Craig” at age sixteen.
1889-1897 Appeared as actor with several companies, including Henry Irving's company at the Lyceum Theatre.
1893 Married May Gibson.
1896 Formed his own company, giving Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet.
1898-1901 Published The Page,a magazine devoted to the arts. Became increasingly involved in art work and scene design.
1900 Met Elena Meo.
1900-1902 Designed and produced several highly innovative productions with Martin Shaw and his Purcell Operatic Society:
1900 Dido and Aeneas(Purcell)
1901 The Masque of Love (music from Purcell's opera Dioclesian)
1902 Acis and Galatea(Handel and John Gay) Bethlehem(Housman)
1901 Arranged first of many exhibitions - this of bookplates.
1903 Designed and directed The Vikings(Ibsen) for Ellen Terry. Also designed Much Ado About Nothing for Ellen Terry and For Sword or Song for Fred Terry. Wrote and designed The Masque of Hunger, The Masque of London, and The Masque of Lunatics. Met Count Kessler. Visited Berlin in July.
1904 Left for Berlin in August to prepare designs for Venice Preserved(OTway-Hofmannsthal) for Dr. [UNK] of the Lessing Theater. Met Isadora Duncan in December.
1905 Prepared a dozen exhibitions in Germany and Vienna. Formed Direktion Vereinigter Kunst to further his own projects and manage Isadora Duncan's appearances. Designed Klektrafor Eleonora Duse (not produced).
1906 Designed Rosmersholm in Florence for Eleonora Duse.
1907-1914 Moved to Florence. Created Screens, Über-Marionette, and the Black Figures in 1907. Began publishing The Maskin 1908, continuing to work on it with some interruptions until 1929. Made sketches in 1908 for a ballet project, Psyche, and agreed to produce Hamlet for the Moscow Art Theatre. In 1911, demonstrated his movable screens daily on a large model stage in London. W.B. Yeats used Craig's screens in one of his plays in Dublin. Craig opened a school in Florence in 1913. Built large model for Bach's St. Matthew Passion, which was broken up when the school closed at the outbreak of war.
1918 Published The Marionette,a magazine.
1921 Issue of The Chapbook, a Monthly Miscellany, devoted to Craig's article “Puppets and Poets.”
1926 Designed The Crown Pretenders(Ibsen) for Johannes and Adam Poulsen at the [UNK] Theatre in Copenhagen. Received the Cross of the Knight of Dannebrog for his services to the Danish theater.
1928 Prepared set and costume designs for a production of Macbeth in New York. The Cranach Press in Weimar published Hamlet, translated into German by Cerhart Hauptmann and illustrated by Craig.
1934 “Settings for an Ideal Theatre” displayed at an International Exhibition of Theatre Art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
1966 July 29 Died in Vence.

Biographical History: Isadora Duncan
Date Event  1878? May 27 Born in San Francisco
1896 To Chicago. Met Augustin Daly and was engaged to dance in A Midsummer Night's Dream in New York. Danced under Daly for two years in various shows.
1898-99 Gave concerts in Carnegie Hall Studio with Ethelbert Nevin, and danced in the drawing-rooms

A summary of events reflected in the Craig-Duncan manuscripts follows. References are to folders in the collection.

Date Event 1904 The Craig-Duncan correspondence begins three or four days after the first meeting of Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig on the evening of December 14 or 15 at the Duncan apartment at
11 Hardenburg Strasse in Berlin. The first meeting or two are referred to in notes written by both Isadora and Craig during a train journey in January (#23). On the evening of December 15, Isadora and Craig left a party in the Duncan apartment over the protests of Isadora's brother, and drove to Potsdam and back, returning to Berlin at dawn. Isadora spent the 16th at the lodging of Elise de Brouckère (#291 and 346), who had introduced Craig to her. Later, Isadora joined Craig in his studio and apartment at #11 and #6 [UNK] for several days. She returned to her own flat on the 18th for a reception (#1) and appears to have given at least one performance during this period when she was staying with Craig (#2 and 3). She also helped her sister, Elizabeth, who was organizing the new school in Grunewald (#3). On December 23, Isadora left Berlin to perform in St. Petersburg. As she left she wrote Craig a letter with the phrase “until I return to the Heart in which I was born”, which affected him deeply (#6 and 289). She planned to be back in Berlin on December 31 (#16, 18, 19, and 21).

1905 A son (Edward Craig) was born to Craig in England on January 3 by Elena Meo, who figures in later letters as “Nelly” or “N”, and who was later known as Mrs. Gordon Craig although they may not have been legally married. Isadora may have known about Craig's relationship with Elena Meo as early as 1905. Her feelings about Elena varied between jealousy (#35?, 36?, 258), of which she was ashamed, and great generosity (45, 47, 86, 158, 162, 247 and 263). On January 15 Isadora and Craig travelled by train to or from Dresden, writing down all their thoughts along the way. They apparently thought that Isadora was pregnant (#23). They were in Hamburg from January 24-31, where Isadora gave auditions for pupils for her new school (#25 and 309). In February they apparently travelled together to Russia (#41, 216, 310, and 357). Toward the end of March, Isadora gave a series of highly successful performances in Brussels, and then was joined by Craig for a short holiday in Villiers-la-Ville (#38, 39, 41, 338, 347, and 348). Late in April Craig wrote his book, The Art of the Theatre, in the space of two weeks (#338). Isadora's business affairs began to be handled by Craig and Maurice Magnus through Direktion Vereinigter Kunst early in 1905. During the summer a theater agent in Amsterdam, “Stumpff”, began arranging Isadora's bookings in Holland, dealing with her, Craig, and Magnus. His name recurs frequently in the correspondence through 1907. The income from Isadora's appearances helped support her school in Grunewald, the Duncan family, herself, and Craig. Both Craig and Isadora were absorbed in their creative work. One recurring theme in Isadora's letters of this period is the difficulty of reconciling love and work (#44, 47, and 57. See also #15, 132, 148, and 216). 1905 was the year of closest association between Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig. They travelled together and saw each other almost every day. For this reason, they wrote each other fewer letters than in 1906 or 1907.

1906 Isadora became pregnant sometime during December, 1905. Early in the year, Craig wrote to his friend, Martin Shaw, asking him to come to Berlin and possibly conduct for Isadora. [UNK] came and was soon engaged. Craig, Shaw, and Isadora travelled together to Nuremburg, Augsburg, Minich, Amsterdam, Harlem, the Hague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Gothenburg on a performing tour which Isadora had planned before becoming pregnant. The doctor told Isadora that she could dance until the end of May, and after having the baby in late summer, could start dancing again around the first of December (#55). This is almost exactly what she did. After the tour ended, Isadora wrote Craig several letters from Gautzch (?) where she was staying with Dr. and Frau Zehme studying yoga, taking walks, and promoting a project between Dr. Zehme and Craig (#63-69). These letters probably date from late May. Several of them mention Kathleen (#59-62...
and 65). This was her friend, Kathleen Bruce, whom Isadora had met through Rodin. She was a sculptress and made a sculpture of Gordon Craig contemplating one of his marionettes when both of them were visiting Isadora at Noordwijk during the summer. The first week in June, Isadora rented a house on the Dutch coast at Noordwijk, an hour's trip from Amsterdam (#71 and 350). It was called Villa Maria, and she lived there through October. Craig spent his time mostly in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, visiting her occasionally. He was in England between July 18-21, seeing Elena Meo and their two children.

Craig, Gordon Craig, p 214.

Two unhappy letters from Isadora correspond with this period in July (#85 and 86). In September (September 14?) Isadora gave birth to a daughter, Deirdre. From this point on the baby, also called “Snowdrop,” is mentioned in almost all of Isadora's letters (#93 et seq.). Isadora remained in Noordwijk recuperating until the end of October (#103), when she returned to Berlin. In Berlin, she and Count Harry Kessler, Craig's friend and patron, brought Craig and Eleonora Duse together. Craig was invited to design a production of Rosmersholm for Duse in Florence. (He had, at Kessler's instigation, already designed a production of Elektra the spring of 1905 to star Duse, but it came to nothing.) Craig, Isadora, the baby, and Marie Kist, the baby's nurse, travelled to Florence in November. Isadora translated the conversations between Craig and Duse, who did not speak the same language. The play was performed with Craig's sets on December 5 (#105-107 and 126). Isadora was the first to leave Florence. She travelled to Warsaw sometime between December 1-17 and gave a series of performances in Poland extending into the new year. A letter dated December 1 in Warsaw was either dated by the Russian (Julian) calendar which was 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar used in Europe, or was dated incorrectly (#108). Isadora's letters reflect some of the political unrest prevailing in central Poland, which was, at that time, part of Russia. Some of her engagements were cancelled or delayed due to fighting in the streets (#120, 121). She was also plagued with illness and concerned about money as she struggled to resume work. Isadora's pregnancy and the onset of motherhood not only interrupted her dancing but intensified her conflict with traditional attitudes towards women. Many of her letters from 1906 and 1907 reflect her struggle to define woman and [UNK] and to relate her own feelings to her definitions (#56, 57, 66, 82, 133, 145, 255, 256, 259. See also #29 and 37).

1907  Isadora was scheduled to tour Holland in January, but she became too ill to continue dancing in Amsterdam (#134). Soon after, Eleonora Duse wired Craig from Nice, asking him to come and help with the scene of Rosmersholm (#135). As soon as she was able, Isadora went to Nice where she joined the baby, Fraulein Kist, and her mother (#136, 137). Craig left Nice either before she arrived or shortly after, and made his way to Florence. In spite of the many letters written by Isadora in 1907, the two ceased to be lovers at this time. Isadora remained in Nice suffering from neuralgia until the end of [UNK] when she returned to Holland and began performing again (#157, 160). Her [UNK], which caused her great pain, was ascribed to “nerves” (#141, 145, 162, 257, 258). In 1919 she wrote to Craig, saying “For years I suffer from Neu-ras-then-ia which malady translated means Incurable Sorrow and Heartbreak...” (#240). Although their relationship was deteriorating and under great stress in 1907, Isadora and Craig agreed on a plan for the future which involved saving money and building a theater and school in Florence (#169, 179, 181, 186, 196, and 340). Although she was able to send Craig money from time to time, Isadora agonized over her inability to do enough through the summer of 1907 (#192, 194-196, and 198). She had great difficulty getting summer engagements (#169-175) and was under pressure from Craig to do more (#268 and 269). In September, after a long and discouraging summer, Isadora decided to vacation in Venice (#197-205). Craig was angry that she used her savings this way (#198). She visited him briefly in Florence on her way back to Germany (#273), after he had declined to join her in Venice. He was short of funds and wrapped up in his work in Florence, where he had several people working with him on a variety of projects (#268, 270, and 271). During her brief visit it became clear that Craig's romantic interest in her was finished (#205). The encounter upset her deeply and left them both with ambivalent feelings (#205, 258?, 272-274). Isadora now began to drink heavily and frequent “merrie company” to overcome her despair (#209, 210, 216 and 218). Craig felt that his work was not
important to her, and was both hurt and hostile (#205, 272, 274, and 340). In December, Isadora left for a tour of Russia. She became friendly with Constantin Stanislavsky of the Moscow Art Theatre and spoke to him at length about Craig and his work (#214, 215, 217, and 218). She was instrumental in getting Stanislavsky to invite Craig in 1908 to design a work for the theater. Stanislavsky also apparently tried to help Isadora find support for moving her school from Germany to Russia.

1908 After writing to Craig about Stanislavsky several times in January, Isadora's letter-writing tapered off. She returned briefly to Berlin, and then went back to Russia with several of her pupils to tour the Caucasus (#218 and 220). She wrote to Craig before going to London in July to perform at the Duke of York's Theatre and again before leaving for America in August. One of these letters (#222) enraged him (#281 and 282).

1909 In 1909, Craig and Isadora met in St. Petersburg. The meeting, with Stanislavsky present, has been recounted differently by Isadora Duncan, My Life (New York, Boni and Liveright, 1927) pp 235-236 and by Edward Craig. Craig, Gordon Craig, p 252

Isadora's note (#224) asking Craig to come and see her may relate to this meeting.

1913 On April 19, Isadora's children (Deirdre, her daughter by Craig, and Patrick, her son by Paris Singer) were drowned in the Seine. This tragedy set off an exchange of telegrams and letters between her and Craig from April to December. They apparently met at least once in Florence in the fall (#235).

1919-1920 In December, 1919, Isadora and Craig met in Rome. At this time, Isadora was living with the musician Walter Morse [UNK], who she called her "Archangel" (#240, 242, and 247). She and Craig corresponded and saw each other on occasion through the spring of 1920 while Craig was living in Paris. There is nothing to indicate that Isadora Duncan and Gordon Craig not or corresponded after 1920, although they both thought and spoke of each other often until their deaths. In 1925, when [UNK] needed money and threatened to publish letters from her lovers to raise it, Craig corresponded with Paris Singer through his friend Richard Wallace to see about giving her money (#340).

Scope and Content Note

The Craig-Duncan Collection consists of theater artist Gordon Craig's collection of materials relating to the dancer Isadora Duncan. It contains approximately 400 items dating from 1901 to 1957, the bulk of them falling in the years 1904-1920.

Gordon Craig kept almost all of the letters which Isadora Duncan wrote to him, as well as many of her notes and telegrams, from the time of their first meeting in December, 1904, until her death. He also kept photographs which they took of each other or which Isadora sent to him; drawings and sketches which he made of her and her pupils; several programs from her concerts with his comments pencilled in; and ticket stubs, magazine covers, and other miscellany. In December, 1904, Craig began to keep a series of notebooks filled with his notes on Isadora Duncan, clippings, and an occasional letter relating to her. Of these notebooks, only two are in the Craig-Duncan Collection, one dating from 1924-1928 and the other from 1933 after the publication of Maurice Dumesnil's book An Amazing Journey - Isadora Duncan in South America. Other sketchbooks and notebooks, dating from 1903 to 1906, containing drawings, some of Craig's notes on the theater, and Isadora's translation of a lecture by Ernst Haeckel which she and Craig attended together in 1905, are included in the collection. A group of letters and notes written by Craig, mostly to Isadora, and a number of letters and telegrams to Craig...
concerning Isadora from friends and family complete the collection.

The letters of Isadora Duncan comprise the bulk of this collection, and provide glimpses into her relationship with Gordon Craig, her intellectual and emotional life, and her struggles and triumphs in creating and performing dances. Because Craig and Maurice Magnus managed her bookings and other aspects of her business through their firm Direktion Vereinigter Kunst from 1905 to 1907, the letters also reveal something about her financial [UNK] and her practical problems as a performing artist.

Craig reread the items in this collection at various times during his life. He made notes on many pieces at first or subsequent readings. Very few of his letters to Isadora exist today. Those in this collection were retained by Craig and never sent. The collection provides insights into the development of some of his ideas on the theater, information about his activities during the period from December 1904 to 1908, and evidence of Isadora’s influence on him and his career. It also reveals something of his character.

Other correspondents are: Elise de Brouckère, J. Paul Cooper, Augustin Duncan, Elizabeth Duncan, Irma Duncan, Raymond Duncan, Fritz Endell, Mary Endell, Count Harry Kessler, Fenella Lovel, Elena Meo, Barbara Rose, Martin Shaw, Paris Singer, Dame Ellen Terry, and Richard Wallace.

Key Terms

Subjects
Manuscripts (Letters)
Manuscripts -- Collections
Set designers (Craig, Edward Gordon)

Names
Craig, Edward Gordon, 1872-1966
Brouckère, Elise de
Cooper, J. Paul
Duncan, Irma
Duncan, Isadora, 1877-1927
Duncan, Raymond, 1874-1966
Endell, Fritz August Gottfried, 1873-1955
Endell, Mary
Kessler, Harry, Graf, 1868-1937
Lovel, Fenella
Meo, Elena, 1879-1957
Rose, Barbara
Shaw, Martin, 1875-1958
Terry, Ellen, Dame, 1847-1928
Wallace, Richard, d. 1925 or 6
Container List

f. 1-306  A. Correspondence

Correspondence is grouped by writer and arranged into three subseries: 1) Isadora Duncan letters, cards, telegrams and notes, 2) Edward Gordon Craig letters and notes, and 3) Other Correspondents. The Isadora Duncan items are arranged in approximate chronological order, followed by a No Date category. Few of the letters were dated; a number of them were dated by Gordon Craig many years after he received them, and his dates are not always accurate. The letters have been placed in sequence on the basis of content. Only those giving insufficient clues to their place in sequence are in the No Date group. The Gordon Craig items were arranged in approximate chronological order in the same way. Most of the Craig letters and notes are not, however, real correspondence, since they were not sent. Some of his notes have been filed not by the date they were written, but by the time period to which they refer. Other correspondents are arranged alphabetically into the third [UNK] series. In addition, there are several pieces of correspondence regarding Isadora Duncan from Craig’s friends in his notebooks (#340, 341).

f. 1-263  1. Isadora Duncan letters, notes and cards

f. 1-21  1904 Dec.
f. 22-25  1905 Jan.
f. 26-33  1905 Feb.
f. 34-45  1905 Mar.-Apr.
f. 46-54  1905 Apr.-? Nov.
f. 55-68  1906 Jan.-May.
f. 69-78  1906 June.
f. 79-91  1906 July-Sept.?.
f. 92-103  1906 Oct.
f. 104-118  1906 Dec.
f. 119-132  1907 Jan.
f. 133-140  1907 Jan.-Feb.
f. 141-157  1907 Mar.
f. 158-167  1907 Apr.
f. 168-184  1907 May.-June.
f. 185-193  1907 July.
f. 194-198  1907 Aug.
f. 199-205  1907 Sept.
f. 206-208  1907 Oct.
f. 209-211  1907 Nov.
f. 212  1907 Dec.
f. 213-217  1908 Jan.
f. 218-219  1908 Feb.-Apr.
f. 220-223  1908 July-Aug.
f. 224-226  1909.
f. 227-228  1913 Apr.
f. 229-231  1913 June.
f. 241-248  1920.
A. Correspondence (cont.)
   1. Isadora Duncan letters, notes and cards (cont.)
      f. 249-262  in approximate chronological sequence  No Date (circa 1904-1907
      f. 263  No Date
   f. 264-290  2. Edward Gordon Craig letters and notes
      f. 264-265  1905
      f. 266-268  1907 Jan.-June
      f. 269-271  1907 July-Sept
      f. 272-274  1907 Oct.
      f. 275-277  1907 Nov.-Dec
      f. 278-279  1908 Feb.-Apr
      f. 280-282  1908 July-Aug
      f. 283-284  1909
      f. 285-288  1913
      f. 289-  1917
      f. 290  1919
   f. 291-306  3. Other Correspondents
      f. 291  Brouckère, Elise de
      f. 292  Cooper, J. Paul
      f. 293  Duncan, Augustin
      f. 294-295  Duncan, Elizabeth
      f. 296-297  Duncan, Irma
      f. 298  Duncan, Raymond
      f. 299  Endell, Mary and Fritz
      f. 300-301  Kessler, Harry Elemens Ulrich, graf Von
      f. 302  Lovel, Fenella
      f. 303  Shaw, Martin
      f. 304-305  Terry, Dame Ellen
      f. 306  Wallace, Richard
   f. 307-335  B. Drawings
      Drawings of or related to Isadora Duncan by Gordon Craig. Dated drawings are in approximate chronological order, followed by a No Date group. Three undated drawings of unknown authorship complete the series.
   f. 307-332  1. Edward Gordon Craig
      f. 307-314  1905
      f. 315-318  1906
      f. 319  1907
      f. 320-332  No Date
   f. 333-335  2. Artist Unknown
   f. 336-341  C. Sketchbooks and Notebooks
      Gordon Craig's sketchbooks and notebooks of clippings, correspondence, notes, and drawings relating to Isadora Duncan. In chronological order.
   f. 336  1903-1906
   f. 337  1904-1905
C. Sketchbooks and Notebooks (cont.)

f. 338-339  1905
f. 340  1924-1928
f. 341  1933

D. Programs

Programs from Isadora Duncan performances, with notes by Gordon Craig. In chronological order, No Date items last.

f. 342  1909
f. 343  1911
f. 344-345  No Date (circa 1904-1905)

E. Photographs

Photographs, some with annotations or inscriptions by Isadora Duncan or Gordon Craig. In chronological order, No Date items last.

f. 346  1904
not included on microfilm
f. 347  1905 Mar.
not included on microfilm
f. 348  1905 Apr.
not included on microfilm
f. 349  1905 Spring
not included on microfilm
f. 350  1906
not included on microfilm
f. 351-355  in approximate chronological order) No Date (circa 1904-1912
not included on microfilm

F. Miscellaneous

Miscellaneous items including theater and train ticket stubs, a prescription, magazine covers and a poem, all relating to Isadora Duncan with the exception of a 1901 cover for Craig's magazine The Page. Approximate chronological order, No Date items last.

f. 356  1901
f. 357-358  1905
f. 359  1920
f. 360  No Date