

Scenic Design

Introduction

The scenic designs discussed in this chapter span the 25 years of Kiesler's activity in the American theatre. Throughout those years he applied his design theory directly to scenic interpretation; especially important was the concept of design by polarization. The opposition of visual elements inside the setting and between the production and the audience resulted in a complete environment that focused the audience's attention on the content of the script which Kiesler hoped would be understood emotionally rather than intellectually.

A list of some 60 different productions thought to be designed by Kiesler during his career in America has been prepared by Mrs. Lillian Kiesler. In addition Kiesler executed a number of these projects. Mrs. Kiesler's tally was utilized as a basis for developing a catalogue of Kiesler's works. The registry of designs has been divided into four categories: reputed designs, student designs, designs unverified by visual evidence, and designs verified by visual evidence. This inventory comprises the first part of this chapter. The second part summarizes the various elements of Kiesler's theory as demonstrated in his designs and notes the characteristics of his style.

Design Registry

Reputed designs. Three designs have been informally attributed to Kiesler which were in fact designed by other individuals. (See Table 1).

The Margaret Linley design was executed three years before Kiesler joined the Juilliard School in 1934; the program for a subsequent production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1933 did not credit Kiesler or any other designer.¹ Alfredo Valenti was listed on several of the Juilliard productions as the stage director. Presumably he performed both design and staging functions for a period and chose to reuse his own designs for some productions as even after Kiesler's employment, Valenti is credited as the pro-

duction designer. Specific instances are *Orpheus* (1934)² and *Dido and Aeneas* (1935).³ Mrs. Kiesler recalls that Francesco Christofanetti was an Italian painter and designed for Juilliard as Kiesler's guest artist.⁴

Table 1. Reputed Designs

Title	Designer	Date
<i>Jack and the Beanstalk</i>	Margaret Linley ^a	1931
<i>The Secret Marriage</i>	Alfredo Valenti ^a	1933
<i>Così Fan Tutti</i>	Francesco Christofanetti ^b	1940 (Feb. 28 - Mar. 2)

^aFrederick Kiesler, *Ten Years of American Opera Design* (New York: New York Public Library, 1941), pp. 9-13.

^b*Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 12; "Così Fan Tutti," Program, Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library.

Student designs. Beginning in the fall of 1936, while still employed at Juilliard, Kiesler was engaged by Columbia University as an instructor in design and architecture. He remained there until 1942. During those six years Kiesler brought his students from Columbia to Juilliard as designers. Apparently the students received credit in stagecraft courses from the university. Kiesler arranged design opportunities for the architecture students because he felt that the theatre provided a training ground where the neophytes would be placed in the midst of conflicting personalities and time pressures and be forced to create an environment in continuity with the other production elements. During those years Kiesler was very often shown on the program as the production manager. In the production programs, and later in the exhibition he organized, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, he gave full credit to the students who designed under his direction. That each student actually was responsible for his or her own designs is suggested by the highly decorative style of some of the work. Kiesler was not given to the use of decoration in any of his endeavors. The degree of interaction between Kiesler and his students must have varied depending on their abilities and other influences. *Joseph and His Brethren* was a sparse setting with most of the stage given over to dance space. Upstage right was a triangular construction representing a pyramid. On this shape visions of the lean and fat years were projected. In all probability, Kiesler contributed the design and execution of the projections only.⁵ Apparently there was a degree of collaboration between Kiesler and his students on many other productions.

According to the collection *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, the

Table 2. Student Designs

Title	Designer	Date
<i>Joseph and His Brethren</i> (Josten Ballet)	Sets: Nathalie Swan ^a Lights: Logan Chappel	1936 (Mar. 9-12)
<i>Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	Pasquale Carbonara ^b	1936 (April 22-25)
<i>The Frantic Physician</i>	Pasquale Carbonara ^a	1936 (Dec. 9-12)
<i>Garrick</i>	Paul Oppenheim ^a	1937 (Feb. 24-27)
<i>The Poisoned Kiss</i>	Nathalie Swan ^a Paul Oppenheim	1937 (April 21-24)
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	Daniel Brenner ^a	1938 (Jan. 19-22)
<i>Abduction from the Seraglio</i>	Nathalie Swan ^a Daniel Brenner	1938 (April 6-9)
<i>Marriage of Figaro</i>	Tom Jones ^a	1938 (Dec. 14-17)
<i>The Spanish Hour</i>	protégés ^c	1939 (Mar. 29-31)
<i>Falstaff</i>	John Stevens ^a	1941 (April 2-5)

^a*Ten Years of American Opera Design*, pp. 10-13. Programs, Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library.

^bProgram, Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library.

^cClipping, "Juilliard School Gives Old Opera," March 30, 1939, in Kiesler's scrapbook 127/628.

opera *Garrick* was produced only once, yet it is illustrated by several different designs.⁶ Only one designer was credited in the program. The other designs are apparently projects. Also Nathalie Swan is credited with designing *Joseph and His Brethren*, but Logan Chappel also executed a series of renderings for the ballet.⁷ At one point in his notes Kiesler mentions preparing sketches for *The Spanish Hour*,⁸ yet the press reported that the setting was designed by Kiesler's students; at the same time, it credited the teacher alone with the design of *Dido and Aeneas* presented on the same evening. All of this suggests the manner in which the stagecraft class may have operated. Each member of the class may have studied the script, prepared drawings, and executed renderings. When the class met, they may have discussed the various concepts presented and selected the one they thought best to actually build. Sometimes the designs may have been those

of students, at other times those of the master. Kiesler most certainly designed the more difficult machinery for the productions as indicated by the working drawings found occasionally among those of the students.

For the following designs Kiesler was listed as either production manager or scenic director, but the extent of his involvement is not known: *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Frantic Physician*, *The Poisoned Kiss*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Abduction From the Seraglio*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *The Spanish Hour*, and *Falstaff*.

Designs unverified by visual evidence. The following table is comprised of the productions with which Kiesler is credited in Mrs. Kiesler's production list and the additions she made by personal letter. Neither literary nor visual evidence has been located to either substantiate or repudiate these claims. The majority of the designs were executed during the last six years of Kiesler's tenure as scenic director for the Juilliard Opera.

Table 3. Designs Unverified by Visual Evidence

Title	Date	Title	Date
<i>Don Pasquale</i>	1941	<i>Così Fan Tutti</i>	1953
<i>Riders to the Sea</i>	1946	<i>Facade</i>	1953
<i>Gianne Schicchi</i>	1948	<i>Capriccio</i>	1954
<i>Fidelio</i>	1950	<i>Idomeneus</i>	1955
<i>Ballet Ballads</i>	1950	<i>He Who Gets Slapped</i>	1956
<i>Triple Sec</i>	1951	<i>The Wife of Martin Guerre</i>	1956?
<i>Falstaff</i>	1952	<i>The Child and the Apparitions</i>	1957
<i>Brittania Triumphans</i>	1953	<i>Gianne Schicchi</i>	1957
<i>Venus and Adonis</i>	1953	<i>Bolivar</i>	1958

Designs verified by visual evidence. Thirty-two production designs have been verified by literary and/or visual evidence as the work of Frederick Kiesler. Table 4 consists of designs which were actually constructed, based on an interpretation of the available evidence.

The design record for the period 1934 to 1957 appears to be fairly complete when the productions listed in Tables 2, 3 and 4 are considered. The apparent practice of the Juilliard School was to produce two or three operas in a season with the first performance in December, the second in February or March, and the final program late in March or early in April. Occasionally two short operas were prepared for the same evenings. Using these guidelines, a listing of the productions by season indicates the performance of two or three productions consistently from 1934 through 1944 for which Kiesler or his students executed designs. The 1944-45 and 1945-46 seasons are missing and only one production is available from the

1946-47 season. From 1947 through 1957, the record is again fairly complete; however, beginning in 1951 there is a dearth of visual evidence for Kiesler's designs. In addition, six projects have been found among Kiesler's personal papers.

In the following pages the available evidence on each design is stated and interpreted. Discussions center on the points which illustrate the application of Kiesler's theories and the eccentricities of his design style.

Table 4. Designs Verified by Visual Evidence

Title	Date	Title	Date
<i>Helen Retires</i>	1934	<i>No Exit</i>	1946
<i>Ariadne on Naxos</i>	1934	<i>The Poor Sailor</i>	1947
<i>In the Pasha's Garden</i>	1935	<i>Oedipus Rex</i>	1948
<i>Maria Malibran</i>	1935	<i>Angelique</i>	1948
<i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	1939	<i>The Soldier's Tale</i>	1948
<i>The Tales of Hoffmann</i>	1939	<i>The Magic Flute</i>	1949
<i>The Curious Women</i>	1940	<i>The Beggar's Opera</i>	1950
<i>The Magic Flute</i>	1940	<i>Sodom and Gomorrah</i> ^a	1950
<i>Barber of Seville</i>	1941	<i>The Prisoner</i>	1951
<i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i>	1942	<i>The Play of Robin and Marion</i>	1952
<i>The Mother</i> ^a	1942	<i>Canticle for Innocent Comedians</i>	1952
			(revived 1969)
<i>Solomon and Balkis</i>	1942	<i>The Triumph of St. Joan</i>	1952
<i>Orpheus and Eurydice</i>	1943	<i>The Tempest</i> ^a	1952
<i>The Old Maid and the Thief</i>	1944	<i>The Tempest</i>	1954
<i>Fashions of the Times</i> ^a	1944	<i>The Tempest</i>	1955
<i>Der Freischütz</i>	1946	<i>Henry IV</i>	1958

^aThese four productions were not previously attributed to Kiesler.

Helen Retires (February 28-March 3, 1934)

By George Antheil and John Erskine. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *Helen Retires* (Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library) and *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 9.

George Antheil had requested John Erskine to prepare a libretto on a Greek theme for him in 1930.⁹ Erskine's *Jack and the Beanstalk* had been performed at the Juilliard School in 1931, which may account for the School's cooperation in producing *Helen Retires*. Because George Antheil had been a member of De Stijl since 1923, and had written the music for *Ballet Mechanique* which was shown at the 1924 Exhibition of New Theatre Technique, Antheil must have been familiar with the work of Kiesler in scenic art in Europe; doubtless, the men knew each other. When the Antheil-

Erskine opera premiered at Juilliard, Kiesler may have been asked to execute the design by his old acquaintance. Possibly this special arrangement was the cause of Kiesler's appointment to Juilliard's staff beginning with the 1934-35 season.

His design for *Helen* was impressive and drew acclaim from most critical sources.¹⁰ The composer and librettist were awarded the David Bispham Medal for their efforts, amplifying the attention given the production.¹¹

The opera opens on the funeral feast of Menelaos. Helen does not mourn greatly for she feels these last years have been wasted as Menelaos grew older while she remained an eternal beauty. As each guest delivers his oration, the old priest directs them not to speak of certain matters, such as the affair of Helen and Paris and the less gallant aspects of the Trojan war. Helen remarks to each comment of the priest that no offense is taken, and in a short phrase innocently and without malice deflates the guest's rhetoric.

Guest. And home at last
In sweet repentance
Helen, by you persuaded
Once more faithful—

Priest. Choose a better subject friend, Nothing so
intimate! Why speak now of sins long past?
He, ere he died forgot and forgave.

Helen. Neither! He never forgave, he never forgot
Why should he? What glory would he have won
had I not loved Paris? (*turning to second guest*)

His words were few—he could not think fast.¹²

After the banquet Helen prepares to leave, telling her servants that she is going to find lasting love. She shall seek the company of Achilles who rests on the Island of the Blest. In spite of the ranting of the Priest, she exits on her journey.

The setting for the first act was simple and utilized projections. The floor was divided into three levels. On the stage level the chorus, serving as audience at the banquet, was seated on cubes downstage right. The first level, approximately six inches high, served as a playing space for the guest and priest during their orations as well as for scenes between Helen and her servants. The level allowed the audience's view to be unobstructed by the chorus. On the second, higher, level were placed two stools resembling column capitals. During the banquet Helen occupied the stool or pedestal upstage left. Behind the raised playing spaces was a projection screen. The

screen was illuminated by replicas of the chorus during the priest's invocation. As each guest spoke, the projections were used to illustrate his commentary, doubtless changing with the speaker and the topic of his discourse. It is important to note the juxtaposition of picture parts evident in the projection behind the priest.

The composition is similar to that of one of Kiesler's galaxial paintings. The fragments on either side are pictures of the chorus as guests. The stage left projection shows a closer view than that on stage right, while the center projection is an abstraction of a pedestalled wine bowl. The figures focus on the central image and the space between the projections creates a tension that holds the composition together. The interlocking shapes of the fragments enhance the feeling of a single unity. The juxtaposition of picture elements in this way emphasizes the unity of the gathering it symbolizes.

A second screen, stage left, appears to be somewhat taller and has a projection of a chorus mask resting on a cube which was displayed throughout the act. The chorus appears to have been mute, for the script only calls for the servants to sing during the entire act. The masks were made with eyes and ears but without mouths which substantiates this idea. The chorus may have cleared the stage when the guests left and moved into the auditorium and become watchers and listeners just as the paying customers. The *Ten Years of American Opera Design* Collection includes a photograph captioned "Chorus in place in the auditorium."¹³ If this maneuver was accomplished, then the stage would have been cleared for the broader action of the servants, priest and Helen toward the end of the act, and the audience would have had a clear view of the projection screen on which a film depicted the descent of a submarine into the waves.¹⁴ The submarine carried Helen to the Isle of the Blest.

Act II reveals the chorus of the dead heroes on the Isle of the Blest. They moan about the darkness and call Helen the most cursed woman in the world as she is responsible for most of them being there. The ghosts wore black clothing and carried shields larger than themselves made from plywood.¹⁵ Olin Downes believed the shields to be symbolic of the characters of the heroes,¹⁶ while Alexander King emphatically disagreed.¹⁷ The point is debatable, and Kiesler did not comment. The significant point is that the shields were abstract, monumental, and flat, two-dimensional. The scene was lighted in heavily saturated green and blue, suggestive of the shadows and darkness of which the ghosts sing.¹⁸ Into the underworld of gloom, a shaft of bright light appears revealing Helen posed with her hand on a pedestal on a stairway directly up center (Plate 13).

The ghosts describe her as the "terrible one" and hide their faces as she descends and moves among them in search of Achilles. Each in turn is tempted to follow her himself. She announces that when she finds Achilles:

... he shall have
All the love in the world
All the love that all men
Gave and shall give forever:
He shall have untouched
What none other came near—
My soul!¹⁹

Achilles rises from hiding to sing:

The life I had forgotten,
Stirs in me!²⁰

They leave the stage together to the chorus' greater lamentations over the effect of Helen on men. Except for Helen's radiant entrance, the entire scene is played on the stage floor against black.

The "love birds" open Act III with a lyric love duet on a platform suspended above head height up center stage. In front of the platform is a cutout drop with a kidney shaped opening. Behind the platform are two more drops. The first has a light color and fills the kidney shaped opening of the downstage drop. An ovoid hole is cut in this light colored drop to reveal a dark drop behind it. On stage left there is a stair to a platform, perhaps three feet high, from which an exit is provided through the drop farthest downstage.

Three fishermen enter this abstract version of the Elysian Fields and ask the lovers to stop singing because their music has cast a magic spell which holds the fisherman's boat to the shore. The old man complains that he must return to his waiting wife. Helen believes at last that an enduring love is possible, but her delusion is shattered when, in questioning the man, she finds that he really is returning home out of habit and because it is comfortable; love is long since past for him and his wife. The fourth young fisherman has all this time been entranced by Helen and has to be dragged off by his fellows.

Helen, admitting that love does not endure, sends Achilles away while their love is at its height so that in this way, it will last forever and not be reduced to habit. Achilles, regretfully, takes up his plywood shield and exits. Helen retires to the stairs stage left, lies back and reflects until the young fisherman returns. He dances:

"Well, where did you come from?" she asks.
He kneels without words and clasps her knees.
Helen has come out of retirement.²¹

Apparently the use of color was restricted to bold saturated colors brought together in unusual combinations,²² but nothing else is presently known

about this element of the composition. The reliance on strong color and stark combinations was typical of Kiesler's work while associated with De Stijl. He had considered color a basic expressive ingredient from the beginning of his theatre career.²³

The design also demonstrated Kiesler's use of projection to amplify meaning through visual image and his continued use of film as an effect novelly integrated with the script. The design of the projection used in Act I illustrates Kiesler's concept of space between the portions of a composition creating a tension which holds the composition together in a graphic sense and makes its meaning clearer for the viewer.

He created a polarized comparison between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The figures of the underworld are flat and two-dimensional while Helen and the living are made increasingly three-dimensional by special lighting when the occasion is practical, as in Helen's entrance in Act II. (The use of the pedestal on which she poses almost as a piece of classic sculpture gives expression to the satire found in the script.)

The polarity of these images creates visually the tension found in the text which draws the living and the dead together. Life in Helen is drawn toward the immortal, enduring world of Achilles where he cannot grow old and come to the same end as earthly lovers. The flat, two dimensionality of the underworld is attracted to the living world of which Helen is the ultimate example.

I would rather be a slave on earth
To another, himself a slave
and both of us starving,
Than reign king among the dead²⁴

says Achilles and "The life I had forgotten stirs in me."²⁵

The chorus is present somewhere between the world of the living and the dead. They are more three-dimensional in design than the ghosts, but much flatter than the living world. They are a theatrical convention used to provide the required link between worlds. Their possible sharing of the audience space may indicate their use as such, bringing the world of the audience and the world of the play closer together. One of Kiesler's goals was to unite the audience and the production by eliminating or breaking the proscenium plane. The use of the chorus in the audience might have been a device to that end.

Ariadne on Naxos (December 5-8, 1934)

By Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *Ariadne on Naxos* (Juilliard School

Collection, New York Public Library and the catalogue *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 9.

Ariadne on Naxos is divided into two parts, the *Vorspiel* (prelude or foreplay) and the opera itself. The two halves are thematically parallel, the first act providing an explanation of the opera to follow. The initial version of the *Vorspiel* was a play without music, but the final version utilized recitative to more completely unify the structure of the composition. The scene is laid in the home of Maecenas who is a rich and tasteless patron of the arts. Maecenas appears only through the orders of his lieutenant, the *Haushofmeister*. The patron has scheduled an opera and a commedia dell'arte ballet for the same evening. The dancers and the composer of the opera with his music teacher arrive for the festivities and are informed by the *Haushofmeister* that both performances must be completed before nine o'clock because the fireworks display has been scheduled for that time and cannot be changed. Continuing, he tells them that in order to accomplish this end, the ballet and the opera will be performed at the same time. The ballet is to be improvised between the scenes of the opera. The lead dancer, Zerbinetta, willingly and cheerfully accedes to the demand. The young composer submits in a hot tempered spirit of resignation to reality because he has no other acceptable alternative. The two characters are presented as opposite views of the interaction of the artist with the real world from which he derives his living.

Neither of the characters are entirely stereotypes. Zerbinetta seems to have a genuine capacity for deep feeling as she attempts to console and convince the composer of their need to comply with Maecenas's request. However, the composer is not a stubborn aesthetic. Although he has no sense of humor, feels betrayed and misunderstood by the world which forces him to debase his talent to live, and is given to bursts of rage when his idealism is compromised, there is a certain warmth about him which keeps him from being a complete caricature. Rather than rejecting Zerbinetta out of hand, he is, for a time, captivated by her enchanting manner and obvious charms. The act is ended by the exit of the composer who has rescued the control of his ideals from Zerbinetta's temptations.²⁶ The second act contains the composer's opera interspersed with the dancers.

In the composer's opera, Zerbinetta appears as the same dancer she played in the first act, and the figure of the composer with whom she was contrasted is replaced by Ariadne as a symbol of the sensitive idealist. The leading lady is found alone on the desert island of Naxos where she was abandoned by the only true lover she has had, Theseus. She proclaims that she will only love one man in all her life, and because she cannot endure her existence alone, she resolves to die. By willing herself to die she makes her transformation possible. Ariadne sinks into a trance-like state which is disrupted by the entrance of Zerbinetta and the dancers. Zerbinetta con-

siders it silly to think a woman lives to love one man alone and describes the process through which each new man coming into her life is a god who transforms her into a woman who can love again and must surrender to that love. Ariadne does not accept this reasoning. She prays for Hermes to come and carry her to the world of the dead.

Instead, Bacchus arrives and is mistaken for Hermes. Bacchus has recently escaped the captivating love of Circe and is on his guard. He is at first suspicious of Ariadne, but becomes passionately aroused when she wishes to accompany him without making any demands, on the assumption that he is taking her to the land of the dead. She surrenders herself to the inevitability of death, which is parallel to the inevitability of love, and the lovers are symbolically united. The suffering of Ariadne has brought her to the point of surrender which allows her to be transformed or reborn to a fuller understanding of the world.

The composer faces this same kind of transformation; through his sufferings and love with music he will be able to understand the world. The transformation of both the composer and Ariadne, although parallel to the process by which Zerbinetta acquires new lovers, is of greater depth. For Ariadne it is the unity with the cosmos through love, and for the composer through art.

By conceiving his characters in terms of the lowest (Zerbinetta) and the highest (Ariadne-Composer) examples of human beings, Hofmannsthal has created a work that is universal in its meaning and application, for every other individual must fall somewhere on the human scale between these two extremes.²⁷

The critical appraisal of Donald Daviau and George Buelow all but utilizes Kiesler's terminology in summarizing the manner in which the opera creates its effect upon the audience. The author created polarities which through their opposition focus the audience on the relevance of the ideas to their own lives.

Three polarities are created within the text, two of which are given visual treatment in the production design. The first polarity is established by the opposing worlds of true art and false art in a tasteless world.

The world of false art is depicted in the tasteless jumble of Maecenas's home. The ceiling is supported by four stark pillars, one in each corner of the stage; swags of drapery try to soften the effect. Mounted on the downstage pillars are feather-carrying cherubs, not a singular excellent carving but two identical, mass-produced, cultural artifacts. All of the pillars are decorated by candle-like wall sconces topped with shades to cover the bulbs. The shabbiness of these fixtures contrasts with the decorative simplicity of the chandeliers. In contrast to the starkness of the pillars, the furnishings reflect the curvaceous meanderings of art nouveau. The home setting is composed of pieces which cannot be tastefully combined.

The setting for the stage within the stage which was built during Act I, however, presents a unified composition with controlled comparisons (Plate 14). The design uses the simple shapes of the Greek column and capital as a controlling form; the column is repeated three times and the capital five times. These forms are contrasted with square units of the same color. The total composition is contrasted with the natural rock shape resting on the dark colored levels upstage.

The second polarity is between the reaction of the artists to the demands for a simultaneous performance. Zerbinetta willingly allows the debasement of her art without concern, whereas the composer refuses to watch. These extremes serve to establish the relationships between Zerbinetta, Ariadne and the composer in the opera, and were not rendered scenically. The arrangement of the characters did emphasize the third polarity which is the contrast of the ideal and the basely real. The ideal was presented by the highly artificial quality of the Greek costumes worn by Ariadne and Bacchus while the common level of reality was illustrated in the costuming of Zerbinetta and her followers in humorous versions of the commedia dell'arte.²⁸ The playing space emphasized the dichotomy by providing an elevated stage for the Greek mode and restricting the commedia to the stage floor and four curtained entrances under the upper stage. The artificiality of the Ariadne scenes was amplified by the use of symbols such as the lowering of the dove at the end of the performance.²⁹ Though the audience may have laughed at one extreme and marveled at the beauty of the other, the individual members were not to accept either as a position for themselves, but to come to a better understanding of their own position in relation to those extremes.

The setting applied Kiesler's theory that design was the creation of a nucleus of forces through the polarization (contrast) of elements within the design. He also continued his use of projections as a means of communication with the audience: the anguished mental state of Ariadne was conveyed by the projection of the snake-haired Medusa onto the curtain of the stage within the stage; the snakes possibly were meant to have a Freudian connection with the basis of Ariadne's suffering.

In the Pasha's Garden (January 24, 1935)

By John Seymour and Henry Tracy. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *In the Pasha's Garden* (Archives of the Metropolitan Opera Association) and 25 newspaper and periodical sources.

In the Pasha's Garden was a short opera (45 minutes) performed as part of a benefit given by the Metropolitan Opera. The production was the premiere

of the opera and the debut of Helen Jepson with the Metropolitan; it was also the debut of Frederick Kiesler outside of the educational circles which approved of his experimentation.

The opera is a single act recounting of the old plot: wife has lover; husband discovers. Alternate endings are available to produce comedy or tragedy. *In the Pasha's Garden* leaves the outcome in doubt until nearly the very end of the script when a serious turn of events occurs.

The setting was basically a series of curved ramps aided by stairs for sharp turns which spiraled to a circular platform (Plate 15). The back side of the platform, enclosed by a low benched wall, was placed well forward on the stage with the topmost playing area left of center stage.³⁰ A circular hanging suggesting a canopy hung over the platform.³¹ A large trunk provided the only furnishing. Behind the unit was a projection screen 70 feet wide and 40 feet high.³² When the opera begins, three large black and white³³ leaves are projected upon the screen. "They overhang the action vastly," said Kiesler,

and seem to brood above it. Those leaves are threatening, sinister, watchful. But . . . it is not a static decorative setting. The whole movement of the plot is carried on in the movement of the background, the fading out of the microscopic sections of two leaves, in the lighter moments of the lovers' happiness, to their [the leaves] dark retraction during the moments of the Pasha's vengeance.³⁴

In another account Kiesler mentions that the leaves also change in size during the progress of the action.

Helene, the wife, and Etienne, the lover, open the opera backed by a fading picture of the leaves of the garden until Helene starts with fright as she hears someone coming. At this point the leaves must have loomed large and brighter if Kiesler's intentions were logically applied. Helene hides Etienne in a trunk just before Zumbul Agha, the eunuch, arrives. He asks if she is having trouble with the key and offers to help. Because something does not feel right to him, he plans to tell the Pasha. Helene is about to rebuke him when the Pasha enters. He dismisses Agha, who mentions that the trunk might reveal more than he would like to say. His delay, however, angers the Pasha who would like to have dinner in the garden, but there is no table. "There is the chest," offers the departing eunuch.³⁵ Taking the challenge, Helene suggests cushions be used for seats, and so dinner is served. Light talk ensues, and the moon begins to rise. The plot takes a turn from what might still have been resolved in laughter as Helene recounts the tale of Pandora:

And woe is hidden in a certain chest,
Which, woman like, she opens . . .

Troubles sprang like the wind
 From it and seeded all the earth;
 Behind
 Was left but one small waif. . . .
 Hope was its name.³⁶

She excuses herself and when the Pasha would accompany her, she tells him to stay and reminds him that he wants to hear Agha. The Pasha has then made the connection between the trunk, the parable, and the earlier remarks of Agha. He sends his servant Sheban to fetch a shovel.

The Pasha extinguishes the candles, he and the servant bury the chest as nightingales resume their song while the luminous black sky is slowly filled by Mr. Kiesler's enormous telescopic moon. Realistically equipped with mountains, rings and craters and the tale is done.³⁷

The moon began to rise at the point in the text where Helene began to betray her lover and continued to grow in brightness and size until the deed was complete. The moon was estimated to be some 20 feet in diameter by the end of the final scene.³⁸

The kindest critical comment of the setting was offered by Olin Downes when he described it as "imaginative and atmospheric in a considerable degree."³⁹ Most of the reviewers showed a stylistic bias for the traditional painted settings which they deemed more appropriate. Negative comment on the leaf projection ranged from the mild restraint of "just plain silly"⁴⁰ to descriptions recalling "a Magnified clam . . . uncooked tripe,"⁴¹ "a slightly mildewed butterfly climbing a twig the size of a liner's smokestack,"⁴² and "an x-ray of the venous system of a frog."⁴³ Most of the other reviews, though less witty, were no less uncomplimentary. Whether or not this adverse criticism affected Kiesler's possibilities for future work with the Metropolitan is not known, but he never returned to its service.

The setting for *In the Pasha's Garden* is based on Kiesler's concept of settings in continuous motion, reflecting the changing environment of the play. Also evident is the use of the spiral-like unit leading to the circular playing area similar to the space stage of Vienna in 1924. Thrusting the platform so far downstage that members of the press feared for the singer's safety⁴⁴ may have been Kiesler's way of bringing the play closer to the audience. Such a position would also have been advantageous for preventing the light striking the singers from illuminating the projection surface. Kiesler chose a simplification of the design elements called for in the script and emphasized them in an attempt to symbolically communicate the actions taking place on the stage.

Maria Malibran (April 8-11, 1935)

By Robert Bennett and Robert Simon. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *Maria Malibran* (Juilliard School Collection) and the catalogue, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 10.

The Bennett and Simon opera was given its premiere performance at the Juilliard School during 1935 in three acts. The first is set in Vauxhall Gardens, a nightclub for the high society of New York existing about 1825. Maria has come to America as a singer with her father's opera company. He has betrothed her to Francesco Malibran. At the Gardens, Maria meets and falls in love with Philip Cartwright, but having given her word to her father she becomes Maria Malibran. In the second act, about a year later, Maria is to perform at the engagement reception for Philip and Clair Prescott. After she sings from Zingarelli's *Romeo and Juliet*, she and Philip discover they are still in love, largely because he comes to her defense when the guests are shocked by her costume for the performance. In the final act Philip, having left Clair, comes to Maria's apartment. Her husband, in addition to being twice her age, has now taken up gambling and drink so she decides to leave him. But much to Philip's surprise, she does not accept him either. Instead she has arranged for a European tour where she is determined to live permanently. She will rid herself of a husband she does not love and at the same time not disgrace herself and her father.⁴⁵

A series of Kiesler's studies for the designs in Act I and Act II reveal some aspects of his working method in evolving a final product. The first drawing (Plate 16) presents fragments arranged as though seen from the front and top simultaneously. A bluish area stage right shows a formation of tables; the wall all the way upstage is patched with the same color brown which appears in later versions of the setting; gates and low flowered fences are drawn in. The vertical unit on stage left is decorated with a flower bloom; overhead are spherical lamp globes supported on rectangular frameworks lying on different planes. The second drawing (Plate 17) has more solidly defined the stage space. An area for tables remains on stage right; a curved irregularly shaped wall, topped by small globes, fills the upstage right corner of the setting and connects the gate which has been moved from downstage left. A thick wall extends from the gate to downstage left with a shuttered window in the end toward the audience; two tables are provided near the footlights where a single tripod-based circle was located in the earlier drawing; the spherical lights are suspended in rows directly above the stage, each having a single supporting line.

Next Kiesler made a collage using the pages from slick paper magazines. The setting was modified again (Plate 18). Straight, formal lines are

employed. The tables stage right are placed in a straight line. The upstage wall is brick and extends directly across the stage to join a similar wall coming directly downstage; an open arch replaces the gate in the upstage wall. An entrance has been added to the stage left wall and its thickness greatly decreased; these walls are the brown of the first drawing. Buildings are placed behind the upstage wall, and the collage is surrounded with a silhouette foliage border. The lighting globes are more symmetrically arranged. In the final version (Plate 19) the squared angular lines and shapes of the collage are retained. A decorative wire fencing is added to the top of the upstage wall; the archway is finished with the gate that had been deleted in the collage, and the buildings behind the wall are eliminated. The two drawings, the collage and the photograph of the finished setting indicate the process of Kiesler's experimentation; it moved from an assemblage of items that might be included in the environment; arranged them in abstraction as might be typical of some twentieth-century art movements; then moved toward the curved asymmetrical shapes which seem typical of Kiesler's personal drawing style. His personal style seems to have then been submitted to the control of the formal yet superficial quality of the period in which the opera is set, resulting in the rectangular configuration of the space and the scenic units. The process ended with very few changes in the final setting. From his collage (the third version) to the completed set only the gate from the original assemblage was returned, while the somewhat distracting buildings were eliminated.

The finished setting did not attempt to depict the Vauxhall Gardens with historical accuracy. Rather the design presented an environment having the feeling of the formality, facades, and superficial sophistication of the class who frequented the club. The setting was imbued with the texture of the collage.

The design for Act II tried to achieve the same quality and reflected a way of living rather than historical accuracy. The reception for Philip and Clair was staged in a room with walls that swept grandly in curves from the curtain line upstage to offstage left. The upcenter entrance kept its dominant position and yet appears to be placed in the side wall of the room. Authenticity was not lacking in some ways; the properties, including the piano and chandeliers were appropriate for the period as was the wallpaper pattern.⁴⁶ The entire decor was rendered in blue and white.⁴⁷

The final act was performed in Maria's room which was described as having "imagination, color, charm and a touch of surprise."⁴⁸ Although apparently a standard box set, the ceiling was more severely angled than was conventional. This made the setting appear deeper than it actually was. The floor space was divided into various levels which were edged with lightweight railings. The railing would have served to restrict the movement of the singers, possibly indicating the restricted patterns of the lives of the

characters. The light color of the room and the lively tree and leaf pattern on the wallpaper were juxtaposed with the traditional pictures displayed to provide contrast. The room reflected the complexity of Maria's life: lively enough to love but restricted by family traditions and the proper channels of society. Taken in totality, the settings display a much subtler tuning of the design to the tune of the play than the stark symbolism of Kiesler's three earlier productions.

Dido and Aeneas (March 29-31, 1939)

By Henry Purcell and Nahum Tate. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by a newspaper article entitled "Juilliard School Gives Old Opera," dated March 30, 1939, found in Kiesler's scrapbook 127/628.

The article refers to the design as fresh and evocative. A second article found the scene in the wood to be "too urban . . . for the dramatic context." This would have been Act I, scene ii of the text. The setting for Act II, "the witches' conference was the most effective. . . . The lighting was ably handled."⁴⁹ No visual evidence of the production has been located, and the critical commentary offers little insight into the nature of the design.

The Tales of Hoffmann (December 8-12, 1939)

By Jacques Offenbach and Jules Barbier. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *The Tales of Hoffmann* (Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library) and the catalogue, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 12.

The Tales of Hoffmann is presented in a prologue, three acts and an epilogue. The prologue is set in Luther's inn next to the opera house. During the act break, the chorus of young men enter for a drink. Hoffmann and his companion Nicklausse arrive and the young men ask him for a story. (The Hoffmann of the opera is actually Ernest Theodor Wilhelm Hoffmann, an author, lawyer, composer and literary critic who wrote the stories upon which the operas is based.)⁵⁰ He obliges them by telling the stories of his three great lovers. The first act is the story of Hoffmann's love affair with Olympia. Hoffmann arrives at the home of Spalanzani under the pretext of studying to be a doctor; actually he is attempting to win the affections of Olympia with whom he has fallen in love at first glimpse through a window. When the doctor leaves for a moment to prepare for other guests, Hoffmann peeks through curtains to see Olympia; he believes her to be asleep. Nicklausse, having arrived and warned Hoffmann that he should know the girl better before falling in love, sings of his own love for a doll-like girl of

perfect beauty some years before. Coppelius, Spalanzani's accomplice, enters and from his bag of tricks provides Hoffmann with a pair of glasses which will make his vision of beauty even clearer. Spalanzani sends Coppelius away with a bank draft to keep him quiet about his part in their operation. The guests arrive and Olympia sings for them; then they go off to dinner leaving Hoffmann alone with his love. When he touches her hand she begins to move about erratically. He catches her and they begin to dance faster and faster until Spalanzani stops Olympia, and Hoffmann falls exhausted to the sofa as Olympia is taken to her room. The loud noise of a machine breaking and springs popping is heard; removing his glasses, Hoffmann sees his love was a mechanical doll. Because the bank draft had been valueless, Coppelius returned and smashed the doll. To the laughter of the chorus at Hoffmann's love for a mere doll, the curtain falls.

The second act finds Hoffmann and Nicklausse at a gaming house in Venice where Nicklausse warns Hoffmann about the charms of the courtesan, Giulietta. The hero says he could not fall in love with such a woman. Dapertutto, the man of evil intent, appears and convinces Giulietta to capture Hoffmann's soul (his reflection) and give it to him. At first she is unwilling but complies when taunted that Hoffmann considers himself invulnerable to her charms. Of course, he proves not to be, and says he will give up his reflection when they meet in her apartment. First he must acquire the key to the suite from her present lover, Schlemil. They duel and Hoffmann, armed with Dapertutto's sword, wins. Giulietta meanwhile is seen running off with a new lover; Dapertutto has caused Schlemil's death as he planned, and though he has not acquired Hoffmann's soul as well, he has made a fool of him. Nicklausse takes Hoffmann away before the police arrive on the scene.

In the final act Hoffmann returns after a year's absence to his love Antonia. Her father does not wish her to sing because she is ill, and the strain may cause her death as it caused her mother's who had the same disease but refused his advice. Hoffmann fears she loves music more than she loves him. At this point the evil character of Dr. Miracle appears. Antonia's father fears him for he feels he provoked the death of his wife. Miracle is routed from the house and again the father receives his daughter's promise that she will not sing, but Miracle returns magically to the scene and aided by the entreaties of her mother's singing portrait, induces Antonia to perform, which naturally brings about her death. The act ends with the lament of Hoffmann and the father.

The epilogue returns the scene to the tavern where all cheer Hoffmann on his excellent stories, and Hoffmann is left alone. One of the chorus members points out Hoffmann to Nicklausse: "Full to the brim," referring to Hoffmann's state of inebriation and implying he has been filled to the brim with love as well as drink.⁵¹

The episodes of love which have destroyed Hoffmann are like fantasies, dreams in which the same characters appear again and again. The composer suggests that the three women be played by the same soprano⁵² and the evil geniuses of Coppélius, Dapertutto and Miracle be enacted by the same baritone.⁵³ Hoffmann becomes a symbol of all men, and his loves can be interpreted as archetypal images of women. The first love is perfect in beauty and innocence; the second is an irresistible seductress; and the last, possessing the human warmth the others lack, is a goddess. Each of these women has an effect upon man. The first shatters his illusions of surface beauty and youthful innocence for she is mechanical without depth. The second, because of his self-centered desire for power over men, makes him a fool. The last one ruins man for loving any other; she is the woman on the pedestal never to be captured in soul; she is love and beauty incarnate, and not to be owned. For the composer, she may well be equivalent with the muse of song.

The evil genius or satanic figure manipulates women to catch man's soul. It is Coppélius who sells Hoffmann the glasses in Act I and suggests that Spalanzani marry Olympia to Hoffmann. Hoffmann would then be snared forever in the devil's trap of illusion. Dapertutto in a more blatantly stated fashion sets Giulietta to capture Hoffmann's reflection (soul) for him. Dr. Miracle as the final image of evil, even more magical than the others, having failed at capturing the soul of Hoffmann, destroys the earthly image of the woman who is the poet's romantic ideal. Though not the possessor of Hoffmann's soul, the evil figure has had his revenge. The struggle of evil to use love to control men is submerged beneath the sometimes jovial circumstances of three simple stories, just as Hoffmann's real pain is hidden from the chorus' view by his drunken state. Though the trappings change, the opera is concerned with a single struggle using the figures of Hoffmann, his loves and the evil nemesis as recurring parties to the conflict.

Kiesler created a single changeable environment for Hoffmann's singular struggle. Up-center was a platform unit, three steps high, behind which a three-dimensional arch was placed. Partial walls slanted inward toward the central arch on both sides of the stage. The incidental furnishings were changed with each act to reflect a change of circumstance within the same environment. Different designs were inserted into the arch for each act as well.

For the prologue, a table, benches, and stools of plain design were arranged upstage with a panel painted with stacked kegs inside the arch. This was replaced by wire-backed chairs, a wooden sofa and chair painted in a flower motif, and a painted curtain which opened in the center to allow for entrances for the first act.

During the second act, the arch was completely opened, revealing two pillars and the waters of the grand canal with a swagged drapery flown in

upstage of the wall units. The furnishings were limited to a curvaceous lounge and two padded stools. For the final act the four stuffed chairs and a sofa provided the seating while a small piano and bench were placed in front of the platformed area and toward stage left. A painted panel with the portrait of Antonia's mother filled the arch (Plate 20). The wall unit varied in decoration with each act as well: In Act I, heads and limbs were placed on shelves and hung on the walls but later removed and pictures in gilded frames installed; for the last act, parts of violins and other stringed instruments were hung on the walls; in addition a large, stylized violin neck was hung behind strings stretched from the floor to ceiling.

The violin parts are specified in the script by Offenbach⁵⁴ and must have had symbolic meaning for him, perhaps in clearly associating the art of music with the true and ideal love portrayed in the text. The designer amplified the symbolic meaning by increasing the size, number and prominence of the violin parts requested by the author. Kiesler also found in the text the requirement for lighting in the first scene with candles,⁵⁵ and just as he amplified the significance of the violins hanging on the wall to clarify the author's intention, he similarly increased and clarified the purpose of the candlelight.

Since candlelight is flattering, it aids the illusion of beauty which may hide a less than becoming bone structure. The candles are used in both the first and second acts in which Hoffmann is deluded by the illusions of the shallow beauty of the doll and the compelling charms of the courtesan. During the third act, the candles are entirely missing. Clearly this scene is different from the previous scenes which were linked by the use of the candle device, just as the interpretation of the text indicated. The epilogue returns to the scene of the inn utilizing the same scenery as that of the prologue.

The utilization of a single unit which changes, such as the arch in this opera design, is typical of Kiesler's concern for tools which can perform several functions. More important, however, is the creation of a single environment in which the art work is displayed. The settings for each act and the action of the opera are contained within a single controlling environment. The environment provides a single visual context just as the conflict in the text provides a single thematic context for each of the three tales of Hoffmann.

The Curious Women (April 17-20, 1940)

By Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari and Luigi Sugana. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *The Curious Women* (Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library) and the catalogue, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 13.

The opera is based on a play by Carlo Goldoni. The plot is simple and makes use of some commedia characters as well as those created by Goldoni. Two matrons and two maids of Venice are intrigued by the secret happenings in a club that is restricted to men. After preparing secret plans, the curious ladies breach the defenses of the club and discover that the gentlemen are doing nothing more than having a quiet dinner. The men goodheartedly forgive the ladies' trespass and invite them to share dinner. The meal turns into a dinner dance, and the final curtain descends on the minuet.⁵⁶

Primarily, the settings illustrate Kiesler's ability to adequately design in a more decorative manner than was his custom. The ground plan demonstrates his ability to work with scenery predominantly rigged for flying as opposed to the emphasis previously given to three-dimensional units. As a number of sketches are available, a comparison to the actual settings can easily be made.

A false proscenium of obviously painted molding and drapes provides a frame for all of the settings. A door is placed in a vertical member of the false proscenium on both sides of the stage.

Act I scene i is set in the club (Plate 21). The gentlemen sit playing cards and having a pleasant drink. These two major activities of the organization are symbolized by the large portraits over the three central doors leading to the dining room. The flat scenery is painted to resemble the line of the eighteenth century moldings but not their three-dimensional richness. The second scene of the act is set in the house of Ottavio. The curvaceous background displays the same characteristics evident in the club room. Similarly, the furniture used by the performers, and the properties set about the room are three dimensional—real as opposed to painted objects. Perhaps the use of a given unit determined whether it should appear as real or painted.

The second act also has two scenes, those of Lelio's house and Ottavio's dining room. The edges of Lelio's room are defined by the tasseled ropes on either side of the stage. The room is considerably more vertical in design than other sets. The integration of painted and real objects is clearly evidenced in the wardrobe door; the shelf and the walking stick hanging beneath it are readily usable in the course of the action, but the coat painted upstage of them is not to be used, even though Lelio sits in his shirt sleeves. This technique makes the audience feel that all of the items that should be present in the scene are there and yet allows for the minimum number of actual properties to be moved during a scene shift. Only a drawing is available for Ottavio's dining room. Three paintings dominate the walls; two tables, one on a platform upstage center, are provided for the action.

The final act occurs on a street in Venice and returns to the club. The street scene is presented by painted drops, one of the water and the others of

the colonade. A platform and wide central stairs provide a raised playing space upstage. The club room is the same as in Act I with the exception that the doors to the dining room have been opened.

The use of the two-dimensional quality of the painting may well reflect Kiesler's interpretation of the opera as concerned with surface values. The simplicity of the decoration must be noted: the convolutions of the molding and their shadowing show a great deal of restraint. In any case hardly fewer lines could be used to render the decorative elements, but the overall feeling of baroque busyness is still maintained. This is especially true of the club and Ottavio's house.

A study of the ground plan indicates that only the false proscenium, the cyclorama and a single midstage masking piece were used throughout the production. This suggests that the playing space was shallower than might be guessed from the ground plan which is not drawn to scale, because given a depth of 20 to 30 feet, a single side masking piece would not hide the wing areas unless the drops for each scene were hung well downstage. Possibly the action of the play was staged without a great deal of depth in the blocking pattern. In this way the blocking and the painting of the scenery would both amplify the same interpretation of the script.

Both of the Act I scenes were executed as single units, and both must have been structurally reinforced to strengthen the functional portions of the units. The club room is shown to have two practical doors in the ground plan, although the final setting indicated the presence of three such units. The Ottavio setting utilized both a practical door and window.

Lelio's house in Act II was provided by a single drop as was Ottavio's dining room. Act III settings apparently encompassed more of the stage space. The drop for the street scene was hung in three parts, the stage left portion slightly farther downstage than the portion on stage right, with the third located behind the platform and on stage left. These units must have utilized additional support for the columns in order to keep them rigidly in place during the action. A painted water drop was used just downstage of the cyclorama. In front of this drop, the ground plan indicates a ship which might have been drawn across the stage using the platform downstage to mask the mechanism. A drop is used to back the open doors of the club room, with the dinner table placed between the drape and the club drop.

A comparison of the drawings Kiesler made for the settings with the actual settings indicates varying degrees of exactitude in the actual construction of the setting. The drawing of Lelio's house was fairly close to the final setting while the Club room showed significant differences from the finished product. There is a similar vagueness concerning Ottavio's Act I, scene i room. Most interesting is the series of drawings for the street scene. Each drawing in the series of four is more complex than the previous one. This indicates that Kiesler began with a single concept and expanded and

elaborated upon it until he achieved the desired result. Interestingly, the final drawing for the scene appears far more complicated than the actual setting used in the opera.

The Magic Flute (December 11-14, 1940)

By W. A. Mozart and Emanuel Schikaneder. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program of *The Magic Flute* (Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library) and the catalogue, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 13.

Described as a masonic opera, *The Magic Flute* extolls the virtues of Freemasonry and those who are qualified to become members of the brotherhood. The entire text has been minutely analyzed by critics for symbolic meanings and presented in sums of pages greater than the text the opera itself encompasses. A detailed recounting of such analyses would do little to enhance the understanding of Kiesler's designs. Limited references to such analyses, however, are useful in illustrating that Kiesler was familiar with the intent of the opera and with the symbolic activities through which the characters related to the institution of Freemasonry.

Traditionally the opera was presented with a multitude of scene changes, but Kiesler chose to stage the opera in a single unit setting. Regardless of the activity which the actors performed, the symbols of the conflict were always before the audience. Changes in the scene were provided by means of inserting a painting which symbolized the place and/or its meaning into a pillared facade on center stage.

The basic unit setting for the opera (Plate 22) consisted of a platform across the stage about two feet in height. A two-sided stair unit was centered on the platform to provide access to the upper level from the stage floor. Stair units on either side of the stage rose to a height of four feet and led to offstage escape units.

On the platform center stage was a pillared structure. Within the framework of the pillars and the lintel they supported was a device for scene-changing. It was modeled on the scene roller of the nineteenth century. The machine also provided a mechanism for stretching the canvas after it was in place to prevent sagging of the material, especially for paintings with portions removed for entrances.⁵⁷ Kiesler's construction placed a feed roller on the bottom and a takeup roller on the top. Various scenes or symbols were painted on a long strip of scenic canvas in the order of their appearance in the production. The canvas was attached to the bottom roller with the final scene closest to the roller. The other end of the canvas with the first scene to be shown was attached to the top roller. By turning a crank on the side of the machine each subsequent scene was moved from the bottom roll

into place for the scene in which it was used and then deposited on the top roller as the next scene came into view. The large number of scenes required by the opera could be presented with little if any delay and without any change in the structure of the basic unit.

The top of the scene-changing machine was graced by two statues and a pediment with a cloth banner displaying the star of the order and the clasped hands of brotherhood. Behind the platform and to the extreme stage right was what appears to be the back side of the secret altar inside the temple. A clear vase of water was placed on one corner of the altar alluding to the symbolic element of water in the rituals and the trial by water undergone by the initiates in the opera. The area between the scene-changer and the temple was used for the projection of flames as required in the script. The entire area from the stage left side of the scene-changer to the wings was filled with the scenery of the rocky places prescribed for several scenes and associated with the Queen of Night.

The entire stage picture was enclosed by a partial false proscenium with a pediment containing the all-seeing eye of the pyramid joined to the proscenium arch of the theatre. A swag of drapery was used, just in front of the stair units leading off stage right and left, to complete the picture.

As Act I opens, Prince Tamino enters pursued by a serpent. Kiesler staged the scene with the Prince in front of a drape that was transparent when lighted from the back side. The huge shape of the scaled creature was projected from upstage onto the back side of the scrim. When the Prince faints, three of the women of the Queen of Night appear behind the drop and slay the serpent with their silver javelins. Tamino is a literary substitute for Joseph II of Austria who was a known sympathizer with the Freemasons, while the Queen of Night represents the person of his mother, Maria Theresia, who staunchly opposed the lodges.⁵⁸ The serpent was a symbol of the Masonic organization which was trying to awaken Tamino to his calling as a member.⁵⁹ The silver javelins represented women who are considered incapable of assuming the mantel of membership except through union with a male of the order.⁶⁰

When Tamino awakes and the scrim is removed, he meets the bird-catcher, Papageno, who is ordered to aid the Prince in rescuing the daughter of the Queen of Night. The Prince, having been presented with a miniature portrait of the girl, has fallen in love with her. The scene changes from the rocky place to the design for the entrance of the Queen of Night. The center portion of the canvas was a cut out. During the scene dark clouds moved across the cyclorama.⁶¹ After the Queen promises Tamino the hand of her daughter and the attendants have presented him with the Magic Flute, the scene shifts to an interior where Pamina, the Queen's daughter, is brought after her attempted escape.

Her captor is Monostatos, a traitor to the order in the secret service of

the Queen. Papageno finds her and leads her off to find his master. The scene rolls to reveal the Temples of Reason, Wisdom and Nature. Tamino is denied entry because he has not proven himself worthy but is told that Pamina lives; he exits to find her and the pursued Papageno and Pamina enter. Shortly Sarastro arrives with his retinue. Even more quickly Monostatos and Tamino enter in search of Pamina. In his wisdom Sarastro chides Monostatos for his behavior and welcomes the prince to the temple to bring an end to Act I.

By this time the Prince has realized that the Queen of Night must have been untruthful to him for Sarastro holds the keys of wisdom and in fact has not harmed Pamina at all but is protecting her from her mother who is attempting to use her capture to bring about the downfall of the order. As a chosen seeker of Wisdom, Tamino undertakes initiation accompanied, of course, by Papageno. Papageno is not a seeker of wisdom and is not chosen; he wants only a wife and three meals a day. Pamina also goes through the initiation process, but it is only her union with Tamino which allows her to succeed. Each character in turn is challenged by Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Tamino and Pamina triumph, and Papageno fails, yet is rewarded for his efforts with a wife, Papagena.

The text of the opera places the beginning of Act II in a wood. Kiesler apparently changed this locale to inside the temple in front of the symbol of the order.⁶² This seems to clarify the meaning of the scene as it presents a meeting place of the priests in which they agree to have Tamino attempt the trials to become a member. The second scene then is in a court or vault where the priest gives the initiates their instruction. The final scene of Act II is played before a painting of a lake in the garden. Pamina's trials begin in this scene when she refuses the advances of Monostatos who is the symbol of earth which corrupts the spirit. Sarastro saves her and banishes her assailant.

A quickened pace characterized the action of Act III which is complicated by the required number of scene changes. The proceedings begin in another of the testing chambers where Tamino and Papageno undergo further trials. During the test of fire, flames were projected in the space between the temple structure stage right and the scene-changing device center. The following scene takes place in another garden and provides another test for Pamina. The setting here may have been symbolic rather than simply depicting a garden. The scene opens with three spirits singing.

Soon speeds the morning light proclaiming
The sunshine's golden way.
This youth the powers of darkness defaming,
Shall see the light of day.⁶³

The design symbolically treats the withdrawal of night upward with the coming of the sunrise from the bottom of the scenic roller. No other setting is

known for the scene. The scene that follows apparently did not require a different painting in Kiesler's scheme. No visual evidence has been discovered for a picture which corresponds with the scene. The text describes the area as a rocky place. Very likely the scene, which is extremely short, could have been staged in front of the rocky area stage left that was a permanent part of the set. Perhaps the reason the rocks were present throughout was more than symbolic. Besides representing the forces of the Queen of Night, they provided a convenient place identification for all rocky area scenes. The playing area associated with the rocks comprised little more than one-third of the stage breadth, adequate for the staging of three and four actor scenes. With a rock painting installed in the scene-changer, as for the entrance of the Queen of Night, more than half the stage could be defined as the rocky area. The scenic unit or ground row upon which the rocks, stage left, were painted is sufficiently upstage as to be rendered less dominant by the use of light in scenes where they were not required. At the same time, their symbolic impact would still have been present. During a short scene Tamino and Pamina are reunited and must pass the test of fire. Staging the scene on the platform in front of the rocks would have allowed them to pass behind the scene-changing device and come forth on the other side through the flames which could be projected on the cyclorama just as they were in Papageno's encounter with the test by fire earlier in the act.

Having transcended the flames, they could appear again in front of the scene-changer which now contained one of two paintings. Either a new picture was inserted at this point, illustrating the temple as required by the text, or the symbol of the rising sun displacing night was still in place. Kiesler does not indicate the use of a new setting and evidence has not been found to indicate its existence.⁶⁴ The text indicates that the sun symbol may still have been present or have been rolled higher to indicate a further dislodgement of the power of night.

O Gods, what ecstasy divine!
 On us the smiles of Isis shine!
 Rejoice! The victory is gained!
 The journey's end you have attained!
 On you the smiles of Isis shine!
 Come enter in the temple's shrine!⁶⁵

These lines form the content of the entire scene and were not damaged by not having been sung within view of the temple. In fact they would have been enhanced by the movement of the sun from the bottom of the frame to the top as previously conjectured.

While the lovers are reunited, Papageno has been an utter failure, though frankly he is not much disturbed that he has not become a member of the order. He leaves the temple and is found in a garden. Kiesler has

presented this scene as a wood instead. Although a wood was called for at the beginning of Act II, the painting presented as the wood by Kiesler does not agree with the content required for the opening of Act II. Moreover, he substituted a temple interior for the required setting. Kiesler's wood does not seem appropriate for any other scene as described in the text. The painting presents a forest of trees and a large bird perched on a limb. Perhaps the bird symbolizes the coming to rest of the Papageno theme of the plot. Papageno is the birdman and traditionally is costumed in feathers; he made his living by bird catching before he met the Prince, and his home was in the forest. All of these considerations indicate that Kiesler's wood scene was appropriate for this moment in the script.

After Papageno meets his bride in the wood, another line of development in the plot is concluded. The Queen of Night, her servant Monostatos, and the three ladies who saved the Prince in Act I enter on their way to the temple to destroy the order. That the Queen has promised Monostatos her daughter is confirmation of her evil disposition. There is no evidence that the scene-changer presented a new painting for this scene. It might well have been performed on the platform in front of the rocky area upstage left as were other scenes specifying the rock environ. Accompanied by thunder and lightning, the wicked ones sink into the earth. Whether this effect was accomplished for the Juilliard production is not known. With the forces of darkness defeated, Sarastro and the lovers appear in front of the scene-changer which then presented the "Portal of Fire and Water".⁶⁶ The symbol of darkness was to the left and the symbol of light to the right of the center cutout which provided for the entrance of Sarastro.

To clarify the characters in the opera, Kiesler discarded the masquerade costumes that were traditionally used. The Prince, who supposedly was of Oriental birth, wore the eighteenth-century clothes of an aristocratic gentleman rather than conventional Oriental armor. The Priest, Sarastro, named for the leader of an eastern cult, Zoroaster, likewise wore eighteenth-century garb with his masonic vestments placed over them. The Queen of Night was similarly de-allegorized. The only characters remaining in strange clothing were the birdman and his wife.⁶⁷

Kiesler's design for *The Magic Flute* created a single environment for the conflict of the play. The conflict was illustrated by the polarization (contrasting) of the symbols of Freemasonry and the Queen of Night. The design attempted to clarify the allegory of the composer and librettist by simplifying the scene changes and the costuming. The settings, though they reflected different locales, presented them in such a way as to deemphasize the change itself and make the scene meaningful in the context of the rituals being performed, thereby communicating which forces were being symbolically represented at a given moment. The simplification of the costume plot made evident the contention that the persons on the stage were all part of the

same culture and had assumed new names or disguises for the purpose of the play. The designer continued to utilize projected effects in this production and a single setting for several different uses.

The Barber of Seville (February 26-March 1, 1941)

By Gioacchino Rossini. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *The Barber of Seville* (Juilliard School Collection, New York Public Library).

The performance program lists Kiesler as the scenic director; no other person was mentioned in connection with the design of the setting. As Kiesler scrupulously credited his students when they designed a production, it is reasonable to assume Kiesler designed the setting. No visual evidence of the production has been located.

Iphigenia in Tauris (1942)⁶⁸

By C. W. Gluck and François Guillard. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler on the basis of a signed and titled drawing found in the artist's papers.

The opera in four acts retells the myth of Iphigenia, the daughter Agamemnon sacrificed to bring fair winds for his fleet, but who was saved by Diana and transported to Tauris where she became a priestess in the temple of the goddess. Orestes and Pylade arrived on the scene pursued by the Furies. The two dedicated friends are taken to the temple for sacrifice. Orestes tells his sister, Iphigenia, of the murder and revenge of Agamemnon, but they do not recognize each other. Iphigenia attempts to save the stranger she pities by sending him with a letter to her sister Electra; King Thoas, however, demands the sacrifice. Just as the ceremony reaches a climax, Pylade enters at the head of a Greek rescue party, Thoas is killed, and Orestes and Iphigenia are reunited as brother and sister. Diana herself pardons Orestes to remove the curse that has followed him to Tauris.⁶⁹

The drawing presents the atrium of a temple as required by the first act of the text. A simply heavy pediment is supported by two sturdy columns. A wall stretches across the stage behind the temple and is broken near center stage; a darker angularly broken rock intrudes through the crack and slightly over the top of the wall. From the surface a plant-shaped figure rises. The intrusion is not called for in the script, and its use and meaning remain with the scenic designer (Plate 23).

The Mother (December 9, 1942)

By Joseph Wood and Hurd Hatfield. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by information on the reverse side of photographs discovered in the Juilliard School Collection of the New York Public Library.

The opera was premiered by the Juilliard School in December of 1942.⁷⁰ It is a one-act script in two scenes. Copies of the libretto are in short supply, and the work has not been accepted in standard repertoires and/or anthologized. All the known information concerning the script and the production is limited to the evidence found in the Juilliard Collection.

The first scene of the opera is presented against a backdrop of a large tree with its shadow painted on the stage right half and the interior of a building on the stage left portion. A flowing cover, perhaps snow, envelops the roof. On the wall a clock indicates eleven o'clock as the hour. The mother and the crib are situated on a platform directly in front of the painted building while another smaller platform is located at stage right. The second scene takes place in a rocky area and is rendered three dimensionally. A drop is used upstage of the rock units. Two large formations are present; the larger of the two is stage right, the other at center stage. During this scene sunrise occurs. Somewhat later the scene is presented as the garden of death, and the design features fantasy shapes unpleasant to behold (Plate 24). During this time Kiesler was associated with the Surrealists, and it is not unlikely that they influenced the character of the drop. However, such shapes are not present in Kiesler's earlier or later work. He may have been experimenting with the ideas of another art movement as he did during the 1920s. More likely than not, the drop was painted as opposed to being projected as there does not appear to be enough room between the rock units and the drops to allow a shadow projector to spread an image to the size required.

Solomon and Balkis (February 9-12, 1943)

By Randell Thompson and Rudyard Kipling. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by information on the reverse side of photographs found in the Juilliard School Collection of the New York Public Library and in "Settings for Three New American Operas" published in *Modern Music*, XX, No. 5 (March-April, 1943), p. 180.

The scene of this one-act opera was designed by Kiesler practically to the exact specifications the composer incorporated in the text (Plate 25).

The scene is high noon in the garden of Solomon's palace. Painted warm yellow on the backdrop or on connecting screens, the palace is at the center with a center door hung with closed curtains and approached by steps. Downstage right: a large camphor tree shading a massive low backed throne. Downstage left: a cluster of tall irises and red lilies and spotted bamboo.⁷¹

Whether the color of the backdrop was yellow or not is unknown. The stair unit downstage left was an addition beyond the items called for in the text, and the designer also eliminated the door closed with curtains. The door directly upstage center was painted into the drop. The only technical requirement was that the drop be flown out and back in on cue during the performance. Either a drop or projection would have worked well for the required disappearance of the palace, but for practical reasons the drop was most probably used in this instance. The photograph of the setting shows Solomon and Balkis stage right, and the butterfly, stage left, on the stairs, when the wife returns from inspecting the palace which the butterfly has just re-materialized with a stamp of his foot. The drawing used in the *Modern Music* magazine shows the general outline of the setting as rendered in broad heavy strokes. Kiesler seems to have taken great care in working with the authors' intents concerning the setting, as previously mentioned in the *Tales of Hoffmann*. When he does alter the scene significantly, as he does upon occasion in *The Magic Flute*, the intent of the scene is made clearer by his action. *Solomon and Balkis*, however, may be the opera in which Kiesler most closely followed the composer's wishes.

Orpheus and Eurydice (Spring, 1943 or 1941)

By C. W. Gluck and Raniero da Calzabigi. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by notes on a photograph found in the Juilliard School collection of the New York Public Library.

The dating of the production is tentative as no evidence has been found to specify the performance dates. Mrs. Kiesler dates the production as 1941. The practice of the Juilliard School was to produce three major operatic performances each season. During the 1942-43 season, *The Mother* was produced in December of 1942, *Solomon and Balkis* in February of 1943, leaving only the spring date, usually in April, for the production of *Orpheus*.

The setting pictured in the Juilliard School Collection is for the Elysian Fields where scenes ii through v in Act II take place (Plate 26). The two central figures of Euridice and Orpheus are surrounded by the chorus of the Blest. Interestingly the same setting could have been used with some modification or selective lighting to provide the environment for other scenes. Whether there were other settings is not clear. The large opening doors directly under the figures could have served as the gates of Euridice's

tomb (Act I) with incidentals changed regarding the pillars and backdrop. With lights dimmed and limited in their coverage of the stage space, the same gates could have been the gates of the underworld for Act II, scene i. During the ballet entitled "Dance of the Furies," "Orpheus enters the Underworld. Towards the end of the dance, the Furies and Monsters disappear."⁷² At this point the lights could have dimmed out and incidental aspects of the environment have been changed during the music bridge in order to reveal the scene shown in the Juilliard photograph. Orpheus could then have entered through the same gates by which he made his exit. At the end of the scene, Orpheus can lead Euridice from the land of the Blest via this same exit. The following act could have been played on the stage floor in restricted light as it is described as a dark vault.

The gods allow Orpheus to traverse the underworld and bring Euridice back to the world of the living only if he promises not to look upon her face until their return; he also must not tell Euridice of the arrangement. She, not understanding the plan, convinces him to look at her, and she dies. Orpheus then is about to kill himself when the goddess of love wrests the dagger from his hand and rewards the lovers' faithfulness. They are taken "to the brighter spheres above."⁷³ At this point the entire stage could have been lighted, revealing the basic unit again, perhaps with some rearrangement of columns, etc. to represent the Temple of Love for the final scene of the opera as specified in the text.

This multiple usage of a single setting is consistent with Kiesler's corollary, but its application to the setting of Orpheus is largely speculative. Although based on the potentials existing within the design and the script, this discussion cannot be accepted as solid evidence of the principle's relevancy to the design. However, the possibility of this pattern of employment does exist.

The Old Maid and The Thief (1944)

By Gian-Carlo Menotti. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler on the basis of notes mentioning the work.

In his notes, Kiesler describes the setting as a "decor for travelling."⁷⁴ He does not describe the design, and no drawings have been discovered.

Fashions of the Times (October 24-27, 1944)

The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by an article entitled "Fashions of Times to Excel '43 Show" in *The New York Times* for October 15, 1944.

The design for *Fashions of the Times*, like *The Mother*, has not been previously attributed to Kiesler. *The New York Times* reported that the

revue would "include eight eye-filling sets designed by Frederick Kiesler."⁷⁵ The article also discussed the subject matter of the presentation and some information concerning the setting.

Other questions are answered in the course of the colorful show. What is it that has made fashion the first industry in New York? What will come out of the test tube for tomorrow?

A verbal tribute will be paid to the actual workers in the apparel trade—the cutters, patternmakers, sewers, pressers, finishers and dyers, without whose skill and good will the industry could not exist. . . .

Throughout the show various props will convey symbolically the weight of the enormous industry that fashion is: lamb's wool, bales for cotton, and test tubes for man-made inventions.

The show is dotted with special features. . . . One scene shows woman's eternal quest for color. . . . In a scene devoted to man-made fabrics set against a realistic background designers will be contributed by New York's couture.⁷⁶

Among Kiesler's personal papers a number of designs bearing his name and union stamp accompanied by the design number 63 were found. The color renderings did not indicate the title of the production but the content of the drawings is comparable to the description of the sets for *Fashions of the Times*. As the text of *Fashions* is not available, it has been impossible to construct a sequence for the series of drawings. One rendering illustrates a sewing room filled with machines and their operators. The stage left side of the rendering is black and the stage right side is in grey tones. Material under the sewing tables is a greyed blue. In front of the stage left curtain a completed garment appears in brown, black and deep blue. This may be the setting for the tribute paid to fashion workers.

The scene concerning the wool industry may have utilized two drops as a background. One drawing presents a brownish facade with two doors, one located on either side. Through the door various colored sheep pass to be shorn. Centered on the building is a turret which contains the research laboratories. The turret is topped with a flag and pair of shearing scissors and four differently colored columns rising from the top of the structure. Another drawing is presented as an overlay for the first. The door stage right is retained and the turret is replaced by the sight of a rocky stairway leading to what might be a display area under a domed roof supported by three columns. A flag and scissors are displayed as in the previous drawing.

The test tubes for man-made materials are found in Plate 27. The center test tube is larger than the others and appears to contain raw materials. Two small tubes and the two intermediate sized tubes to stage left contain models wearing finished fashions. The small tube on stage right apparently is still in the process of creating a new fashion. Each tube is topped by a puff of smoke

and convergent lines which may indicate chemical activity. The scene is set against a green background.

Woman's search for color may be illustrated in a drawing which shows three or more figures linked by a single piece of material crossing the vast open space studded with white columns. The center staircase provides access to the forestage. The configuration would have allowed for the display of 22 designs especially created for the scenes.⁷⁷ The platforming is brown, and the background shades from light blue at the top of the platform to a dark blue at the top of the rendering.

The remaining three drawings of the design 63 series provide settings for: (1) a shooting gallery with fashion drawings as targets; (2) what appears to be a fashion salon with seating stage right and an entrance up center stage; and (3) what might be a hotel lobby. None of these appear to be the realistic background referred to in the *Times* article. The shooting gallery is rendered in black, browns and shades of blue green. The salon is warm in tones of beige, brown and yellow with accents of blue and green. The background is a deep blue-green. The final setting is placed against black and is offered in muted greys and browns. A large entrance way is located in the center of the picture with an elevator door to stage left and a desk area with mailboxes, cashier, switchboard operators and desk clerk indicated.

Where possible, Kiesler has used blatant symbols to convey the meaning of the setting. Most of the settings appear to be intended as three-dimensional constructions. While some of the scenes appear to be obviously theatrical in presentation, the hotel lobby suggests Kiesler's ability to present realistic detail when he chose to do so. The varied styles of the settings are unified through the repeated use of the same and related colors.

Der Freischütz (December 14, 1946)

By Carl Maria von Weber and Friedrich Kind. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler in the article " 'Der Freischütz' Offered by Students at Juilliard" in *The New York Herald Tribune*, December 13, 1946.

One critic has called *Der Freischütz* the most German of the German operas. The book and music reflect the height of the romantic movement in Germany.⁷⁸ The story is set in the mid-seventeenth century, and the locale is the forest surrounding the estate of Prince Ottokar. The curtain rises on Act I to reveal the shooting range outside the village.⁷⁹ Kiesler's setting provides high contrast between the lightly colored barren trees and black drapes to which they are affixed. Several small rocks are strewn about. An arched stair unit leads off stage right at about midstage. A huge hollow tree or rock dominates the upstage left corner of the stage picture with a raised wooden

platform placed in front of this tree. Center stage is an old suit of armor with the concentric rings of the target painted on the breast plate. The setting is finished by the cyclorama enclosing the upstage side of the scene. Some symbolism may be involved with the use of the armor as a target because later, man (the wearer of such clothing) becomes the target of the devil and of the marksman. The hollow structure up left combined with the starkness of contrast in the trees against the black curtains gives a feeling of strangeness. The environment is somehow made uncomfortable.

The source of this discomfort might be the spell that has been cast on the hero, Max, who must demonstrate his ability to be the forester by proving to be the best marksman. During the practice session he has been unable to hit a single target because of the enchantment placed on him by Caspar. Caspar has sold his soul to the devil in the guise of the black woodsman, Samiel. As the time Caspar is allotted on earth is growing short, he has searched for a soul to give Samiel in place of his own; he has chosen Max. He approaches Max with the proposition that he can provide bullets which cannot miss their intended target. To prove his claim he has Max shoot a soaring eagle practically out of sight using the special projectile. Max will lose a great deal if he does not win the contest before Prince Ottokar the next day; not only the position of forester is at stake but so are his honor and the hand of the present forester's daughter, Agathe. He agrees to meet Caspar in the Wolf's Glen.

The second act has two scenes: the first is in the home of the old forester where Agathe and her friends try to dissuade Max from going to the Wolf's Glen on the pretense of following a wounded deer. Kiesler's designs for this setting are not available. The second scene takes place in the Wolf's Glen.

The rising curtain reveals a set of stairs and platforms down stage right. Behind this configuration is a huge rock rising from the stage floor into the flies. The onstage edge of the rock slopes like the ends of a triangle from an apex above sight lines to the floor center stage. Four huge vertical slabs of rocks enclose the stage left side of the playing area. The audience is viewing the scene from the inside of a cave, looking out of the entrance which is upstage between the rock slabs. This approximates the cave called for in the script.⁸⁰ Down center is a flat-topped rock which serves as the witches' circle. A skull rests on the rock and smaller rocks are placed around the stage floor. During the scene in which Caspar is conjuring Samiel to make final arrangements, a large and vengeful eagle's head is projected on the triangular rock surface stage right while an eye-shaped vision is projected on the rock stage left (Plate 28). As Samiel appears a portion of the triangularly shaped rock cracks and when the projection disappears it reveals the evil one. Later after Max arrives, Caspar conjures again to form the seven Freischuetz or magic bullets. This effort was apparently more spectacular.

To contribute to the atmosphere of witchcraft and incantation . . . he (Kiesler) made a pyramid-shaped rock split in two to reveal apparitions and he flashed still and moving pictures of animals onto the rock.⁸¹

The text also requires the approaching thunderstorm to intensify during the scene. Thunder and lighting most likely were additional effects Kiesler might have utilized in meeting this requirement. The setting for the third act might have been the same as Act I even though the libretto only indicates a place in the forest. Visual evidence of Kiesler's designs for Act III has not been found. All ends well, for Max wins the shooting match with the six bullets belonging to him. Max confesses what he has done, and the Prince at first considers banishment as a punishment for dealing in witchcraft, then relents and places Max on one year's probation. Max is given the position of forester and is joined with Agathe to complete the happy ending.

The setting indicates the continued use of still and moving picture projections as an element of Kiesler's design technique. The use of projection of the eagle and the animals during the conjuring demonstrates his adherence to the desires of the author.⁸² The splitting rock and the reversal of audience perspective in Act II, scene ii is an innovation of the designer. Kiesler attempted, at least with the Act I setting and that of Act II, scene ii, to create a single environment that would be strangely uncomfortable. There is a starkness found in the first setting, however, that is not present in the second. The creation of two environments affected by a single evil force seems to suffer somewhat from this divergence of stylistic treatment.

No Exit (November 26, 1946)

By Jean Paul Sartre. This design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by newspaper reviewers (*New York Critics Reviews*, VII, No. 26) (December, 1946), p. 241.

No Exit was a project to which Kiesler devoted a great amount of time. He considered the design to be his response to the problem of providing a stage for a poet's theatre. A poet's theatre was for the spoken word and required an architectural stage, not a decorative one. He expressed his goals for the stage:

First of all, the dialogue must be clearly heard in the whole house; and secondly, the action must be brought into a most expressive visual plasticity. . . . Third, the physical relationship between the audience and actors must be established so as to permit direct contact or definitely cut such contact off. . . .⁸³

To accomplish this acoustic goal Kiesler determined that the stage must be elevated perhaps as much as two feet above the stage floor. A slight inclination from the rear of the stage toward the footlights was to provide for greater plasticity. The relationship to the audience he defined by covering the proscenium arch with black and confining the stage space to a smaller area inside the arch. This configuration would allow the actor's direct contact with the audience to be cut off as Kiesler thought was required at times. The curtain was redesigned into two elements, one of which flew vertically and the lower half of which would fold down and out toward the audience; this provided an acting area which brought the action into direct contact with the audience when desired. Therefore, the relationship of the actor to the audience could be manipulated at will.⁸⁴

The completed setting did not entirely achieve these goals. Kiesler executed 82 conceptual drawings in the process of designing the setting. A study of the drawings indicates that the designer had five definable approaches to solving the design problem which correspond roughly with the goals. Very likely the goals were actually clarified and developed during the drawing process.

The five design approaches are entitled: (1) the road, (2) the island, (3) the pedestal, (4) the surrealist, and (5) the funnel. The order in which the designer accomplished these sketches is not known. He may have worked on several at the same time. The funnel renderings, however, were the final concept used for the design. The sketch of the road (Plate 29) places the scene outside of the room called for by the author. A road crosses the stage from downstage right to upstage left. Surrounding the way are large pointed and rugged rocks. In the foreground are the heads and shoulders of persons apparently caught in some sort of mire, possibly the audience.

Another setting extended into the auditorium and was connected to the proscenium by a runway providing an island for the performance in the midst of the audience (Plate 30). Scenery was used on stage and the actors were to be ushered in through a trap in the stage floor and across the bridge to the room of their confinement. A door was located between the gangway and the stage. Three chairs were provided for the inmates. Either the curtain over the island was made transparent by light inside or it was raised to reveal the scene.

The pedestal version of the setting places the action on a raised platform in the center of the stage (Plate 31). A framework delineates the wall locations, and a door and three chairs are present. The section indicates that a series of orchestra-shell-like structures were to surround the setting.

Views of the surrealist design for the room are numerous (Plate 32). In the example, the walls and ceiling of the room are studded with volcano-shaped cones. On the stage right wall there is a table and chairs. The playing space is an elevated platform inside the walls with the furnishings wildly

distorted. In another version, the forms on the walls and ceiling are more like mushrooms; the furnishings are less distorted, and the door is present as well as the brick-filled window. Both of the designs may be considered as versions of the funnel shape; they are set apart here because of the extremely different treatment they are given when related to the other versions of the funnel.

Plate 33 shows the basic funnel shape. Another version places three figures in a brick tomb. An extreme version thrusts the bottom of the funnel shape well out into the space between the stage and the audience. Another sketch shows the front view of the funnel with the door located in the center of the upstage wall. A more elaborate version places the furnishings and indicates the position of the bricked window. Kiesler, at some point, made a painted collage using rough textured materials. Green and blue were used at the top and bottom of the collage respectively. The two colors were blended to a muddy consistency in front of the three squares indicating the chairs.

In the final rendering, the room is funnel shaped and almost square in the proportion of its height to its width. Plaster decoration was indicated for the ceiling and decorative modelings and drapes for the door and window. Three lounges of various periods were provided for the actors, with the entire setting surrounded by black. The photograph of the completed setting (Plate 34) makes only one change in this design. Rather than meeting the stage right and left walls squarely as in the rendering, the upstage wall crossed the stage at a slight angle from right to left. The room is given a strangely skewed feeling as a result of the dislocation of the upstage walls. The setting was painted all one color and lighted with constant and even brilliance.⁸⁵

Kiesler recalled that a number of compromises were made during the production. His design for the floor of the setting two feet above stage level was reduced to one foot and the slight incline of the playing surface was retained as well as the masking of the proscenium arch in black. His idea for the new curtain which would also provide a stage extension closer to the audience was not constructed.⁸⁶

Kiesler demonstrated his ability to create a subtly twisted environment for the action of *No Exit*. The setting was well received by all of the New York theatre critics.⁸⁷ George Freedley credited Kiesler with creating "a decor which was hell in itself and to my mind was one of the best pieces of interpretative designing I have ever seen."⁸⁸ Yet the play was Kiesler's first and final design for the Broadway stage.

Kiesler's manipulation of the environment was very subtle; his most blatant symbolic treatment is the bricked-in window. He illustrated the theme of the play by creating a polarity between reality and appearances. The room appears to be harmless on the surface, yet underneath it is an inescapable hell. The interaction of the appearance and the reality reveal the meaning of the situation in which the characters find themselves. The room

was designed to discomfort its occupants for eternity. Kiesler advocated the study of correlation through experimentation and intuition. The quantity of drawings for *No Exit* indicate that experimentation was the more basic approach in Kiesler's working method. The collage was used for experiments in texture much as it was for *Maria Malibran*. Interestingly, the setting which Kiesler finally developed is amazingly similar in shape to that which he recommended in his article "The Debacle of Modern Theatre." This, along with the post facto goals outlined in 1956 for his book, indicates that he was attempting to join the actor and the audience in the same kind of relationship he had defined in his early article.

The Poor Sailor (1947)

By Darius Milhaud and Jean Cocteau. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by Dorothy Miller in the catalogue, *Fifteen Americans*, p. 8. Mrs. Kiesler dates the production as 1948.

Although the opera is divided into three acts, it is played without intermission because the playing time is only 35 minutes. In that short time a great deal takes place. Act I finds the sailor's wife patiently awaiting the return of her husband gone some 15 years. Though her father and the friend of the sailor who lives next door would have her marry so that there would be a man to operate the tavern, she is determined to continue her vigil. Just at the end of the act the sailor returns, but not wishing to make a possibly intrusive entrance into what might no longer be his home, he stops at the neighbors. His friend tells him his wife has been faithful to him. The sailor, however, decides to stay with the friend and test his wife. The following day, Act II, the sailor tells the wife that he is a shipmate of her husband and says her husband is returning home a poor man. The shipmate, however, is rich; he illustrates with a bag of pearls. The friend comes over on the pretext of returning a hammer he has borrowed to find out what has transpired. The wife tells him nothing. He leaves and the wife notices the uncanny resemblance of the sailor asleep in the chair to her husband. She coughs, but he does not stir. Then she strikes him with the hammer until he no longer moves, rifles his pockets for the riches and with her father disposes of the body. The neighbor calls again; there is no answer, and as the curtain falls, the wife sings of her returning husband who she knows will now never return.⁸⁹

Waiting for her husband's return was a ruse whereby the wife could turn away suitors who would take over the business she enjoyed operating. She had no need for the sailor or any other husband, except for the pearls. When she realized the shipmate was in reality her husband, she had to kill him or lose the life she had found satisfying.

In the center of Kiesler's set for the opera is a series of stairs which lead to a rope ladder upcenter (Plate 35). On stage left is the house of the friend mounted on a platform two steps high. The simple structure is painted with the patterns of sea shells, one of which is whole while the others are portions of shells. Over the abode hangs an asymmetrical starfish.

On stage right is the bar and home of the sailor's wife. By contrast to the natural shapes of the friend's house, the bar is an open framework formed with nightmare shapes. The two downstage posts are dangerous; the stage right support has saw-like teeth along its surface; the other has piercing ribs capable of impaling the unwary; the lintel between the two is armed with sharp spikes. The tops of the upstage posts are shaped like long-billed, unpleasant creatures. The device centered upstage on the wife's platform suggests both a juke box and an electric chair. Material hanging from cross-members of the framework stage center veils the bar from the sight of the friend. Upstage right is a drape for masking the offstage waiting positions of the players.

Kiesler is contrasting two polar elements in the text by the use of two contrasting structures. Both are set above stage level and are not connected, thereby emphasizing their separateness. The friend's house is enclosed and constructed from designs familiar and comforting to a man of the sea. On the other hand the bar is exposed and constructed from unfamiliar and discomfiting, dangerous shapes. This conveys to the audience symbolically the difference between the friend and the wife and what to expect from both. The design illustrates a highly amplified use of symbolic elements.

The center playing space might have been used for the entrance of the sailor. He could come down center, pause, start into his own tavern, then change his mind and go to the friend's house. The center space can then be seen as the force which links the two houses just as the sailor links the actions of the friend and the wife. This applies Kiesler's idea of space as the link between the elements of a continuity. In the script the continuity is the manner in which the individual is treated by the extreme elements of the society.

Oedipus Rex (April 22, 1948)

By Igor Stravinsky and Jean Cocteau. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by an Olin Downes article entitled "Juilliard Offers Stravinsky Opera" in *The New York Times*, April 23, 1948.

The translation of the narration which accompanies the Latin text was especially prepared from the French by E. E. Cummings for the Juilliard production. Kiesler made the arrangements for his friend Cummings to do the translation.⁹⁰ The opera is based on the story of Sophocles but

concentrates on the high points of the story, leaving the narration to connect the scenes.⁹¹

The music critic of *The New York Times* was excited by Kiesler's design and commented that the Juilliard staging of the production was just what the opera needed. He described the setting (Plate 36).

The stage was arranged in tiers. On the two lowest levels were the brass and woodwind players arranged somewhat geometrically. The next highest level was occupied by the central figure of the tragedy, and others who momentarily appeared by his side. . . . Backward and upward from this level were the ranks of the chorus in four successive tiers, the whole design extending upward against a simple panorama of a quiet neutral shade which however reflected darker and more dramatic color which shifted with simple movements and groupings of the singers in a way that was psychologically reflective of the drama.⁹²

Mr. Downes did not describe the circular walkway which surrounded the levels, extending from stage right and encircling the orchestra pit to return to the proscenium on stage left.

Kiesler's concept was to create a single environment for the opera by bringing the polarized performance elements which were separated by the arrangement of the stage and orchestra pit into a single architectural continuity. He wrote to Olin Downes:

When I first received the score, and had studied what had been done before, it was evident to me, that a new or at least somewhat special form would have to be found for the stage to do justice to the combination of opera and oratorio.

The cue for my design I found in Stravinsky's annotation at the beginning of the score, which desired the chorus to be located as closely as possible to stage front. The next inspiration came from my twenty year long occupation with the architectural and acoustical problems of the concert hall arrangements and particularly with the orchestra seating. It always seemed to me that big orchestras were shuffled into theatrical stages as sort of an emergency solution.

As you have so appropriately described, I tried to solve it by integrating thematically, acoustically and visually an opera-oratorio through a new architectural structure.⁹³

Kiesler designed masks for the chorus members so their movement would not distract from the actions of the lead singers who were limited in the playing space they had in which to perform. The woodwinds were placed on the lowest level above the pit because the playing of the instruments required little distracting movement. Kiesler felt that a portion of the orchestra had to flow out of the isolated pit to unite with the singers and chorus.

The design for *Oedipus* illustrates the application of Kiesler's general definitions of design. The disparate musical elements, which can each be regarded as being separate or polar elements of the opera/oratorio form, were brought into a relationship by the setting which acoustically and

dramatically illustrates the basic continuity of the musical form. At the same time, the performance was moved out of the proscenium and into the same space that the audience occupied without placing the musicians among the audience. This realized another aspect of Kiesler's theories: the audience and the production were juxtaposed as two elements of the theatrical experience, but because of that polarization, the experience was intensified. The understanding of the audience was increased and their enjoyment enhanced. Kiesler implies with this design that there is a difference in the quality of theatrical experience when the performance and the audience are polarized elements within the same space than when they are separate elements each within its own space.

Angelique (April 22, 1948)

By Jacques Ibert and Nino. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by Thomas Creighton in his article entitled "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea" published in *Progressive Architecture*, XLII (July, 1961), p. 122.

Angelique was performed on the same program as Stravinsky's *Oedipus*. The setting was provided from units of a standardized "space-set" designed by Kiesler. The space-set consists of a number of standardized units which can be arranged in various ways to produce a number of low cost settings. Most design texts refer to this as unit setting. The configuration designed for *Angelique* is shown in Plate 37. A series of dishes and jars are mounted on a panel stage right to represent the house and shop of Angelique's husband Boniface. Angelique appears in the upstairs window. Across the stage is the door to Charlot's house. Upstage are houses of the town behind which the gossips and ever observant members of the chorus can keep an eye on the proceedings. Directly upcenter stage is the painted boat to which Angelique's English buyer wishes to take her. The plot is simple. Angelique is tired of her old husband for whom she has given up many suitors in her life. She tacks up a sign "Wife for Sale." Boniface doesn't object for, to tell the truth, Angelique is not easy company. Three suitors come in turn and buy her for a wife based on her health and good looks; each returns her. Finally, the Devil himself appears and takes her for his bride. The suitors want their money back but are persuaded that they are all ahead not to be stuck with Angelique. A party is held when the Devil, too, returns the shrewish wife. Boniface now believes there is nothing to do but hang himself. Angelique, thinking he is going to an early grave for love of her, repents and promises to be a good wife, not as surly and talkative as she had been.⁹⁴ By presenting the shops and port simultaneously this design typifies the general application of Kiesler's concern that a tool, in this case the setting, be used for multiple purposes.

The Soldier's Tale (1948)

By Igor Stravinsky. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler because two 3 by 5 inch color slides were found among his papers, one of which was marked with the production title and "by K" in the artist's handwriting.

The two slides illustrate different arrangements of red, blue and white material draped across the stage. The material appears to be connected in some fashion to rigging over the stage and offstage right and left. Possibly the material could be changed from one position to another to form varied compositions during the performance. This would be in keeping with Kiesler's thought that the same object should serve several functions as one set of drapes might be moved to form settings for several scenes. Another possibility is that the material continuously changed throughout the production to form the different compositions. This procedure would be vindicated by Kiesler's proposition that movement should be continuous just as the movement of forces in the universe are continuous. The fact that the opera requires only 35 minutes of performance time might support either or both of these possibilities as it would hardly be appropriate to stop the performance to change the setting for each of the 10 scenes required by the composer.⁹⁵ Moreover, the continuously moving setting would lend itself to the change of environment in the traveling scenes. Because of the restricted amount of visual material and the large number of scenes, no further interpretation can be rendered.

The Magic Flute (1949)

By W. A. Mozart and Emanuel Schikaneder. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by Thomas Creighton in his article entitled "Kiesler's Pursuit of an Idea" for *Progressive Architecture*, XLII (July, 1961), p. 122.

This production of *The Magic Flute* utilized the elements Kiesler designed for the Juilliard space-set. These units, however, are rigid, curved panels which may be held in a vertical position with the aid of a support unit or placed horizontally as weight bearing surfaces unlike the flats utilized for *Angelique*. In Plate 38, three of these units form the stage right portion of the setting. There is a platform and stairs upstage center, along with other three-dimensional units. The scene depicted is the serpent version of Prince Tamino at the very beginning of the opera. Tamino hides among the units stage right while the serpent, projected on the cyclorama, is posed to strike. The three ladies of the Queen of Night appear against a curved unit stage left. Apparently Kiesler's interpretation of the opera remains the same as in his earlier designs, but reconstruction of the designs in sequence is impos-

sible as no other photographs or drawings of this production have been located.

The design is another application of Kiesler's principle of a tool serving more than one function because the same units were moved to create a number of settings. There is inadequate information for making further interpretations of the setting with regards to the text.

The Beggar's Opera (March 27-29, 1950)

By Benjamin Britten and John Gay. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by Howard Taubman in his article "Britten's Version of 'Beggar's Opera' Presented Here By Juilliard School" in *The New York Times*, for March 28, 1950.

In rewriting John Gay's classic ballad opera, Benjamin Britten retained all but three of the songs and musical fragments. He cut a great deal of the dialogue but kept the story line intact. Britten envisioned the opera as set in the "great room at Saint Giles."⁹⁶ This great room was to be a laundry where the beggars would perform the opera as it may first have been produced in honor of the marriage of two ballad singers. Kiesler seems to have utilized Britten's vision.

The orchestra was dispossessed for the production. A large oval thrust stage covered the orchestra pit (Plate 39) while the orchestra was seated in the front rows of the auditorium. This thrust was a very unusual arrangement: a runway similar to that used in *Oedipus* encircled the orchestra pit; inside the ring was a sunken stage area filling the pit, except for a stairway at the stage left, and providing an entrance from under the pit stage onto that playing area or the runway. On the stage left side of the pit, outside the ring, was a covered speakers' platform. Another entrance and stair was provided to the ring on the stage right side of the pit. A stair unit was placed in the center of the runway which allowed the center aisle of the auditorium to be used for entrances and exits. The drawing dated October 5, 1949 indicates the use of a false proscenium crowned by an oval design containing the words "The Beggar's Opera."

Inside the proscenium drops were used to provide a background for some scenes. One of these drops was for the prologue. It looked like a large bed sheet with cartoon drawings illustrating scenes from the play. The final setting also used flats inserted well forward toward the proscenium and on both sides of the stage to back other scenes.

The completed design changed the structure of the ring around the pit. On the stage right side, the ring began at stage level and then descended three steps. Beginning about the center of the runway, the surface ramped up to meet the stage left side of the apron. An interesting device which Kiesler

employed was a curtain which appeared to be another large bed sheet, possibly in remembrance of Britten's idea. This sheet hung so as to cover the center of the stage with the bottom edge; it fell right at the upstage edge of the playing area constructed in the orchestra pit. The curtain was raised by ropes which were attached to the bottom edge. When the ropes were pulled, the lower end of the curtain was drawn up and back into the proscenium arch.⁹⁷

The number of scenes in the opera is great and the evidence available is not adequate to reconstruct exactly how the setting was used. Howard Taubman, however, made a general observation concerning the staging. He reported: "A ramp has been built to run around the pit, and it provides an opportunity for more space and variety of movement. It also has the strange effect of making scenes played on the regular stage seem remote compared with those played in front. . . ."⁹⁸ In the setting for *No Exit*, Kiesler was attempting to design a stage space which would allow for the willful manipulation of an actor's distance from the audience. *The Beggar's Opera* setting apparently achieved Kiesler's goal.

Sodom and Gomorrah (March 31, 1950)

By Jean Giraudeau. The design is attributed to Kiesler on the basis of a drawing found in his personal papers.

The drawing found among Kiesler's papers was dated and signed by the artist with the name of the play and its author also indicated. The text for the play has not become available. The inscription (Plate 40) on the left side of the drawing refers to an "Adjacent Angel" being painted in a style fitting the eighteenth century. A note at the top right of the drawing is directed to the walls of a house at the top center of the drawing. It reads: "The house as a bird's cage." The two sketches to the right of the larger drawing show the placement of parts which appear to be made from some fabric which folds and refolds to change the scene. The top sketch is marked "Beginning" and the lower one simply "Later."

The drawings can be assumed to indicate another application of multiple purpose in a single setting. No other conclusions seem to be appropriate without consulting the text. The actual date of the production is not known. The drawing is dated just two days after the closing of *The Beggar's Opera* which was probably the final production of the Juilliard season. It seems likely the production may have occurred during the summer or in the fall of the following season. The design is included among Kiesler's executed works on the strength of Mrs. Kiesler's statements that the production was actually realized.⁹⁹

The Prisoner (March 15-19, 1951)

By Luigi Dallapiccola. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *The Prisoner* found in Kiesler's scrapbook.

The opera, written in 1947, was given its American premiere at Juilliard. The story is set during the Inquisition under Phillip II in the sixteenth century. The Prisoner is an anonymous character who is to be taken as a symbol for all political prisoners. The Prisoner has been given to think he can hope for escape by the jailer who calls him brother and tells him stories of Phillip's defeat in battle. At last the door of the cell is left unlocked. The Prisoner believes he is being freed; the monks moving about the scene make no effort to stop him. At last he meets the Grand Inquisitor who is also the Jailer he has grown to trust. His hopes crushed, the Prisoner is taken to the stake for purification.¹⁰⁰

Kiesler designed a cell for the prisoner on top of a tower of stone. The cell was six-sided and barred. A painting shows a prisoner hanging by his wrists. Inside the cell was a bench and jar. A long stairway on the stage right side of the cell provides access from the stage floor.

On both sides of the cell risers were arranged for the chorus of monks. The whole configuration was 32 feet across. In front of the towers and chorus was a barrier system to restrain those who might leave their cells. A back drop of heavy stone arches and iron-barred turrets apparently backed the setting. At some points a scrim was used with some scenes staged behind.¹⁰¹ The location and specific use of the scrim is not known. During the final scene in the cell, in which the Grand Inquisitor sentences the Prisoner to be burned, the walls of the cell fall away and some symbolic emblem is lowered to replace the painting (Plate 41).¹⁰² The Prisoner has been freed of his burden of futile hope. His spirit has been freed in spite of his corporeal end.

The setting demonstrates Kiesler's continued use of symbolic scenic elements. The formal positioning of the chorus in relation to the singers is similar in intent to the architectural stage for *Oedipus*. The cell is the nucleus of the design. The environment of the prison surrounding it is suggested by the collage arrangement of building parts and human agents of constraint symbolized by the chorus members. Kiesler created a single environment which pushed inward upon the prisoner, thereby forming a stronger containment than the bars of the cell.

The Play of Robin and Marion (1952)

By Darius Milhaud. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by a drawing found in the Kiesler papers.

The exact date of production is not known; Mrs. Kiesler confirms that the design was realized.¹⁰³ The drawing shows a stage similar to the simultaneous settings used in France during the Middle Ages, the period from which the story of the opera dates (Plate 42).

The stage right side of the setting shows a village or city. A castle with drawbridge comes next. The fields give way to the forest, and the setting is completed with a group of houses on stage left. A banner flies from the top of one of the leaves which compose the tree tops of the forest. No notes accompany the drawing and the text is not available. Only the generalized conclusion that the setting illustrates the use of a single tool for multiple scenes can be confidently suggested.

Canticle for Innocent Comedians (April 22-27, 1952; Revived April, 1969)

By Martha Graham. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by "Reviews of the Month," *The Dance Observer* (June-July, 1952). The use of Kiesler's design in the revival was confirmed by Walter Terry in "World of Dance" for *The Saturday Review* (April 26, 1969), p. 55.

Little is known about the ground plan for the ballet. Apparently the scenic elements were moved by the dancers and configured in different designs for different segments of the dance. The setting consisted of "a series of sliding panels, a window and a doorway. . . ."¹⁰⁴ Some of the sliding panels were the curved plywood units from the space set used for *The Magic Flute* in 1949. At one moment in the dance, the dancer performs the role of the sun resting with his back against one of these panels with feet extended over his head. The other units provided "doors to life and death" and "windows to the moon."¹⁰⁵

The setting illustrates the principle of multiple purpose as advocated by Kiesler. Clive Barnes commented: "The set by Kiesler—movable and practicable; a versatile machine for dancing is as attractively adaptable as ever."¹⁰⁶

The Triumph of St. Joan (April 23, 25 and 27, 1952)

By Martha Graham. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by "Reviews of the Month" in *The Dance Observer* (June-July, 1952), p. 33. Mrs. Kiesler dates the performance to 1951. Perhaps this is a different performance of the same dance.

The dance consists of three parts. The first is in a garden in which Joan hears a voice; the second is on a battlefield where she carries the standard of the king; the third is placed in the city square where martyrdom is her end.¹⁰⁷

The setting was a large folding series of triangles under and around

which Miss Graham performed (Plate 43). Among Kiesler's papers a folding paper model of the setting was discovered. Strings were attached at various points. By pulling on one or more of the strings the model was forced to move at various junctions of the triangular components. If the construction were rigged in a similar manner in the theatre, then the structure could be moved during the performance to form different compositions. Presumably these would reflect the various locales involved with each of the three parts of the dance.

If this did occur, it would prove another example of Kiesler's art as a utile machine—a machine in continuous motion reflecting changes in the environment. At the end of the dance, St. Joan in a transformed state moved directly downstage until a large silken curtain bearing the French fleur-de-lis rushed down to meet the stage floor. This final element of the design as well as the movable structure itself was not well received by the reviewer. The entire setting was considered "much too stagey and literal, especially (the) greasy looking . . . curtain. . . ." ¹⁰⁸

The Tempest (July 1952, December 2-3, 1954, December 1954, September 1955)

By William Shakespeare, with the music of Jan Sibelius. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the following sources: July, 1952: "A Play of Inlanders for Islanders," *Vineyard Gazette* (Edgartown, Massachusetts), July 18, 1952; December 2-3, 1954: M. Leighton, "Cincinnati Produces *The Tempest* With Sibelius' Music," *Musical America*, LXXIV (December, 1954), p. 3; December, 1954: "The Tempest," Program, Kiesler Papers; September, 1955: "Flood Wreckage is Set for 'The Tempest,'" *Ellenville Journal*, September 1, 1955.

Kiesler, in partnership with Basil Langton, produced *The Tempest* on four occasions. The first meeting of the two artists was on Martha's Vineyard where Kiesler was vacationing during the summer of 1952. Basil Langton was producing summer stock under the name of the Rice Playhouse which had closed in the late 1940s. The name apparently went with the rental of the building.¹⁰⁹ A photograph of the setting Kiesler designed for the Rice Playhouse was found among his personal papers.

Three sloped platforms with rib-like projections from the upstage side, topped by poles lashed together to shape a sail, provided the stage right portion of the setting (Plate 44). Another platform is visible at the extreme left of the picture. The amount of the setting outside the picture is not known. The upstage walls are covered by sails hung from spars and ropes set at various angles.

Two years later Langton worked with the Antioch Players and the

Cincinnati Orchestra on *The Tempest*. The performance was given at the Antioch Area Theatre where the orchestra played the Sibelius music inspired by the play. This was the United States premiere of the use of Sibelius's music to underscore the play.¹¹⁰ Kiesler executed the design for the production which was performed again in Cleveland that same December.¹¹¹ Two photographs of the details of the setting are among Kiesler's drawings. Unfortunately, neither gives a clear understanding of the configuration of the setting. Some similarity to the 1952 design is evident.

In 1955 Kiesler received a commission to design the Empire State Music Festival Theatre. As part of that first season, *The Tempest* was presented again. No visual evidence of the setting has been located, but the *Ellenville Journal* carried an interesting description of the setting:

Frederick J. Kiesler, the festival's architect, who designed the "Tempest" decor, searched among the debris abounding in the flood region and collected a quantity of driftwood and weather-beaten lumber from which he constructed a 60-foot "open sculpture" or framework that transforms a realistic wreckage into a ship's hulk, mast and sails of a magic realm. Levels and ramps of varying heights, hidden niches and open vistas permit the actors, dancers and singers to move within it freely, to make sudden appearances and disappearances. Imaginative lighting invests the whole with an air of mystery and fantasy. . . . Caliban's cave is a dugout in the hull, while Ariel's paths of wind become gangplanks and floating decks, crossing each other.¹¹²

Kiesler created a single continuous environment which provided for a variety of locales. The materials he selected, the sail and weathered wood, provided the texture required for his vision of an island of shipwrecked castaways. Kiesler also integrated all of the performance elements into the stage environment.

The Symphony of the Air members are seated behind the framework, at the rear of the stage, which has been extended to its full 120-foot width by 75-foot depth. The conductor of the orchestra Hugh Ross is lifted into the mast and hidden from the audience behind a torn sail.¹¹³

Kiesler's innovation was still new years later when *Man of La Mancha* placed the performance orchestra behind the actors. The orchestra placement was an extension of the idea Kiesler used in the *Oedipus* production of 1948. He was probably attempting to achieve an accoustical balance between the music and spoken word as well as trying to unite the performance elements. Both are consistent with his concern for unity within the production.

Henry IV (November 4, 1958)

By Luigi Pirandello. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the program for *Henry IV* found in the Kiesler Papers.

Henry IV, like *No Exit*, was one of the very few designs which Kiesler discussed at length in his writings. After a humorous recounting of how he acquired the commission, he proceeds to say:

I was fascinated by the theme of *Henry IV*, the mad king who believed himself to be living in another century. He had three lackeys who were garde-robiers of specific costumes; visitors who desired to see him had to change into a dress of the century the king at the moment believed himself to be living in. And the interior of the castle had to be transformed accordingly.

For this purpose, 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 decor could be transformed from that of the original stone mansion to another style by slide projection on the white surface, while, with the depthless 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.

I also had the stage floor elevated twenty degrees toward the back. Upstage right, a rectangle about two by three feet was cut out of the floor. Over it, I placed an old-fashioned trunk with its bottom removed. Underneath, on the real stage, were piles of costumes, stored according to centuries. When it was necessary to dress people up, the servants lifted the trunk top and a concealed stagehand passed up to them costume after costume, headgear after headgear, ten, twenty, fifty—a magic performance in the manner of prestidigitators. The king's throne was an upright cave in which he hid. To the right of the throne, according to the play, there was a portrait of the contessa who was the king's love of twenty years before. I changed it to a sculpture of supernatural size. She was hollow and open in the back. Toward the end of the play, a psychoanalyst is called in by the contessa (who has returned) in a last effort to save the king's sick mind. For this purpose, he induces a shock by presenting the contessa's daughter, who is now the same age as her mother was when the king fell in love with her. While Pirandello prescribed a transparency trick with the portrait for this, I had the shell of the sculpture burst into hundreds of pieces, as if struck by lightning, revealing the young girl in repeated flashes of ice-white against the black velvet. The king turns and stabs the doctor to death. A cortege bears the body off stage; the contessa follows. The king, now aware of having committed a murder, ascends his cave-throne while the stage returns to an eleventh-century stone castle.

A spotlight strikes the king's face in the semi-darkness of time. Addressing his dead-silent servants, he declares: "I have not been insane for the last ten years. I have only pretended, so as to learn the truth about the members of my court."

We opened in Philadelphia, and had the usual party afterward; we were not gay. We played there for one week. The production never reached New York.¹¹⁴

The setting in Plate 45 does not appear to be a half circle, but Kiesler may not have been speaking literally. The set does appear to present one-half of a room. The floor does not appear to slope up near the back of the setting at 20 degrees but the layout of the wall is simple enough to allow easy use of the *periaktoi*-like device. Mrs. Kiesler, who saw the opening in Philadelphia, confirmed that the set shown in the illustration was used for the production.¹¹⁵ Perhaps the setting produced was not exactly the one Kiesler

wished to build; changes could have been made with regard to the sloping surface as was the case with *No Exit*.

Each of the three wall surfaces can be thought of as a single element of the world of the King. Kiesler saw the world of Henry as having three aspects. The designer symbolized these as polar extremes in black, white and grey. The interaction of the three subdivisions of the King's environment rendered a unified picture of the king and his perception of reality. This, therefore, is a clear application of Kiesler's design theory as is the three-sided scene-changer an application of his multiple purpose principle.

The utilization of projections is consistent with the designer's earlier practice although the character of the projection is not known. The angle of incidence with the wall surface must have been steep if the projections were not to shine upon the actors which they might well have been intended to do.

Kiesler's use of the sculpture to replace the painting called for by Pirandello is not only a very dramatic invention—it signifies two other points typical of his design. First, the breaking of the sculpture and appearance of the lost love is more literal than the transparent picture of the playwright; the action makes the happening more blatantly evident to the audience. Secondly, it demonstrates the designer's preference for three-dimensional representation, a tendency noted in his first European production, *R.U.R.* The use of spotlighting and highly directional, sharply contrasting white light against the dark as illumination techniques were also evident in those early years.

Throughout his career Kiesler spoke of plays and operas for which he made drawings but which were not produced. While in Paris for the World's Fair, he discussed the staging of *God Loves Us* with J. P. McEvoy. He composed a series of sketches illustrating rooms on three levels made from transparent materials on which slides in black, white, color or moving films would change the milieu of 29 scenes.¹¹⁶ None of his drawings have been located.

In his notes he mentions drawing sketches for *The Spanish Hour*, and he alludes to working on Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* and Aaron Copeland and Orson Welles's *The Second Hurricane*, but does not specify executing drawings for the operas.¹¹⁷ Drawings for six projects are extant.

Of the six projects, four have been selected for discussion. The criteria for selection were the availability of information on the scripts. For this reason, *The Little Screwball* and *Journey to Paradise* are not discussed.

Freud Festival?

The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by a signed drawing found among the Kiesler Papers.

Table 5. Design Projects

Title	Date	Number of Drawings
<i>The Little Screwball</i>	Unknown	12
<i>Journey to Paradise</i>	Unknown	23
<i>Freud Festival?</i> ^a	After 1948	1
<i>Santa Claus</i>	Unknown	2
<i>Garrick</i>	1937	4
<i>The Mother of Us All</i>	1946-1947	8

^aTitle is almost illegible on the back of the drawing. This title, therefore, may not be accurate.

The basic unit of the design is a high six-sided platform similar to the tower used for *The Prisoner*. The front of the platform is cut out, and a smaller and lower six-sided platform fills the space; about half of the playing surface of the lower platform projects in front of the basic unit. A ladder to the stage right side provides access to the upper level while five arches provide entrances to the space under the base unit. On top of this unit and in the air surrounding it are hung curved panels, like those from the space set for the Juilliard School. This suggests the drawing was executed about the time of the building of the space-set or some time thereafter. There is no clue in Kiesler's notes as to the content of the production.

Santa Claus

By E. E. Cummings. The design is attributed to Kiesler on the basis of a signed drawing found among the Kiesler papers.

The design is for a simple, rectangular, raised platform with step units inset on three sides. A sky piece is curved behind an upstage wall with a door. Plate 46 shows the item of particular interest: four curtains are used to change the shape of the playing space. The curtains, when not deployed, rest around a pole at each corner of the stage. When drawn, each curtain could be extended on its track until it reached the center of the stage space. The top drawing in Plate 46 shows the curtains dividing the stage into triangular spaces containing one-quarter of the playing surface. The lower drawing shows half of the stage available for performance.

This kind of simple, easily moveable stage might be similar to the one used for the traveling production of *The Old Maid and the Thief*. The design illustrates a kind of stage configuration not encountered in Kiesler's earlier

designs. The artist also executed a series of costume drawings for the actors as puppets. The marionettes were to be larger than the life-sized actors. This recalls Kiesler's interest in puppets early in his career and the actorless theatres of the futurists and Gordon Craig.

Garrick (1937)

By Albert Stoessel and Robert Simon. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler by the catalogue, *Ten Years of American Opera Design*, p. 18.

Although the script for the opera is not available, the drawings provide a perspective on Kiesler's work. The designs for *Garrick* illustrate two points regarding Kiesler's work. The first is Kiesler's simplification of line. The design of Act I by Paul Oppenheim, one of Kiesler's students, who was the designer of record for the production, is historically accurate in its decorative, ornate rendering of the environment. This style is consistent through all of the designs he produced for the opera. One of Kiesler's drawings uses a similar ornate style presenting his design, but his use of line is less complex. He might be imagined to have been showing his protégé how to move the action forward out of the proscenium while retaining the decorative style the student had chosen. In other drawings for Act I, Kiesler clearly illustrates the simplification of line and elimination of decorative detail characteristic of his personal style.

The second point concerning Kiesler's work has already been mentioned. The Kiesler design thrusts the setting from the proscenium. The same thrust, though varied in shape, is present in the sets for Act II (Plate 47) and Act III as well. There is an historical basis for Kiesler's interpretation of the stage upon which *Garrick* was performed, allowing the actor to come forward of the proscenium to speak to the audience. Also, the moving of the performance and the viewer into the same rather than separate spaces is characteristic of Kiesler's thoughts on stage architecture. *Garrick* is the first scene design in America which illustrates Kiesler's use of a thrust attached to the proscenium stage.

The Mother of Us All (1946)

By Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein. The design is attributed to Frederick Kiesler on the basis of eight drawings found in his papers and his comments in his book *Inside the Endless House*.

The Mother of Us All was commissioned by the Ditson Fund of Columbia University during 1945-46, and the first performance was given May 7, 1947.¹¹⁸ Kiesler and Thomson were friends during the early forties, and in

honor of the commission the musician had received, Kiesler developed a portfolio of designs as a gift for his friend.¹¹⁹ The designs were not used for the production; instead the settings were provided by Columbia's staff designers, Richard Bernstein and Asa Zatz.¹²⁰ The incident may have precipitated the return of the drawings to Kiesler.

The composer wrote:

The Mother Of Us All is a pageant. Its theme is the winning in the United States of political rights for women. Its story is the life and career of Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906). Some of the characters are historical, others imaginary. They include figures as widely separated in time as John Quincy Adams and Lillian Russell. Through poetic license they are all shown in the opera as personally acquainted or as associated in public life.¹²¹

The opera is divided into two acts: The first act has five scenes and the second three scenes. Kiesler designed a basic unit upon which all of the scenes would be played with various scenic pieces providing the local atmosphere. The design drawings do not indicate which scenes they depict. Therefore, the sequence has been reconstructed by comparing the requirements of the text with the drawings.

The basic unit was a platform, perhaps one and one-half to two feet in elevation (Plate 48). Five ramps lead to the central playing space; one ramp was located upstage center while each of the others was laid out in the pattern of an X; each ramp ended with two stairs. The opening scene, played in the center of the platform, was surrounded by wall units. One drawing depicts exactly the scene as described in the text:

A room in the house of Susan B. Anthony. . . . Susan and Ann are seated beside a table on which there is a lighted lamp. Anne is knitting. Susan B. is pasting press clippings in a scrapbook.¹²²

During the second scene, Susan and Daniel Webster debate women's rights at a political rally. Kiesler's setting places a low platform on the downstage center edge of the basic unit as a speaker's platform. Benches are provided; however, they are stylistically different and might have been intended to be used by specific characters. The designer has placed the scene outdoors instead of in a tent as the composer suggested. Trees flank the stage. Over and between the trees are stretched four rows of streamers. The purpose of the kite-shaped elements is not known.

The final three scenes take place on the same setting. The village green in front of Susan B. Anthony's house is represented by two drawings. One drawing seems appropriate for the third and fourth scenes which take place during the end of day and early darkness; the sun sinking behind the trees indicates the time change. The scene of the stream and forest might well have

been projected onto the face of the church although a removable painted facade would have been equally practical. The church (Plate 49) is the location of the marriage discussion presented in the final scene of the act.¹²³

The locale of scenes i and ii of Act II is Susan's drawing room. Kiesler placed a wall unit with a fireplace across the upstage exit ramp. The side wall is blocked by the ramps leading upstage right and left while the offstage sides of the downstage ramps were bounded by low railings. A window seat, four chairs, a sofa and a foot stool provide a variety of seating spaces. The two scenes are very busy with a multitude of persons arriving and staying in attempts to convince Susan to speak at a political meeting. The restricted entrances would have increased the busyness of the many visitors' arrivals while the great number of seating areas would have allowed earlier visitors to be placed out of the way of the new action.

Act II's final scene is in the Halls of Congress where a statue of Susan B. Anthony is to be unveiled. Kiesler rendered two versions of the setting, one with candles unlit and the other with the candles lighted. Also, the detail of the statue has been changed from the first drawing to the second. The dome over the scene is reminiscent of the Capitol Building.

Kiesler's basic design presented the configuration of a crossroads. Susan Anthony was probably envisioned as a character who would influence which path women would take from the crossroads of the nineteenth century. The basic unit provides a controlling influence on the changes of scene. Regardless of the place depicted, the time environment of the crossroads of history could be symbolically maintained. Visually the ramps direct attention to the central playing area while the settings for each scene serve to reinforce the pattern established by the basic unit. Susan B. Anthony is always placed in the position of influence at the center of the crossroads. The central playing space is the nucleus of the forces directed toward it from the divergent positions of the ramp entrances. This corresponds to Kiesler's thought that external or polarized positions or objects in a continuity direct their forces toward a central point or nucleus of actions.

Design Analysis

The analysis of Kiesler's designs demonstrates that his theories concerning art and theatre were applied throughout his career. Moreover, he had particular, characteristic devices and treatments of the elements of composition which were his own.

Application of Theories

Both his general design theories and what have been called "corollaries" are evident in Kiesler's work. Generally, however, the terms "continuous

tension" and "endlessness" are applicable only in vague ways and are more meaningful when considering his general philosophy and his architecture. His theory of historical change as it applies to the theatre has been mentioned as has his belief that the design of stage settings was the best educational experience for the student architect and other artists.

Correalism: the working method. In reviewing Kiesler's scenic designs, two facts become evident. First, Kiesler took care to honor the author's requests regarding the setting of the play; *Der Freischuetz*, *The Tales of Hoffmann* and *Solomon and Balkis* are primary examples. As in the violin motif of the final act in *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the designer tended to place special emphasis on the composer's suggested furnishings. He did not hesitate, however, to change the locale of a scene if the change would help clarify the action of the scene. In *The Magic Flute* he changed the opening scene of Act II from a forest to the inner hall of the temple where the priests' business may more readily be understood.

A second characteristic of Kiesler's working method was the lack of reliance on intuition evident in his writings on sculpture. In an article, which essentially was the typescript of tape recorded sessions, Kiesler describes the intuitive manner he and Edgar Varese used to create the ideas for a playing space and music for a play they had not read.¹²⁴ This experience was apparently a novelty for Kiesler in the area of scenic design, judging from the excitement in the tone of his writing. In fact, the drawings of *Maria Malibran* and the 82 conceptual sketches for *No Exit* demonstrate that Kiesler generally did a great deal of experimentation before finalizing a design. Each of the final steps in the completion of *No Exit* show a small change which improved the design's effectiveness. Kiesler remarked in his letter to Olin Downes concerning the setting for *Oedipus Rex* that he had studied the previous performance of the Stravinsky opera-oratorio and the score carefully before being inspired to create the architectural stage for the piece. There is little doubt that Kiesler relied upon study and experimentation more than intuition in scenic design.

Design by polarization. Kiesler believed that design was the creation of a nucleus of forces serving a specific purpose. Also he considered that a nucleus of forces was generated by the polarization, the opposing of elements. In the realization of a script, the specific purpose should be the understanding of the script by the audience. Creating a nucleus of forces is simply the bringing together of elements which will make that understanding occur. To do this, two or more visual elements are imbued with opposing characteristics and placed within the stage environment. The interaction of these visual elements allows the relationship between them to be understood on an emotional, intuitive level. Evidence of this arrangement of polar visual

elements is obvious in Kiesler's designs for *Helen Retires*, *Ariadne in Naxos*, *The Magic Flute*, *No Exit*, *The Poor Sailor* and *Henry IV*.

Environment design. For the designer the polarized elements could form a nucleus of forces more easily if they were contained within a single environmental in which all of the parts were related. *The Mother of Us All*, *The Magic Flute* and *The Prisoner* illustrate this concept of the environment. He used a single environmental setting also to demonstrate the relatedness of stories which might appear to be disconnected experiences in the *Tales of Hoffmann*. The artist also sought to bring all the performers of literature requiring the integration of drama and music into a single performance environment. The innovative stage for *Oedipus Rex* and the placing of the orchestra on stage for *The Tempest* support this contention.

Space as a link. Space was visualized as the link between objects, not as an emptiness; space was filled with the forces of repulsion and attraction between objects. The projections for the funeral service in *Helen Retires* demonstrated Kiesler's concept of space, pulling the parts of the composition together, by juxtaposing fragments related in shape and content into the background of the scene. In *The Poor Sailor*, the central space between the two houses kept them apart, and the sailor might be considered the force which moves in that space and links the extremes holding them together.

Performance-spectator space. From early in his career, Kiesler sought to bring the audience and the actor into the same space. His Endless Theatre and the Space Stage of 1924 were attempts at this new space configuration. The funnel shape present in the 1923 production of *Emperor Jones* was advocated as a new stage form by Kiesler in 1926. The funnel shape was used to direct the audience's attention into the stage and to pour the performance toward the viewers. The funnel shape with the same purpose is evident in Kiesler's design for *No Exit*. By the year of that production Kiesler also realized that it might be desirable for the audience to feel at times as though they were separated from the actor. An extension attached to the front of the funnel allowed the actor to directly contact the audience by playing on the extension. Separation was achieved by moving the actor back into the funnel. More effective were the unique thrust stages in front of the open proscenium stage which Kiesler created for *Oedipus Rex* and *The Beggar's Opera*. The action inside the proscenium provided a feeling of separation from the actors and staging on the thrust allowed direct contact between the players and the audience. The tendency to push the action toward the audience and in front of the proscenium was evident in the designs for *In the Pasha's Garden* and *Garrick* early in his American design career.

Multiple purpose. Tools like the parts of the human body were to serve more

than one purpose according to Kiesler's view of technology, and the stage setting was no exception. The classic example of multiple use is seen in his creation of the space-set (unit set) for the Juilliard School. Various shaped units could be turned in various positions to perform different tasks during the performance. The space-setting was used for *Angelique*, *The Magic Flute* and portions thereof for *Canticles for Innocent Comedians*. Other settings used basic units with scenic pieces added to alter the details; this concept was applied in the production of *The Tales of Hoffmann* and *The Magic Flute*. Kiesler also made a single setting change to reflect more than one of the elements of the total environment; the most striking examples are the walls of *Henry IV*: A *periaktoi*-type device was painted on one side as grey stone, another in white and the third was covered with black velour. The same walls served to reflect the three aspects of the king's perception of the world.

The machine: continuous motion. Kiesler provided the major example of the utile machine in art for a major text on twentieth-century art. His use of the machine was also to provide the continuous movement of the setting for *Emperor Jones* in Berlin. The same application of continuous motion may have been used for *The Soldier's Tale* and *The Triumph of St. Joan*.

Design Style

Elements of composition. Generally the style of an artist can be described by the manner in which he tends to use color, line, shape, texture, size and mass. Kiesler is not an exception to this type of appraisal. There are no color photographs of Kiesler's work other than the two slides for *The Soldier's Tale*. General comments regarding the color of his settings indicates that he sometimes made use of bright and unusual color combinations. This generally is congruent with the red, white and blue of *The Soldier's Tale* set and Kiesler's description of the red, green and blacks of his European designs, as well as the available color renderings of his American work.

Kiesler generally employed a fluid but simple line. Even his rendering of the decorative art nouveau style in portions of Maecenas's house in *Ariadne in Naxos* is restrained, although the play provided an opportunity to display a more baroque feeling. The comparison with the work of one of his students, discussed earlier, illustrates the difference between the decorative line and the simplified treatment characteristic of Kiesler. *The Curious Women* provides another example of the minimum use of line to suggest a feeling rather than to demonstrate in detail.

The shapes the artist characteristically used were asymmetrical and biomorphic rather than geometrical. The ghost from *Helen Retires* is a good example. His rendering of rocks, though more angular, seems to flow. He used the curve, ellipse and spiral forms as a matter of preference. The curved

shape is evident in his design of trees for *The Mother* and *Solomon and Balkis*. The ellipse or egg-shape, found first in the exterior shape of the 1924 Endless Theatre, is reflected in the thrust stages for *Oedipus* and *The Beggar's Opera*. The spiral of the Space Stage appeared for the setting of *In the Pasha's Garden*. The funnel shape, considered earlier, must be listed among Kiesler's recurring forms. Certainly there were shapes Kiesler preferred, but like any good designer, he did not force this preference onto the script, and a number of his designs reflect the use of rectangular shapes (*Angelique* and Acts II and III of *Maria Malibran*) as well as more realist renderings for shows which required that treatment.

The surface texture of Kiesler's designs is "clean and smooth" according to Virgil Thomson, long time critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*.¹²⁵ This seems a fair assessment. Although Kiesler articulated his designs in three-dimensional units, the surfaces do have a flat, smooth quality about them, judging from the limited perspective of photographic evidence. Another indication of the truth of Thomson's remark is evidenced by the rough texture of the collage Kiesler made for *No Exit* and the report that the set was lighted very evenly and painted all the same color. Both techniques tend to flatten the surface and to make it appear smoother than it was.

Thomson also observed the "expressive detail" in the design "is likely to be oversized and a little shocking by its obviousness."¹²⁶ Certainly the leaves and moon of *In the Pasha's Garden* and the violin parts from *The Tales of Hoffmann* substantiate the critic. Kiesler, however, was capable of subtle manipulations of the setting too. *Maria Malibran* is an example of a setting with hardly any oversized elements.

Kiesler's arrangement of space allowed for polarized areas within the setting. The organization of the space was extremely playable.¹²⁷ And almost every setting provided some kind of elevated playing space. Kiesler's use of space as a link has already been mentioned as has his concern for the close relationship of actor and audience in the spatial arrangement of the theatre.

The settings of the designer appear to be neither heavy nor light with regard to mass. Typically, mass is manipulated to achieve a balance between objects of the same weight in Kiesler's scenic composition. In *Solomon and Balkis* the tree weighs as much as the palace. The artist achieved this balance by the management of size and plasticity. The tree is large and three-dimensional while the palace is farther away, smaller, and flatly painted.

Design devices. Four characteristic devices appear in Kiesler's designs: projections, light, symbolism, and pedestals. Kiesler's projections include both moving picture films and various kinds of slides. In *Helen Retires* he used projections during the banquet for informing the audience of the ceremonial nature of the gathering and illustrations for the speeches of the guest orators. He carried the plot forward at the end of Act I with a film

depicting Helen's undersea voyage. Another example of projections was the inner dreams of characters in the opening of Act II in *Ariadne in Naxos*. He also employed the more common special effects of moving clouds and bursting flames (*The Magic Flute*). In *Der Freischuetz* projections presented the magical appearance of wild animals with both still and moving pictures. Finally, emblems of symbolic meaning, such as the serpent in *The Magic Flute*, were projected.

Several times in his writings about the early European productions, Kiesler refers to spot-lighting techniques for directing the audience's attention. As late as the production of *Henry IV*, he still employed the bright spotlight in the dark where the script allowed.

That elements of the design were to represent polarized ideas, themes, etc., implies the frequent need for symbolic treatment of those elements. Thomson's remark concerning "expressive detail" also applies here. Kiesler's symbols tended to be bold and obvious. The leaves and the moon of *In the Pasha's Garden* were immense, as were the snake-haired vision of *Ariadne*, the violins of *Hoffmann*, the house of *The Poor Sailor*, the test tubes of *The Fashions of the Times*, and the brick wall window of *No Exit*; the list is almost endless.

Evident as early as *In the Pasha's Garden* and common in the mid-1940s, was his selection of a pedestal or raised level to elevate the actors. Pedestals appear in several of the studies for *No Exit*, but the device was abandoned for the production. Around that same time Kiesler rendered the project for *The Mother Of Us All* using five ramps leading to a platform. The houses of *The Poor Sailor* are similarly raised above stage level. He might well have been working on a way of raising the actors above the stage floor for the entire length of the performance as he advocated for the *No Exit* setting. Perhaps he was trying to achieve the separation of polarized elements within the stage space. The experiments are concluded with the 1947 production and are not found again in the available design record.

Perspective

The dominant design style in America while Kiesler was a practitioner of the stage art was the New Stagecraft. The New Stagecraft was brought to the United States in the second decade of this century. Its promoters sought a simplification of the excesses of realism. Robert Edmond Jones called his approach "Pictorial Realism;" for rather than slavish adherence to fact, he believed the design should be an imaginative expression of realistic elements. The line of the New Stagecraft was simpler and the color somewhat brighter and more appealing to the eye. A mild degree of symbolism pervaded the designs. Kiesler came from Europe as the next generation beyond the New Stagecraft. He was a strange amalgam of the Expressionist, Futurist and

Constructivist art movements, and he brought these influences with him. However, this Kiesler combination was not wholly evident in all of his designs. In fact some, such as *The Curious Women*, *Solomon and Balkis*, *Orpheus and Euridice*, *Angelique*, *Fashions of the Times* and perhaps even *No Exit*, might well have been designed by the advocates of the New Stagecraft. Yet even in most of these designs, Kiesler's use of symbolic representation is greater than that of his contemporaries. His symbolic treatment is the direct result of his theory of polarization. While projections, especially film, give Kiesler's work distinctive flair, it is the symbolism, a direct result of the application of his design theory, that most characterizes his scenic design.

Chapter 6

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