Writer, Typographer, Printer, Artist

Eric Gill (1882-1940), best known for his typography and the widely-used typeface that bears his name, was a prolific English artist and writer whose daring aesthetic combined sensuality and spirituality with a keen sense of the line. His artistic works range from postage stamps to stone monuments. Drawn from USF’s Albert Spencer Collection, the over 150 works in “Eric Gill Iconographer” primarily represent wood engravings completed between 1910 to 1940. These were commonly created on board using carving tools and were printed in limited editions using letterpress technology. Original engravings, blocks and publications are also on display.

The artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist.
—Eric Gill, Christianity and the Machine Age, 1940

Events

Wednesday, November 11, 4-7 p.m.
Join USF’s Printmaking class for a hands-on demonstration on the Albion press previously owned by the firm of Gill & Hague. Participants will have an opportunity to print their own commemorative Gill broadside. A reception will take place in the Thacher Gallery.

Tuesday, November 17, 10 a.m.
Tuesday, November 24, 3 p.m.
Thursday, December 3, 10:30 a.m.
Join John Hawk, Rare Book Librarian, for a close-up look at the collection.

About the Artist

At twenty-one, Gill gave up formal studies in sacred architecture to pursue calligraphy, stone cutting and printmaking, crafts he utilized throughout his entire career. Identified on his own tombstone as a “stone carver,” he was one of England’s most sought after headstone carvers, and received commissions for important stone monuments and sculptures at Westminster Cathedral, the BBC Headquarters, and the League of Nations building in Geneva. Between 1923 and 1931, Gill designed his best-known typefaces: Perpetua, Gill Sans, and Joanna, named for his daughter. He was appointed a Royal Designer for Industry, the highest British honor for designers. During his lifetime, Gill wrote and published numerous books on art, religion and society, including An Essay on Typography in 1931 and Autobiography in 1949.

His most celebrated artworks include sculptures and relief wood engravings as well as drawings. His subjects range from feathery to the religious. His iconic designs and commitment to craftsmanship demonstrate a strong influence from the English Arts and Crafts movement (1880-1910) and artists such as textile designer William Morris. Along with his peers, he founded the Guild of St. Joseph and St. Dominic in order to unite artisans in a religious association. A controversial and conflicted figure, Gill was deeply religious and influential by medieval Catholicism, yet created every imaginable boundary in his philosophy. An advocate of free love and Fabian socialism while a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic, Gill had utopian dreams of re-creating medieval guilds of artists, yet often worked in self-imposed isolation. The deeply spiritual and overtly sexual are regularly intermixed throughout his work. The engravings in “Eric Gill Iconographer” embody these tensions while revealing the elegant boldness that defines his aesthetic.

Acknowledgments

This exhibition was produced in collaboration with the Thacher Gallery. Students in Stuart McKee’s Exhibition Design (Spring 2009) curated and designed the exhibition. Participants will have an opportunity to print their own commemorative Gill broadside. A reception will take place in the Thacher Gallery.

Eric Gill Iconographer and The Albert Spencer Collection

Acquired by the University in 1971 and housed in the Donohue Rare Book Room, The Albert Spencer Collection focuses on Gill’s wood engravings. These works include early bookplates, family portraits, erotica, religious scenes, and illustrations for the fine editions of The Four Gospels, The Canterbury Tales and Trolor Crayote among others. Co-curated by Thomas Lucas, USF Gallery Director, and Stuart McKee, Design Professor, “Eric Gill Iconographer” presents 100 of the most representative engravings in the collection as well as original woodblocks and Gill publications. The exhibition’s design reflects Gill’s influences, and was created by USF design students. The Spencer Collection, one of the many collections held by the Donohue Rare Book Room, includes hundreds of Gill prints. Beginning November 5, the exhibition will extend into the Donohue Rare Book Room which houses an Albion press previously owned by the firm of Hague & Gill.

Credits

Exhibition Signage Design: Gary Au, Angelica Loza, Kate Matusmoto, Catherine Monday, Samuel North
Publication Design: Jordan Hicks, Shae McCollough, Stephanie Whitney
Banner Design: Minesh Govenji, Elizabeth Mohr
Website Database Design: Oscar Areujo, Andrew Hutcheson, Brandon Manders, Peter Tashjian-Groen
Broadside: Gary Au (Design), Alejandro Louis Rodriguez (Printing Apprentice), Fred and Barbara Volmer (Advisors and Printers)
Installation: Alejandro Louis Rodriguez, Katie Luke, Tennes Mejik, Samuel North, Katie Patterson, Nicole Pitman, Kelise Rayns and Jean Tull
Exhibition Overview and Technical Advisor: John Hawk, Timajes Lucas, SU. Stuart McKee, Mary Rhyme, Henry Smith, Randy Souther