

The Legacy

“...two designers absolutely changed the course of British theatre design: one was Jocelyn Herbert, and the other was John Bury.” Peter Hall

Jocelyn Herbert (1917-2003) was a seminal figure in postwar twentieth-century British theatre. Her approach altered the way directors and audiences came to view stage design, and contributed to a fundamental shift in the relationship between writer, director and designer. As well as her artistic force, she provided a strong moral influence on the development of the English Stage Company, one of the key energies that revolutionised post-war British theatre. At the Royal Court Theatre she worked on world premiers of scripts by Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, Arnold Wesker and David Storey, defining the look of plays that were to become twentieth century classics. The consistency of Herbert's approach at the Court, her commitment to the text, her paring down of inessentials to achieve a poetic lyricism, and her bold steps – for example the exposure of the bare back theatre wall, the pipes and the lighting rig in Arnold Wesker's 'The Kitchen' (1959) - was extended in later work for spaces as diverse as the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the amphitheatre at Epidaurus in Greece and the small studio at the Haymarket, Leicester. She was a member of the Building Committee for Denys Lasdun's National Theatre on London's South Bank, and went on to mount productions in all three auditoria, being particularly renowned for her use of the Olivier in her collaborations with the director, John Dexter, and with the poet, playwright and director, Tony Harrison. Her film work encompassed 'Tom Jones' (costumes), 'If...', 'O Lucky Man!', 'Ned Kelly', 'Hotel New Hampshire,' 'The Wales of August' and 'Prometheus'.

Herbert's is one of the most extensive twentieth century theatre design archives, spanning student drawings made at the London Theatre Studio in the late 1930s to the notebook she was using on the day she died in 2003, which she spent working with Tony Harrison on his new play. The main body of the archive is made up of over 5,000 of Herbert's drawings for set and costume designs and also includes production photographs, notebooks, sketchbooks, diaries and contact books, three-dimensional stage models, ground plans, colour swatches for costumes, research materials, budgets and invoices. In addition to these, the archive holds several of Herbert's moulds and masks (chiefly for 'The Oresteia' and 'Prometheus') and several puppet figures made for Harrison Birtwistle's opera 'The Mask of Orpheus'. Herbert's career was characterised by long collaborative relationships with directors, writers and actors, and her archive embraces a significant body of correspondence with figures such as Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson, John Osborne and Tony Harrison alongside papers relating to the English Stage Company and the National Theatre as well as drafts of letters to Herbert's family and others in her notebooks. There are also draft statements and lecture notes about her attitude to theatre and design, her understanding of the way masks should be used in theatre, and the values she shared with George Devine, the founder of the English Stage Company and, in the last years of his life, Jocelyn's partner. Herbert's notebooks contain a mixture of lists and texts relating to her professional and private lives.

Herbert wished this rich collection to be placed in an institution where it was accessible and used by students. She had a long connection with the theatre department at Wimbledon College of Art, which was for many years run by Malcolm Pryde, who, like Herbert, had been a student of Margaret Harris ('Percy' Harris), a member of the famous Motley design trio. This shared background made Herbert an important link with the courses Pryde taught, and she was often called in as an external examiner or otherwise to advise the students. She became involved with WCA as a fine artist when she was invited by Eileen Hogan to participate in *Acts of Renewal: Japanese Art Reinterpreted*, creating work alongside other WCA staff for an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum. In 2000 she received an honorary doctorate from WCA.