

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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MUSEUM OF MODERN ART EXHIBITS BORIS ARONSON

STAGE DESIGNS AND MODELS

"Painting with light" is what Boris Aronson, noted artist and stage designer, calls the new scenic techniques he has spent years developing. Models of these, which will show the multiplicity of changing scenic effects in all their color and movement, will demonstrate the new techniques when the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, opens on Wednesday, June 25, an exhibition of Aronson's Stage Designs and Models. The new techniques shown are so advanced that only in small degree and very infrequently have any of them yet been used on the actual stage. After years of experiment, however, Mr. Aronson feels they are now ready for practical stage production.

In addition to nine sketch-designs for sets and three for costumes the exhibition includes a shadow box showing transparencies of two sets for a musical comedy, two models of changing scenic projection from the rear, and a large model of a stage set against which fifty color slides are projected in rotation to show the infinite range of movement in color and shape possible with front projection. It is this large model which will probably most delight visitors to the exhibition.

The stage of this model has a permanent set of interrelated abstract shapes composed of gauze, screening, and opaque material, all in neutral gray. Against this basic set are projected slides of brilliant color and fantastic design which, instead of reflecting against the usual flat surface, are brought to a high point of visual excitement and brilliance by being broken up into new and dazzling forms by the varying depths and irregular shapes of the basic set.

Equally important in this new technique are the color slides, quite as much of an innovation as the set against which they are projected. Instead of the customary color photographic film between two pieces of glass, each of the Aronson slides is an individual collage composed of gelatin cutouts and black paint superimposed upon the glass of the slide itself. In other words, each slide is an individual, tiny paintingⁱⁿ which colored gelatin is used instead of paint, as the latter loses much of its color when projected. As Aronson is primarily an artist, each of these little slides is a work of art comparable to easel or

mural painting.

Aronson's front-projection technique makes possible the changing of an entire set or a complete dissolve at a minimum of expense and without the waits and confusion of physical set changes, a technique designed particularly for use with ballets and musicals. The model will show in rotation fifty slides at fifteen second intervals.

The other two models demonstrate rear-projection techniques in which movement and changing color are brought about by three huge backstage lights in the primary colors set at different angles and operated alternately so that they project through a screen against which a cutout acts both as a semi-transparency and a silhouette, thus forming the stage backdrop when viewed from the audience.

The shadow box demonstrates a new device for showing a stage sketch in three dimensional form by means of glass transparencies. The two sets shown are designs for the jungle scene and the house interior of the SADIE THOMPSON musical produced in 1944. Each set consists of four glass panels on each of which a separate portion of the entire set is painted. Placed against each other in the shadow box, the transparencies give an illusion of depth.

A great deal of ingenuity and expert knowledge was needed to set up these intricate stage models and work out their operational design. This work was brilliantly done by the Museum's electrical staff, headed by Robert Faeth. The exhibition was arranged by the Museum's Department of Theatre Arts under the direction of George Amberg assisted by Kim Swados. Commenting on it, Mr. Amberg says:

"The Department of Theatre Arts considers one of its essential functions the presentation of experimental and controversial projects for stage sets and costumes. In the exhibition of theatre projects by Boris Aronson the Museum affords the public its first opportunity to see the results of this exceptionally interesting experimental work with stage lighting. The artist contends that because of the immense progress made in stage technique, infinitely more imaginative use could be made of the lighting equipment. In 1940 Boris Aronson demonstrated the possibilities of projected scenery in the Ballet Theatre's production of William Saroyan's GREAT AMERICAN GOOF.

"Today play production has become so complex and expensive a commercial venture that producers cannot afford to experiment extensively. Hence progressive designers have little opportunity to acquaint the theatre public with their more experimental endeavors in this field. Because of this, the stage has been slow to acknowledge changes and progress in architectural function, creative technique and visual perception which are significant in contemporary art. The Museum feels that modern trends in the arts should be clearly reflected in the field of theatre arts."

Born near Kiev, Russia in 1900, Boris Aronson studied painting in Moscow, Berlin and Paris; also began designing for the stage. He came to New York in 1923 where he continued easel painting and began stage and costume designing. Among the Broadway plays for which he has

designed sets are WALK A LITTLE FASTER, THREE MEN ON A HORSE, AWAKE AND SING, MERCHANT OF YONKERS, CABIN IN THE SKY and SADIE THOMPSON. Mr. Aronson has a passion for the circus, has travelled with it and painted countless circus canvases. He has had several one-man shows in New York and has exhibited in Paris, Los Angeles, and other cities. He is represented in the collections of Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, George Gershwin, Clifford Odets, Mrs. Forbes Hawkes, Harold Arlen and many others.

The exhibition comprises the following items:

Experiment in Front-Projection.

Project #1, 1947. Model with 50 slides.

Experiment in Rear-Projection.

Project #2, City Scene for a Review, 1947. Model.

Project #3, Opium Dream Scene for the Ballet, The Red Poppy, 1947. Model.

Shadow Box

Sadie Thompson, 1944. Transparency for Jungle Scene. Musical comedy adapted from Somerset Maugham's play. Produced by Rouben Mamoulian, New York.

Sadie Thompson, 1944. Transparency for House Interior.

Sketches

Miss Underground, 1940. Project.

The Great American Goof, 1940. Setting for ballet. Book by William Saroyan, choreography by Eugene Loring, music by Henry Brant. Produced by The Ballet Theatre, New York.

Snow Maiden, 1942. Setting for ballet. Choreography by Bronislava Nijinska, music by Alexander Glazounov. Produced by The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, New York.

Snow Maiden, 1942. Costume for ballet.

Studies for a Classical Play, 1947. Costume.

Studies for a Classical Play, 1947. Costume.

Gentle People, 1939. Setting for play. Book by Irwin Shaw. Produced by The Group Theatre, New York.

Miss Underground, 1940. Project.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 1939. Balcony Scene for play. Book by Charles MacArthur and Ben Hecht. Produced by Gilbert Miller, New York.

Heavenly Express, 1940. Railroad Trestle Scene for play. Book by Albert Bein. Produced by Kermit Bloomgarten, New York.

Weep for the Virgins, 1935. Backyard Scene for play. Book by Nellise Child. Produced by The Group Theatre, New York.

Cabin in the Sky, 1940. Little Joe's Backyard. Book by Lynn Root. Produced by Albert Lewis and Vinton Freedley, New York.