

Eric Gill drawings in DoT&GC

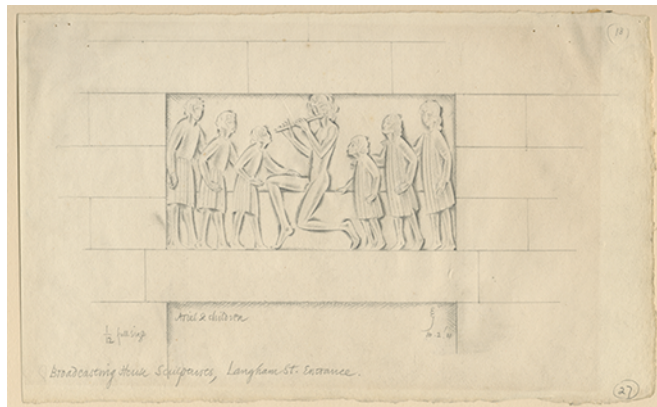
Background

Eric Gill (1882–1940) was an English sculptor, typeface designer, printer, artist and writer. He completed his first sculpture in 1910, had his first solo sculpture exhibition in 1911, and started his first major public commission for Westminster Cathedral in 1914. Aided by apprentices and assistants, his workshop expanded. In 1928 Gill held one of his largest solo shows featuring the recently completed 'Mankind', Gill's largest non-commissioned sculpture. He received many architectural commissions, including sculptures for the London Underground headquarters in 1928 and for the BBC headquarters in 1930. The BBC job was one of the high-profile commissions that firmly established Gill's public reputation. Numerous other large-scale commissions followed and there was continued coverage of his work in the press.

Eric Gill received the commission to design and carve five sculptures for the BBC at the newly built Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London in 1930. He submitted drawings and carved models, one-third full size, for all five sculptures. Work was undertaken between 1931 and 1933. He accepted the suggestion from the BBC to use Prospero and Ariel, the fictional characters in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*: Prospero to serve as a symbol of wisdom and benevolence, and Ariel, the invisible spirit of the air, as a personification of broadcasting. Gill's Broadcasting House commission consisted of four external groups of sculpture. There were three Ariel panels in high relief for the sides of the building: 'Ariel Hears Celestial Music' and 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety' on Portland Place, and 'Ariel Piping to the Children' on Langham Street. Gill started carving the panels on 24 August 1931, but had assistants doing preparatory work in situ during the months beforehand. He continued to carve in situ on a regular basis and worked through the winter. The three panels on the outside of the building were done during winter 1931–1932. It is thought that they are made from Corsham Stone and measure 122 x 182.9cm. 'Prospero and Ariel' was the biggest

sculpture situated in a niche above the main entrance on the outside of the building. In the main entrance hall, Gill also produced a sculpture called 'The Sower'; a stone-carved panel recording the names of key people in the creation of the building; and a Latin inscription of bronze letters. The building was in full use at the beginning of May 1932 and King George V and Queen Mary visited for a royal opening in July. This was modern sculpture on modern architecture. It was discussed passionately in the press. The coverage was generally positive and the sculpture deemed appropriate for the building.

The Lettering, printing and graphic design collections at the DoT&GC have four drawings relating to the design of the Ariel panels. Three of the four drawings are of 'Ariel Piping to the Children', and one is of 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety'.

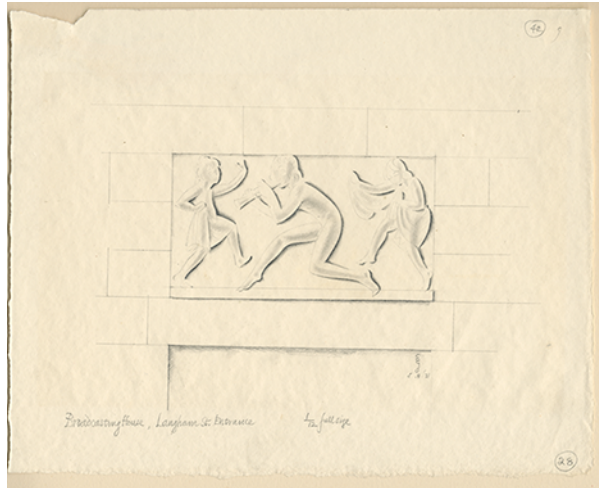


A preparatory drawing in pencil by Eric Gill for one of the four external sculptures he was commissioned to carve at BBC Broadcasting House, London. There were three panels designed and carved in relief on the sides of the building featuring Ariel. This drawing was the first design for a panel known as 'Ariel Piping to the Children' for the Langham Street side. Notes written in pencil in Gill's handwriting say, 'Ariel & children', '1/12 full size', 'Broadcasting House Sculptures, Langham St. Entrance'. The numbers '13' and '27' are also written in pencil towards the edges of the sheet. Pencil on paper. Size 31 x 18.5cm. The drawing is dated 10 February 1931. It shows seven full body figures: a naked Ariel playing music to six children. The drawing shows the panel in the context of

some of the building. Gill's client must have rejected it as he produced a new simpler design for this panel in August 1931 that closely resembles the finished sculpture. There are two other drawings in the DoT&GC collection relating to the 'Ariel Piping to the Children' panel, and one drawing of 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety'. The sculpture work for the panels was carried out during the winter of 1931–1932.



A preparatory drawing in pencil by Eric Gill for one of the four external sculptures he was commissioned to carve at BBC Broadcasting House, London. There were three panels in relief on the sides of the building featuring Ariel. This drawing was for a panel known as 'Ariel Piping to the Children' for the Langham Street side. Notes written in pencil in Gill's handwriting say, '1st sketch for design No. 2 Ariel & children'. The numbers '33' and '4' are also written in pencil. Pencil on paper. Size 16 x 12.5cm. The drawing is dated 4 August 1931 and shows Ariel playing music with a child dancing on either side of him. One of the other drawings in the DoT&GC collection is a more polished version of this drawing and was produced the following day on 5 August 1931. A previous drawing for 'Ariel Piping to the Children' is dated 10 February 1931 and shows a naked Ariel playing music to six children. The client must have rejected the first design as the new simpler design for this panel closely resembles the finished sculpture. The sculpture work for the panels was carried out during the winter of 1931–1932.



A preparatory drawing in pencil by Eric Gill for one of the four external sculptures he was commissioned to carve at BBC Broadcasting House, London. There were three panels in relief on the sides of the building featuring Ariel. This drawing was for a panel known as 'Ariel Piping to the Children' for the Langham Street side. It shows three full body figures: a naked Ariel playing music with a child dancing on either side of him. The drawing shows the panel in the context of some of the building. The drawing is dated 5 August 1931. Notes written in pencil in Gill's handwriting say, 'Broadcasting House, Langham St. Entrance' and '1/12 full size'. The numbers '28', '42' and '9' are also written in pencil towards the edges of the sheet. Pencil on paper. Size 31 x 25cm. See the rougher sketch of 'Ariel & children' done the previous day on 4 August 1931. Ariel was carved semi-clothed in the final panel. The 1932 BBC Year Book said that 'it gives an admirable effect of happiness and dancing'. There are two other drawings in the DoT&GC collection relating to the 'Ariel Piping to the Children' panel, and one drawing of 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety'. The sculpture work for the panels was carried out during the winter of 1931-1932.



A preparatory drawing in pencil by Eric Gill for one of the four external sculptures he was commissioned to carve at BBC Broadcasting House, London. There were three panels in relief on the sides of the building featuring Ariel. This drawing was for a panel known as 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety' above the public entrance to the Concert Hall on Portland Place. The drawing is dated 14 February 1931. It shows Ariel rising up between two figures, Wisdom and Gaiety, the latter having taken Ariel's pipe. Ariel's outstretched arms symbolise his willingness to embrace both. Notes written in pencil in Gill's handwriting say, '1/12 full size', 'Broadcasting House Sculptures - Portland Place II', and 'Ariel between wisdom & gaiety'. The number '25' is also written in pencil towards the edge of the sheet. Pencil on paper. Size 31 x 19cm. The drawing is almost identical to the in situ panel. The sculpture work for the panels was carried out during the winter of 1931-1932.

Related material in other collections

There are photographs and other drawings of the Ariel panels in the Eric Gill collections at William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles; Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin; and Hesburgh Libraries, University of Notre Dame, Indiana.

References

Written by Sallie Morris with reference to:

Ruth Cribb's PhD thesis, *Workshop practices and the making of sculpture: authorship and collaboration in the work of Eric Gill, 1909 to 1940*, University of Brighton, 2013.

The Courtauld Institute of Art, London www.artandarchitecture.org.uk

<https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/buildings/broadcasting-house>

The National Archives, London www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Acquisition information

The four drawings of the Ariel panels were donated by James Fooks-Bale (former DoT&GC student), Senior Director – Creative, of Monotype Imaging UK to Gerry Leonidas in the DoT&GC in January 2020. This occurred following the closure of Monotype's premises at Unit 2, Perrywood Business Park, Honeycrook Lane, Salfords, Redhill, Surrey in December 2019.

It is not known how the drawings of the Ariel panels ended up in the archives at Monotype in Surrey. Eric Gill worked as a type designer with The Monotype Corporation Ltd during the 1920s and 1930s, producing designs that were lucrative for the company. After Gill died in 1940 his wife Mary Gill remained in contact with Stanley Morison who was typographic advisor at Monotype as well as Gill's good friend. Gill had received a retainer from the company and Mary continued to receive an annual sum of money. Perhaps she made a gift of these drawings to Morison or Monotype. There was an exhibition to commemorate the lettering and type designs by Eric Gill put on by Monotype at Monotype House, 43 Fetter Lane, London in October 1958. Perhaps this work was lent or given to Monotype for the exhibition by Mrs Gill to represent his drawing of sculpture.



Location of the three Ariel panels at BBC Broadcasting House, London (as well as 'Prospero and Ariel' over the main entrance, and 'The Sower' inside)



'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety', in situ panel over Portland Place entrance, Broadcasting House, London.



Model (not in situ panel) for 'Ariel Piping to the Children'. Langham Street, Broadcasting House, London.



Eric Gill executing one of his sculptures on the new B.B.C. Headquarters, Portland Place, London

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Eric Gill carving 'Ariel Between Wisdom and Gaiety', Portland Place entrance, Broadcasting House, London. From London & North Eastern Railway Magazine, January 1933 (ZPER 17/7). www.nationalarchives.gov.uk