

## [Hein Heckroth \(1901-1970\) - stage designer, film designer, painter. A survey of his life and work](#)

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Call for Papers

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Workshop (Art History, Theatre Studies, Media Studies and related disciplines), 10 July 2020, Justus Liebig University, Giessen, Germany

The German-British artist Hein Heckroth (1901-1970) does not belong to the canonical figures of 20th century art, theatre and film history, despite the fact that as a painter and as a stage, costume and production designer he had tremendous influence on numerous artistic projects of international importance.

Heckroth created stage and costume designs for ground-breaking works such as the dance drama *Der grüne Tisch* (1932) choreographed by Kurt Jooss, which won first prize at the *Concours International de Chorégraphie* in Paris - a production that subsequently achieved worldwide fame through guest performances and tours. The legendary ballet film *The Red Shoes* (1948), winner of the Oscar for Best Production Design, was shaped by Heckroth's designs, even before the English director Michael Powell appeared on the scene.

From 1956 on Heckroth was active as the head of stage and costume design at the *Städtische Bühnen* in Frankfurt am Main, working mainly for drama, opera and dance. The worldwide reputation he had as a film designer repeatedly earned him lucrative guest engagements in that field as well. Until his death in 1970 Heckroth worked as a set designer for numerous German and foreign film productions, including *Das Spukschloß im Spessart* (Kurt Hoffmann, 1960) and *Die Dreigroschenoper* (Wolfgang Staudte, 1962). In August 1965 Heckroth went to Hollywood for six months to do the set for Alfred Hitchcock's political thriller *Torn Curtain* (1966).

Heckroth worked closely with various theatre and film celebrities - from Gustaf Gründgens to Hitchcock - and was honoured as a painter in several posthumous exhibitions. Hence, it comes as a surprise that accounts of his biography and oeuvre are still full of blank spots that are literally waiting to get coloured.

A detailed biography, based on primary sources and thorough research, simply does not exist. Some sketchy accounts of Heckroth's life, mainly published in exhibition catalogues after his death, rely on information provided by his widow, Ada Heckroth, as well as on personal acquaintance or friendship with the deceased. The biographical data rendered in recent publications rarely emanate from profound source studies and are usually compiled from diverse repositories.

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Our workshop sets out to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the artist's death and to attenuate the deficits in academic research on Heckroth. A one-day symposium naturally cannot recall the "whole Heckroth", rather the whole as a fragment. This approach seems appropriate to Heckroth's work anyway: his international biography, his activities in the field of "free" and applied art, traditional and new media, enduring and ephemeral works, his chameleon-like adaptation of different modernist styles and contents suggest that he should be perceived as an artist with many contradictions and breaches.

As a scaffolding or basis for a thorough analysis of Hein Heckroth's work, an examination of the following topics and questions appears particularly welcome:

- 1.) A study and review of archival sources on Heckroth's abundant number of theatre and film productions, which were not only projected or realised at his main stations of life (Münster, Essen, London, Dartington, Frankfurt), but also at many other European sites: Düsseldorf, Cologne, Göttingen, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Vienna, Cambridge, Glyndebourne, Milan and so on.
- 2.) Analyses of particular films as well as exemplary studies of Heckroth's stage spaces, documented in drafts and photographs of theatrical performances, evaluating their historical impact and purpose.
- 3.) Studies of the relations between Heckroth's painting and his work for theatre and film, explicitly focussing on the intermedial character of his work and contextualising it historically and/or systematically.

Heckroth's artistic work and his biography can only be understood from the point of view of various disciplines. Therefore, this call for papers turns to researchers from the fields of art history, dramatics, theatre and media studies, from the doctoral/PhD phase onwards, who are interested in and deal with an interdisciplinary approach.

Presentations can be given either in German or English with a maximum length of 30 minutes.

Please submit proposals for conference papers (no longer than 300 words) in German or English and a short curriculum vitae until 20 September 2019 to the following address: [Barbara.Stommel@kunstgeschichte.uni-giessen.de](mailto:Barbara.Stommel@kunstgeschichte.uni-giessen.de)

We hope to notify successful applicants by 15 October 2019. Travel expenses and costs for accommodation will be covered subject to a successful application for funds. Registration for the conference will be free of charge. We plan to publish a volume of conference proceedings.

Organizers: Prof. Dr. Sigrid Ruby (Institute for Art History, Justus Liebig University, Giessen); Dr. Marcus Kiefer (Hein Heckroth Society, Giessen)

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