JOHN CONKLIN
SCENOGRAPHER, 1957-1980

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Master of Arts

by
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Approved by

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DEDICATION

No project like this is ever just a result of one person's endeavor; it is a result of the sustenance given the researcher by those closest to her. To my mother, my father, and my husband -- a loving thank you.
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PREFACE

The original aim of this project was to document pictorially the activity of a promising contemporary scenographer. The idea sprang from an iconography seminar at The Ohio State University in the summer of 1978. I was sent to New York City to photograph the work of prominent New York scene designers for a week as part of my assigned projects. Given names and phone numbers, I contacted practicing designers, retired designers, museum curators, and librarians. The experience was edifying. The majority of these professionals contacted were extremely cooperative. They welcomed me into their lives, allowed me to photograph numerous renderings and models, and took time to discuss their work. They were delighted, but puzzled, that someone was recording their work pictorially. I was amazed at this reaction. It seemed to me that no one was saving the work of these talented artists. My curiosity was so aroused that I talked to curators and librarians about the documentation of contemporary scene design. I discovered that no one was or is documenting this type of activity methodically. I discussed the loss of potentially significant work of contemporary designers with my professors, who listened patiently. It was then that this project began.

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Documenting a practicing designer's work is not as simple as it seems. Few artists, especially John Conklin, recognize their true importance. They rarely retain an extensive collection of their past work or extensive records. Even though the person exists as a resource, he is seldom concerned with his past work, focusing instead upon his current projects. Models take up space and are most often discarded after they have served their purpose. Renderings of productions are mislaid or incomplete, sometimes given away, or damaged. Designers' memories are unclear about specifics.

Theatres rarely develop meaningful photo files of stage settings. Regional theatres have small staffs who are busy meeting their production requirements, with little or no time to preserve a designer's works for posterity.

Libraries and museums seldom solicit a designer for his renderings, elevations, and models until he has achieved stardom, usually late in life. It is usually the case, not the exception, that collections of designers' works are made only after the designer's death.

Much of the important design work in the contemporary theatre is being produced by regional theatre companies. It has only been during the last decade that any attempt was made to annually record the activity of regional theatres. Theatre Profiles, an annual produced by Theatre Communications Group in New York City, lists the productions of a particular
theatre and its artistic staff. At best, it is incomplete in its information. In its early issues, the information it provides is not satisfactory for scholarship. The annuals often provide two lists: a season's productions and a season's artistic staff. These lists are frequently not correlated.

This study is intended to be a prototype for further studies of other contemporary scenographers and designers. The catalogue is as accurate and complete as possible with the information made available by the designer and various companies and theatres with which Conklin has worked. I believe that it is as nearly complete as possible faced with the constraints of time, money, and interest in the academic and professional theatre world in preserving history as it happens. The pictorial record is a collection of original photographs of models and of reproductions from the only full-set photographs currently in print. The catalogue must be updated periodically, both factually and pictorially if it is to serve its intended purpose.
METHODOLOGY

When John Conklin agreed to be the subject of this thesis in July of 1979, extensive background research was begun. It quickly became apparent that documenting a working contemporary designer called for non-traditional means of research. Conklin's work, along with most working designers' work, has not been collected, catalogued, or analyzed. His work and comments about it are not readily available in journals and other common references. There is one photograph of a complete setting and a biogram in Contemporary Stage and Design - U.S.A. (1974) and a few photographs of painter's elevations and a biogram in Lynn Pecktal's Designing and Painting for the Theatre (1975).

Examination of theatre annuals, trade magazines, and periodicals only revealed data useful for cataloguing his designs; they supplied no photographs or design commentaries. New York Theatre Annual, New York Critics' Review Index, Theatre Profiles, and Theatre World proved to be the best sources for catalogue information.

The Billy Rose Theatre Collection in the Performing Arts Library of the New York City Public Library contains very little material on Conklin in its clipping files, but it does have video tapes of two productions which Conklin designed: Juno and the Paycock at the Mark Taper Forum in 1974 (VTR in color) and Cat on a Hot Tin Roof for the American Shakespeare
Festival in 1974 (VTR in black and white). These tapes are available for viewing in the library.

After discovering that traditional research sources would produce very little for this study, it was determined that the interview process would be the primary research tool. This process was implemented through letters, telephone conversations, and interview sessions with Conklin. Conklin's only personal record of his work is a program and clipping file and several models. The file is not extensive, but it did provide some useful information. Reviews in this file contained little to aid in design analysis, but provided additional information for the catalogue. Critics' comments about Conklin's work are brief and meaningless. Dates and periodical names are missing on most of his clipping articles. Programs usually contained only slight biographical statements. Conklin's collection of models were photographed in him home on 35mm color slide film.

Conklin's clipping file raised more questions than it answered. The information it contains is only partial, but it revealed information that made further library research fruitful. Collating the often variant and contradictory information from all these sources involved tracing complete seasons over an extended period of time for several regional theatres. It involved tracking particular titles and directors' names by reinvestigating annuals and periodicals for obscure bits of information which are found in profiles of regional companies, reviews, articles about particular
theatres or directors. To reconstruct certain periods of Conklin's career that were not illuminated by these sources, a survey of newspapers and journals covering long periods of time was instigated. This method confirmed some of the facts already collected, but it revealed little new evidence.

Library research did not provide adequate information to completely catalogue Conklin's career. Further research was begun by contacting the theatres and producing companies for which Conklin worked via telephone and letter. All of the organizations contacted, except one, were very cooperative when given specific questions. The exception was the Williamstown Theatre Festival; no information could be gained from this organization. The Yale School of Drama Library also helped to clarify certain entries in the catalogue.

In October 1979, Patricia MacKay, editor of Theatre Crafts, was contacted for possible information, back issues which might mention Conklin or contain articles about the places where he worked. This contact produced nothing immediately. However, in the May/June 1980 issue of Theatre Crafts, Patricia MacKay authored an article entitled "John Conklin: Designer of Theatrical Gesture". Another article, "Williamstown: 25 Summers of Theatre in the Berkshires" by Susan Levi Wallach, was also included in that issue. Much of the information in these articles was repetitive of taped discussions with Conklin made for this thesis prior to the publication of the Theatre Crafts articles. The Theatre

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Crafts pieces provided some usable production photographs not previously uncovered and some quotes that expressed Conklin's ideas in a clearer manner than he had on the interview tapes.

Conklin's overseas activities prior to the 1979-1980 season are not thoroughly documented in this study because of time and financial considerations. The difficulties encountered in documenting his American activities are logarithmically multiplied when dealing with foreign sources.

After the catalogue was compiled as completely as possible, the selected biography and design analyses were begun. The majority of the biographical section was written from the taped conversations with Conklin. Additional facts were obtained from the Yale School of Drama and telephone contacts with Conklin's friends and professional associates. Since no design analyses of Conklin's work have been published, the interviews and examination of the photographs became the primary sources of the analyses contained in this study. The photographs were grouped according to design genre and then analyzed from an artistic point of view. The commentaries made are based in an understanding of the basic elements of art and theatrical design composition. The aim of the analyses is not to critique individual designs but to point out design trends and style in Conklin's work at this time.

This kind of thesis project at The Ohio State University is plowing virgin ground; there is no exact model to follow.
The format of this thesis is a synthesis of techniques used in the research and organization of traditional theses and dissertations.
INTRODUCTION

John Conklin is one of the most active young designers in professional theatre today. His designs for scenery and costumes for the theatre, opera, and ballet have been and continue to be seen throughout this country and abroad. Although his credits include several Broadway shows and a Tony nomination, his work to date has been done mainly for American regional theatre and opera companies. The list of his professional credits suggests that he has significantly influenced design for American regional theatre and that he may spread American design influence abroad, even though his influence is not readily apparent to the casual observer.

John Conklin is leaving a significant mark upon American design. This influence, however, is not easily recognized due to the fact that he is designing all over the country in theatres that receive little media attention or nationwide coverage. His contribution has been particularly important in the development of a regional theatre design style which differs dramatically from the commercial Broadway design style, because of economic necessities. This regional style has become so well accepted and such a strong force that it is now influencing the commercial Broadway theatres.

This influence cannot be documented through awards,
published articles, books, or catalogues. At this time, contemporary designers' works are not being recorded in any organized fashion. A smattering of works may be documented through exhibition catalogues, publicity photographs, and trade journals, but little attempt has been made on the part of theatre historians to document contemporary designers during their early years.

The American regional theatre movement started slowly in the late 1920s and 1930s, gained momentum in the 1950s, and by the late 1970s, over three hundred were scattered throughout the United States. By the 1980s, regional theatres claimed to be the national theatre of the United States. The development of the American regional theatre since 1950 has followed a basic pattern across the country that can be broken into three overlapping steps: survival, upgrading, and innovation.

Until the mid-1960s, most of the regional theatres that existed were preoccupied with "survival." Their primary concern was gaining a foothold, securing a facility and financing, combatting public apathy, building a following a building a company. Because of this, the regional theatres concentrated on the classics instead of new scripts as they had originally proposed to do. Generally, the founders of the new theatres felt that they had to present the familiar and sure thing. Anything obscure or unknown would have blunted interest in the venture and endangered
their teetering finances. If new plays were done, they were sandwiched between the more acceptable ones and often presented as free fare. The theatres also concentrated on the development of large subscription audiences, community programs, and attaining grants from foundations.

These theatres, due more to finances than philosophy, also broke away from the usual proscenium stage and initiated arena, thrust, and flexible staging. The closeness of the audience to the players gave a sense of immediacy which was appealing to the post-war audience along with providing maximum seating capacity in a make-shift place and providing a cheaper stage space to build and fill.

After the idea of regional theatres and the regional theatres themselves became established, "upgrading" the quality of production and presentation became the primary concern. In 1957, the Ford Foundation launched a program of large financial grants to struggling professional regional theatres. These grants helped to legitimize regional theatre as an art theatre. The success of the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, founded in 1963, brought national recognition to the high standards of quality in regional theatres. The better known and more experienced actors, directors, and designers became eager to work in the regional theatres. As a result, the quality of work improved; and, in turn, public support increased. With this came a trend toward the theatre complexes, major architectural units containing two or more theatres. Such an arrangement would give the theatres
greater flexibility in staging and, thus, upgrade their production potential. It was during this period that John Conklin began to exert influence upon regional theatre design.

In 1968, Zelda Fichandler, artistic director at the Arena Stage in Washington D.C., took the third step: innovation. Two of the most popular plays in regional theatre during this period were *Twelfth Night* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Rather than produce such popular works, the Arena Stage took a giant leap forward with its production of Howard Sackler's *The Great White Hope*, a biographical play about the black boxing champ Jack Johnson. Fichandler like the one-act, worked on the script, and produced it. It was an unheard of undertaking for a regional theatre; in fact, the Arena lost a large sum of money initially on the production despite a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The production required an extremely large cast, multiple sets, and scores of costumes. It was a risky premiere, but a significant turning point in regional theatre. The national media thronged to the Arena. The popular success of the Arena's venture signaled other regional theatres to tackle new, large, serious works that might be financially impossible elsewhere, i.e. on Broadway. *The Great White Hope* proved that producing new plays could be a viable and exciting enterprise for regional theatres. The regional theatres became a testing ground for new playwrights, new challenges for theatrical personnel, and something different for the public. A fresh emphasis on new plays, American and foreign, has been evident in these theatres since. It is not
unlikely for a successful regional theatre to have many American, if not world, premières to its credit. It is also not unlikely to find many of these shows being taken to Broadway after proving themselves in the regional theatres. Two recent examples are The Gin Game and The Shadow Box. Having survived and upgraded the overall quality of production, the regional theatres continue to strive for national recognition. They are competing with the commercial theatre by producing both 'safe' works and the new. It is in this theatre that Conklin's design career has flourished.

The objective of this study is to suggest the importance of John Conklin as a scenographer in American theatre, to provide a listing of his work through the 1979-1980 season, and to preserve pictorial documentation of his work.
SELECTED BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

John Conklin was born in 1937 in Hartford, Connecticut. When asked about his life before entry into Yale College, he evades relating any particulars, keeping his personal life a private matter. He is willing, however, to discuss his professional life in the theatre.

Conklin's interest in the theatre grew out of an involvement in high school plays. His first years at Yale University were spent as an undergraduate drama major and as a designer for the Dramat (the Yale Drama Association), the undergraduate producing group. The Dramat produced three shows per year, one of which was an original musical. In his five years of involvement with the Dramat, Conklin designed eleven productions. Most of this work was with director Nikos Pscharopoulos. His co-workers were "a whole group of undergraduates all determined to go into the professional theatre and most of them did."¹ This active group produced shows such as *Camino Real*, *The Inspector General*, and *Danton's Death*. In designing for the Dramat, Conklin learned by doing. It was not until his final undergraduate year that he took a formal design course. It was also during this period that he began associations with other

extremely talented artists who have become prominent forces in American regional theatre.

During his senior year, he began studying under Donald Oenslager who had a profound "influence spiritually." Oenslager contended that a designer should be able to design anything and should be able to totally justify his design decisions. Oenslager's design assignments required exhaustive studies in period style, theatre history, and inspection of the play based upon an extensive knowledge of theatrical conventions and production. Students were required to answer questions such as "Who picked the curtains in this room?" and "Why?" Conklin's first design project for Oenslager (his traditional first project assignment) was a design for Candida.

Oenslager's distinguished career in theatre ranked him as one of the major American designers and teachers of design of this century. As Professor of Scenic Design at Yale School of Drama, he exerted an extraordinary influence upon the young Conklin.

It was Oenslager's "hope that by the end of the first-year course in design, students would discover their own talents and their own directions." To achieve this,

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2 Interview with John Conklin, New York, New York, 4 October 1980.

3 Ibid.

Oenslager was very tough with his students. He emphasized capturing the exact quality indicated by the work itself, not indicated by the designer or by the director.

Conklin earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale, then immediately enrolled in the Yale School of Drama, a professional graduate school. During this period, Conklin continued study under Oenslager and designed three main stage productions: *Volpone*, *Peer Gynt*, and *The Beggar's Opera*; this activity is extraordinary at Yale -- most graduate students design only one main stage production during their three years of study.

During his graduate years, Conklin's growth as a designer was challenged by difficult design problems, major projects, and exercises designed to prepare him as a professional. Oenslager stressed that it was "essential that designers know everything about the visual background of the theatre."\(^5\)

Between his second and third years in graduate school, Conklin left Yale for four years to work in New York City as an assistant to designer Will Armstrong, a 1957 graduate of Yale School of Drama. Conklin gained his first professional experience working for regional opera companies and Broadway productions, including *Carnival* and *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*. Armstrong was noted for his use of textural materials in his scene designs, and his influence may be

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\(^5\)Ibid.
reflected in Conklin's own insistence upon the use of texture in his work.

In the summer of 1957 and 1958, Conklin, along with several other Yale students, worked at the Williamstown Theatre Festival in Massachusetts. Armstrong was the scene designer for these seasons. Under his guidance, Conklin began as an assistant designer while still an undergraduate at Yale. In 1959, Conklin designed settings for Charley's Aunt and for The Brothers Karamazov, which established him in an on-going relationship with Williamstwon that continues today.

Nikos Psacharopoulos had enormous influence upon Conklin through the Williamstown productions, both as the artistic director and principal stage director for Williamstown and as a Professor of Directing for Yale School of Drama. Psacharopoulos gave Conklin his first real opportunities in professional regional theatre. Artistically, both at Yale and Williamstown, Psacharopoulos challenged Conklin. Psacharopoulos was ambitious in his productions. "Nothing was too extravagant or too difficult." At Williamstown, the theatre did not produce typical summer stock productions such as Guys and Dolls, Can-Can, and Bell, Book, and Candle.

Through the 1960s, the American regional theatres expanded rapidly. Resident regional theatres were being

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established throughout the country. The Ford Foundation was issuing large grants to promising regional companies concurrent with the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts. With generous budgets and new construction of facilities, these companies were able to produce high quality theatre outside New York. The regional theatres chose seasons with limited runs, with some notable exceptions including the Guthrie and the Stratford [Ontario] Shakespeare Festival. The regional theatres were and are most often conservative in the selection of a season which usually consists of a mixture of classics and recent commercial hits. Williamstown, however, did not follow this pattern. Beginning as a summer theatre, Williamstown quickly became a recognized regional theatre. Their seasons included unusual summer selections such as *Toys in the Attic*, *Five Finger Exercise*, *The Cherry Orchard*, and *St. Joan*. "Williamstown was a place that taught you not to be afraid of big theatrical gestures - hopefully, gestures of meaning and emotion." This sense of the extravagant theatrical gesture, which is reflected repeatedly in Conklin's work, was formed through his association with Psacharopoulos.

Upon Conklin's graduation from Yale School of Drama with a Master of Fine Arts degree, he also passed the union examination for scene designers and was admitted into the United Scenic Artists, Local 829 - New York.

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7Ibid., p. 51.
The young designer had immediate success in a number of the new professional regional theatres that were appearing across the country. In 1964, he designed Hartford Stage Company's first season, collaborating with a former Yale colleague, director William Francisco. Nikos Psacharopoulos brought Conklin to work at the New York State Theatre in 1966, which confirmed Conklin's entry into the select world of regional theatre designers. In 1967, Conklin began his long-standing association as a designer with Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut; in 1970, with the McCarter Theatre in Princeton, New Jersey; and, in 1976, with the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 1971-1972, he spent a full season with the Arena Stage in Washington D.C.; this was the only time Conklin worked as a resident designer for an entire season. He admittedly prefers to work on a variety of things, often doing ten or twelve productions each year. He has also designed for such well-respected organizations as the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut; Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, California; the Manhattan Theatre Club in New York, New York; the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles, California.

Conklin does the majority of his work in regional theatre and opera; however, he does have several Broadway credits. His first Broadway show was Tambourines to Glory in 1963. Others include Scratch (scenery) in 1971; The Au Pair Man (scenery) in 1974; The Leaf People (scenery)
in 1975; *Rex* (scenery and costumes) in 1977; and, *Bully!* (scenery and costumes) in 1977. His off-Broadway credits include *Romeo and Juliet* (costumes) in 1977 and *The Bacchae* (scenery) in 1980, both at the Circle in the Square.

His numerous design projects for opera include productions for such prestigious companies as the Santa Fe Opera, the San Francisco Opera, the New York City Opera, the Washington Opera Society, the Houston Grand Opera, and the Wolf Trap Festival. Conklin has also designed scenery and/or costumes for the Pennsylvania Ballet, the Royal Ballet, and The Joffrey Ballet.

Recently, Conklin has been asked to design for companies in Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Germany.

He also served as a visiting assistant professor at Temple University in Philadelphia during 1973. There, he designed Arthur Kopit's *Indians*, Hugh Leonard's *The Au Pair Man*, and Solms and Parent's *Lorelei*. 
JOHN CONKLIN AND DESIGNING

It is difficult to explain the designer's roles in the production process, especially when each designer has his own way of developing a design and executing it. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that a designer's approach may vary from production to production due to the influence of directors.

For all designers, the production sequence begins with the script. For Conklin, the first reading is all-important since he tends to work conceptually. He works initially a great deal on instinct and first impressions. "I work very fast. When I read or listen to something I tend to have a very strong image almost right away. Then I try to make it concrete." 8

In order to make this "image" concrete, Conklin does extensive research into all types of visual materials, beginning with his monumental clipping file in his home which is comprised of advertisements, photographs, sketches, swatches of everything and anything, pages from periodicals, books, or whatever else might someday convey a design idea. "I try to find pictures that carry some kind of message." 9

When he finds items that convey his design image, he then

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8 Ibid., p. 52.
9 Ibid.
presents them to the director to explain the feel or look of the design idea, especially to indicate color and texture range.

After extensive research, exploration of the work intellectually, discussion with the director, and thumbnail sketches, Conklin creates models. He uses highly detailed scale models almost exclusively for his scenic designs, rather than the traditional renderings and design elevations. Although Conklin's models serve the same basic functions as any model, they also serve others. All models show the placement of each piece of scenery in the available space and their relationships to each other and the actors. Conklin also has his models serve as the painter's elevations. He concentrates on indicating almost every detail. Most of his models are done in 1/4 inch scale (to keep the model in a manageable size). However, communicating intricate painted detail sometimes requires that the models be in 1/2 inch scale or that additional elevations accompany the model. These models are sent into the scene shop during construction along with swatches, groundplan, and any other drawings needed for clarification.

Conklin feels that models make it much easier for the director, lighting designer, costume designer, construction and paint crews, and property staff to visualize precisely what he intends. He also feels that renderings and sketches can easily be deceptive due to the two-dimensional quality and sketching ability of the person executing the sketch.
In costume designing, models would obviously be impractical. To convey his design ideas, Conklin uses renderings and relies heavily on swatches. He jests that if it were feasible, he would consider using dolls to do scale models of his designs. When designing costumes, Conklin spends a great deal of time with the actual construction. Although comfortable in entrusting the execution of his scenic designs to assistants and technicians, he prefers to be involved in the fitting of costumes in order to achieve the desired fit and hang. In the early days of his work in regional theatre, he did do a considerable amount of his own painting. Regional theatres have changed tremendously. Designers were once expected to execute all of the painting; now, there are hired staffs to do such work.

Conklin expresses no interest in lighting design, a frequent extension of many scenic designers. He explains that in his early years at Yale he worked with a very talented lighting designer, Peter Hunt, and had no need to expand into that area. Also, he views light as a totally unique medium which does not intrigue him. He much prefers the combination of scene and costume design. To him, costumes and sets are made of literally the same materials. "They exist in an unbreakable embrace."10

Conklin does not like doing costumes alone and rarely does any design that is after 1900. Conklin prefers doing

10Ibid., p. 46.
scenery only or scenery and costumes. He treats costumes as "bits of moving scenery." He does feel that some productions demand that the scenic designer also do the costumes. "What I'm talking about is, for example, the last scene in Ballo [Verdi's Ballo in Maschera] where there are 120 people on the stage. There, I must do the clothes, for they are as crucial an element in the overall design picture as any amount of scenery. . . . Costume design is such a potent part of the designer's arsenal of weapons in the endless attempt to capture the essence of a theatrical piece." Conklin also expresses no interest in designing for television or the movie industry.

As mentioned above, Conklin prefers period pieces, primarily attributing this preference to the research. "I guess what I find most satisfying, ultimately, about design is that it is a temporary recreation of life -- all aspects of life and history." He has a fondness for detail and "making the design a puzzle." He stresses, however, that when a director and designer discuss the design for a particular production, they must visually project the inner style of the play, not just the period.

11 Interview, 4 October 1980.
13 Ibid., p. 51.
He emphasizes the controlled use of color, texture, and space in design. "To me the most crucial elements in design are color and texture - and mainly for that reason I want to have control of the costumes."\(^{15}\) To illustrate the importance of color, Conklin uses this example. "If you make a totally red set and put everyone in that set in red, no matter how small that set, the gesture is big."\(^ {16}\) His designs tend to have a very painterly look. To illustrate the effectiveness of his use of texture, one need only examine his design for *The Hostage*. Some walls are solid; some walls are wire and burlap. These textures are pulled together through his use of paint. This predilection with texture and a desire for depth leads to his use of structural pieces in combination with drops in painted perspective. He uses real mouldings on painted pieces and uses non-traditional scenic materials to achieve overlays, transparencies, and other textural effects that cannot be achieved through traditional Renaissance illusionistic painting techniques.

He also stresses control of the physical stage space. His designs use the physical theatre and its relationship with the audience to enhance and reveal the emotional content of the play. There is the practical consideration of the actual limitations of the stage itself. The use of that space must help define the production and convey that definition emotionally. *The Hostage* design exemplifies this concept.

\(^{15}\) MacKay, "Theatrical Gesture," p. 46.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 21.
Placed on a thrust stage, the center stage space serves as "the heart of the play."\textsuperscript{17} As the scenery spreads from center stage, it becomes "more broken away and abstract."\textsuperscript{18} Near the center of the set, walls are solid. Moving from center stage, the walls become wire and burlap. This strategy is also evident in his design of the Long Wharf production of \textit{The Skin of Our Teeth}. Placed on a thrust stage, the set was primarily a huge gameboard closely resembling a Monopoly board.

These physical and emotional boundaries are dictated by the work itself. Conklin emphasizes that "the work must shape the design, not the designer shape the design."\textsuperscript{19} Conklin insists that he does not want to have an instantly recognized style. He firmly believes that the style of the original script or music dictates the style that will be the most effective for that work. The designer's purpose is to illuminate the compositional pattern of the play itself through the basic elements of design which are line, texture, color, and space. The designer must relate or reaffirm the playwright's or composer's organization of character, plot, dialogue, spectacle, and theme.

Conklin prefers to design large scale productions which

\textsuperscript{17} Interview, 4 October 1980.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
allow the designer artistic license. He prefers the theatricality of opera and period drama to slice-of-life realism. He avoids doing plays by "realists" such as Williams, Ibsen, and Chekhov.

Conklin is not favorably disposed toward designing for arena type stages because such stages do not allow the type of design he prefers. They inherently preclude the operatic atmosphere he favors. He enjoys designing for the thrust stage the most. This format allows intimacy yet also permits a great deal of theatricality. A close second preference is the large proscenium stage which has a proportion of greater height over width.

Conklin claims he is "a symbolist and a literalist." He claims to never use an expressionistic approach and to never deal with the abstract. "The kind of scenery I do worst - and the kind that I don't do - is anything that is abstract. I just don't think abstractly." However, his settings for Arena Stage's Twelfth Night and Circle in the Square's The Bacchae would indicate otherwise. The set for Twelfth Night is comprised of an enormous metal-looking sculpture that vaguely resembles a tree in shape. Although The Bacchae was presented in an arena format (making literalism more difficult), Conklin's settings were entirely abstract. John Beaufort in a review for Christian Science

20Interview, 5 October 1980.
Monitor described *The Bacchae* setting as "a stark setting that combines abstraction and convenient trapdoors with gold-crowned exits."²²

Many of his designs have levels forming plastic playing spaces which are prevalent in twentieth-century design due to the dictums of Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. However, Conklin tempers the purity of Appia and Craig with a continuation of the traditional Renaissance illusionism and nineteenth-century realism by using built pieces having a very painted look, structural pieces against painted drops, three-dimensional detailing, and elaborate detail. His settings for *The Au Pair Man* at the New York Shakespeare Festival/Vivian Beaumont and *Journey's End* at Long Wharf illustrate his fondness for detail. In *The Au Pair Man*, he creates a Victorian room so full of knick-knacks, furniture, curios, art objects, and crannies, that an audience member could have hardly taken it in except as an overall effect. In *Journey's End*, Conklin recreated a field and dugout with real mud. The passage leading offstage from the dugout had bunk beds and authentic 1915 pinups covered with more mud and dirt. "Now I don't think anybody could really see what those scraps of paper were - and I wasn't doing it really for the actors - but it was a kind of homage to the idea of the set - that you can somehow recreate a piece of historical truth through research and detail and poetic

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feeling and that it will have an energy that an audience will respond to."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{23}MacKay, "Theatrical Gesture," p. 52.
DESIGN ANALYSES

The following section contains the pictorial evidence of this study. The photographs are loosely grouped according to genre and then analyzed. The appropriate pictures follow the analyses. The commentaries are not intended to be critical analyses, but to illuminate design trends and styles.
Conklin's designs for *The Threepenny Opera* (1974) and *Arturo Ui* (1979) for Williamstown Theatre Festival demonstrate his use of thrust/proscenium stage area in an architectural abstraction. There is a strong insistence on verticality and enclosure of playing space. These two designs exhibit an almost Brechtian or Meyerholdian influence -- eliminating everything except purely utilitarian structures. The two sets are presentational -- making a conceptual statement about the play rather than depicting realism.

The predilection for right angles and strong vertical and horizontal lines also demonstrate the influence of contemporary design motifs. His emphasis on height to achieve a sense of grandeur is common to much of Conklin's work. He also relies upon light to achieve the dramatic qualities of the scene with neutral-colored sets.

Both sets exemplify Conklin's use of scenery to direct or limit focus. *Arturo Ui* exhibits a strong central focus through the use of symmetry while the set for *The Threepenny Opera* uses an occult balance that is almost symmetrical.
Fig. 2 Arturo Ui (1979) at Williamstown Theatre Festival
Conklin's design for *The White Devil* (unproduced) for the McCarter Theatre is much like his designs for Williams-town's *Arturo Ui* and *The Threepenny Opera* with its architectural abstraction, strong vertical and horizontal lines, and enclosed playing space.

Conklin uses large blow-ups of Rubens' painting *Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus* (c. 1617) that are not literal, but have been treated in an abstract expressionist manner. Scaffolding and a flying ceiling piece complete the set. The arrangement of the scaffolding echoes structures in the Elizabethan theatre. The scaffolding arrangement and Rubens' painting accentuate the period and concept of the play itself.

Conklin again uses a monochromatic color scheme, but it is much more flamboyant than the designs discussed earlier. Brilliant reds and siennas are used in high contrast with whites. This particular set combines the utilitarian with the practical.
Conklin's designs for *Waltz of the Toreador* (1976) at Hartford Stage Company, *Miss Havisham's Fire* (1979) for the New York City Opera, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1974) for the American Shakespeare Festival demonstrate Conklin's use of materials to achieve an evanescent quality in a set. *Waltz of the Toreador* uses a transparent lacy material in the doors and transoms. For *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, he uses four French windows covered with gauzy, lace-like curtains. These fragmented windows comprise a large portion of the set. *Miss Havisham's Fire* provides the most interesting example of use of transparent materials. The walls of the set were actual scrim-like materials with architectural pieces in front of it. The entire set was painted in neutral tones so that it could be infinitely altered through the use of lights and special effects.

These designs reiterate Conklin's insistence upon verticality and a sense of grand gesture. They also indicate his love of period detail and his synthesis of it in a romantic, eclectic way which is somewhat expressionistic.
Fig. 6 Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1974) at American Shakespeare Festival
Conklin's designs for Romeo and Juliet at the McCarter Theatre (1974) and the California Shakespeare Festival (1979) indicate Conklin's diversity in design. While both sets are architectural in nature and utilize a monochromatic color scheme and peninsular staging with an enclosed central playing space, the California Shakespeare Festival design is stark and horizontal, while the McCarter Theatre design is romantic and vertical.

The California design is a semi-circular unit set with a brick facade that encloses the back portion of the stage. The only break in the structure is an archway upstage center. A stairway stage left allows the top of the unit to be used as additional playing space. The courtyard floor is treated with brick and stone while the brick facade has three-dimensional "stone" mouldings attached. Painted in earthy sienna tones, the set was altered for scene shifts by the addition of flags, draperies, and properties.

McCarter's Romeo and Juliet, however, consists of a romanticized two-story building of stucco and stone, a fragmented wall, and a gate. These structural pieces define a courtyard playing area as well as a playing space outside the gate. Since this production was set in the 1860s, Conklin romanticizes his design through decorative details and an urban decay and renewal motif. An ochre monochromatic color scheme contributes to a lyric quality which is neither literal nor realistic.

Conklin's designs rarely depend upon mechanical means.
for scene shifts. Transformation of the physical stage space seldom depends upon the use of wagons, turntables, or other shifting devices. Scene shifts are achieved through a careful choice of props and set pieces, which, when altered, change the setting. The juxtaposition of props and set pieces change the scene. This kind of transformation or transition is reflective of regional theatre design. It is also strongly evident in Conklin's designs.
Fig. 8 Romeo and Juliet (1979) at California Shakespeare Festival
Conklin's designs for Twelfth Night (1972) at Arena Stage, As You Like It (1976) for the American Shakespeare Festival, and The Merry Widow (1979) at Central City Opera are very theatrical in their use of space, materials, and expressive elements. The three designs treat nature in a semi-abSTRACTED and semi-expressionistic manner. These sets also reflect Conklin's organic and romantic approach toward design. They depict nature, but are neither literal nor totally abstracted. They are examples of Conklin's personal style which is poetic and whimsical.
Fig. 10 As You Like It (1976) at American Shakespeare Festival
Conklin's designs for *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Cour* (1979) for Hudson Theatre Guild, *Rain* (1977) for Hartford Stage Company, and *The Hostage* (1972) at Arena Stage are examples of Conklin's unique romantic view of realistic interiors. These interiors are far from pristine. The edges of architectural forms are softened by broken silhouettes. The acting areas are realistic. As the eye moves from the core acting area, the realism is softened by broken details and spaces, painted textures, and changes in scenic materials to emphasize actual textures.

The design for *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Cour* is the most literal and realistic of the illustrations included in this catalogue. This design is also the least typical of Conklin's work due to the sharp boundaries of the set and well-defined architectural detail. Some softening is effected through the use of curtains, wallpaper patterns, and a painted billboard. The sharpness of design is most likely due to the small size of the Hudson Theatre Guild compounded by Williams' script's demands for a multi-room set.

The designs for *Rain* and *The Hostage* are much more representative of Conklin's style. Both depict an eroding reality. In the *Rain* design, the harshness of the architectural lines are muted by broken details and spaces. Dilapidated, fragmented, and unkempt, the railings, lattice-work, and gingerbread convey a whimsical use of architectural
elements. The walls are treated with painted detail and three-dimensional details.

The design for The Hostage carries Conklin's romantic treatment farther yet. As the design moves from center, the scenic materials change. The solid walls give way to walls of wire and burlap. The graffiti scribbled on these walls also follows the concept of a change from center stage to the periphery of the stage picture. Towards the center it is layered but readable. Towards the edges of the scene it becomes more indistinct and fragmented in some areas. Some areas have relatively isolated words that seem to melt into the surrounding shadows. The surface texture becomes more and more rough as it moves from center stage. The surface richness of the set conveys the texture of the script and makes a strong theatrical comment about the play.
Fig. 12 A Lovely Sunday for Greve Cour (1979) at Hudson Theatre Guild
Fig. 14 *The Hostage* (1972) at Arena Stage
The designs for *Camino Real* (1979) at Williamstown Theatre Festival and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1977) at the Guthrie Theatre are much like the designs for Conklin's interiors. Although *Camino Real* was designed primarily for a proscenium presentation and *A Moon for the Misbegotten* for a thrust stage, the designs are remarkably similar. Both show Conklin's taste in surface texture and detail that suggest decay. Both of these settings are stylized architectural approaches with earthy, poetic color schemes, immense verticality, and numerous acting levels.

The house for *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is fragmented. The siding is painted to appear rotted and neglected. The use of siding, porch planking, and mouldings give the design a textural depth which is heightened by the paint treatment. Conklin provides numerous acting levels not only in this set, but in all his sets.

*Camino Real* calls for a town square with balconies, a fountain, a hotel sidewalk cafe, city walls with an entry at the top of a stair unit upstage, and various shops opposite the hotel. Conklin's concept provides all these places, and he treats them in a style that is common to many of his designs. The walls are meticulously detailed in eroded and decaying textures through paint and three-dimensional architectural elements. There is fragmentation and broken silhouettes in balustrades, the fountain, and cornices; all trademarks of Conklin's style. The plaza pavement is painted in a radiating pattern that
draws focus to center stage; another reoccurring element in Conklin's designs.
Fig. 15 *Camino Real* (1979) at Williamstown Theatre Festival
Conklin's design for *The Au Pair Man* (1973) for the New York Shakespeare Festival/Vivian Beaumont is one of his best known. He received a Tony nomination for it. The set is a fanciful, romantic rendition of a realistic Victorian interior. This design perhaps best exemplifies Conklin's design style. It is vertical, painted yet three-dimensional, textured, multi-leveled, fragmented architecturally, and extravagantly dress with Victorian furniture and minuta.
Fig. 17 The Au Pair Man (1973) at New York Shakespeare Festival
The designs for Verdi's *Ballo in Maschera* (1977) at the San Francisco Opera, *The Turk in Italy* (1978) at the New York City Opera, and *A Month in the Country* (1978) at Williamstown Theatre Festival include tall architectural units with operatic elegance and lyricism, three-dimensional mouldings, intricate paint treatments, and exacting period detailing.

Conklin considers the design for *Ballo in Maschera* as a good example of his work.\textsuperscript{26} The set is "mostly built, but with a very painted look. It's very romantic and has structural pieces against a painted drop."\textsuperscript{27} "Ultimately, I felt that I was paying a debt to Verdi for all he had given me. It was a big, full scale production with a lot of scenery and costumes. What you got was an extraordinary opera experience."\textsuperscript{28}

*The Turk in Italy* demands a street scene. Conklin conjures up a picturesque arrangement of partially faced framed structures and painted drops. The structures' placement is reminiscent of Serlio's houses and Inigo Jones' wings and shutters arrangement.

\textsuperscript{26} Interview, 5 October 1980.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28} MacKay, "Theatrical Gesture," p. 21.
A Month in the Country setting facilitates the need for an interior and exterior playing area without shifting scenery. Conklin combines tall architectural units with strongly vertical trees to produce a grand, aristocratic statement. The draperies on the windows and the framing on the doorway reaffirm the verticality. Careful choice and placement of furniture and properties define the period and boundaries of the specified areas.
Fig. 18 *Ballo in Maschera* (1977) at San Francisco Opera
Fig. 19 The Turk in Italy (1978) at New York City Opera
Fig. 20 *A Month in the Country* (1978) at Williamstown Theatre Festival
The action of *Beatrix Cenci* (1973) at New York City Opera took place behind a shark's tooth scrim with roots painted on the front. It is another example of Conklin's use of transparent materials. The strong verticality of the roots and the stylized set pieces give the setting a powerful emotional impact. The use of the scrim emphasizes Conklin's trust in the lighting designers with whom he works.
Fig. 21 *Beatrix Cenci* (1973) at New York City Opera
The setting for the 1965 Harat/Sade at Williamstown Theatre Festival displays Coohill's emphasis on the conceptual alliance of setting and script. The towering walls and graffitti enclose the playing space. Inspired by a 19th century engraving of a lecture hall for alcoholics, the setting with its levels and trapdoors, confined playing space, and frank graffitti conveys a lunacy innate in the script.
Fig. 22 Marat/Sade (1966) at Williamstown Theatre Festival
Conklin's design for *By the Skin of Our Teeth* (1970) at Long Wharf is set on a thrust stage. A huge gameboard, the setting reiterates the storyline of the play. Levels and ramps provide a variety of playing levels for flexibility in staging. This set utilizes the entire stage space and allows actors to remove themselves from the main action while remaining on stage.

The setting for *The Good Woman of Setzuan* (1973) at Williamstown Theatre Festival provides an opposite approach. The setting pushes actors forward, never allowing them to escape intimate contact with the audience.
Fig. 23 By the Skin of Our Teeth (1970) at Long Wharf
Fig. 24 The Good Woman of Setzuan (1973) at Williamstown Theatre Festival
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The generally accepted definition of conclusion is the end, close, or final decision. In this study, the conclusion can only be a summation and a statement of opinion. The art of stage design is a continually changing art. Since John Conklin is still a practicing designer, his art is continuously evolving. No definitive conclusions can be made about Conklin's art and impact. Only observations and suggestions can be offered.

What the future will bring for Conklin can only be a matter for speculation. It is reasonably certain that Conklin will continue to mature in his art. It is also reasonably certain that Conklin will contribute significantly to the impact of contemporary designers on design style and design conventions. Although not primarily a teacher or commercial theatre designer, Conklin is a peripathetic designer, criss-crossing the country. He combines the qualities of realism, abstraction, lyricism, environmental theatre, grandeur, and eclecticism in his work. His style exemplifies contemporary American design.

If Conklin achieves historical significance, this study will preserve a considerable amount of documentation that will allow future scholars to more thoroughly analyze his influence. If Conklin falls short of historical significance,
this study will still serve a useful function. It is a
documentation of a twentieth-century design who is
representative of his contemporaries.
APPENDIX

CATALOGUE OF JOHN CONKLIN'S DESIGNS

The catalogue is divided into three sections: designs for stage settings, designs for costumes, and designs for stage settings and costumes.

Entries are organized chronologically and according to the following format.

Title of Production, Author or Composer
Director or choreographer
Producing group

I. Designs for Stage Settings

1957

The Crucible, Miller
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Yale Dramatic Association

A View from the Bridge, Miller
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Yale Dramatic Association

1958

Cyrano, Maltby and Shire
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Yale Dramatic Association

By the Skin of Our Teeth, Wilder
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Yale Dramatic Association

Time Remembered, Anouilh
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Danton's Death, Buchner
William Francisco
Yale Dramatic Association

1959

The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Charley's Aunt, Thomas
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

70
1959

The Inspector General, Gogol
William Francisco
Yale Dramatic Association

Volpone, Jonson
Charles E. Scott
Yale University School of Drama

Grand Tour, Maltby and Shire
William Francisco
Yale Dramatic Association

1960

The Way of the World, Congreve
George Devine
Institute for Advanced Studies in the Theatre Arts
(Designed with Richard Casler)

Camino Real, Williams
Leland Starnes
Yale Dramatic Association
(Designed with David B. Ryan)

1961

Beckett, Coe
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

The Sap of Life, Maltby
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Toys in the Attic, Hellman
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Once in a Lifetime, Hart
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Five Finger Exercise, Shaffer
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Othello, Shakespeare
Unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Thieves' Carnival, Anouilh
Leland Starnes
Yale Dramatic Association

71
1961  Booth Is Back in Town, Pendleton, Bergman, & Massengale  
Leland Starnes  
Yale Dramatic Association  

The Decameron, Tarr and Earle  
Burry Fredrik  
East 74th Street Theatre, New York  

1962  No entries.  

1963  Mr. Booth  
unavailable  
Williamstown Theatre Festival  

A Birthday Party for Shakespeare  
unavailable  
Williamstown Theatre Festival  

The Cherry Orchard, Chekhov  
unavailable  
Williamstown Theatre Festival  

1964  Uncle Vanya, Chekhov  
William Francisco  
Hartford Stage Company  

Othello, Shakespeare  
Jacques Cartier  
Hartford Stage Company  

She Stoops to Conquer, Goldsmith  
William Francisco  
Hartford Stage Company  

Waiting for Godot, Beckett  
William Francisco  
Hartford Stage Company  

The Rivals, Sheridan  
Mario Siletti  
McCarter Theatre  

As You Desire Me, Pirandello  
David Hooks  
McCarter Theatre  

The Birds, Aristophanes  
Stephen Porter  
McCarter Theatre
1965

The Night Chanter,
Norman Walker (choreographer)
Hunter College of the City University of New York

Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe, Albee
Jacques Cartier
Hartford Stage Company

The Importance of Being Earnest, Wilde
Mel Shapiro
Hartford Stage Company

Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

1966

Ondine, Giraudoux
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat
as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton
Under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade, Weiss
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Dialogues of the Carmelites, Poulenc
Nikos Psacharopoulos
New York State Theatre

Annie Get Your Gun, Berlin
Peter Hunt
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Peer Gynt, Ibsen
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Yale School of Drama

The Balcony, Genet
Jacques Cartier
Hartford Stage Company

U.S.A., Shyre and Passos
Harold Stone
The Theatre of Living Arts, Philadelphia

1967

Blech, Owens
Andre Gregory
The Theatre of Living Arts, Philadelphia

The Old Maid, Thief, and the Medium
unavailable
Western Opera Company
1967
St. Joan, Shaw
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Peer Gynt, Ibsen
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Skinflint Out West, Cartier
Jacques Cartier
Hartford Stage Company

A View from the Bridge, Miller
Melvin Bernhardt
Hartford Stage Company

The Threepenny Opera, Brecht
Peter Hunt
Hartford Stage Company

Firebugs, Frisch
Jacques Cartier
Hartford Stage Company

Playboy of the Western World, Synge
Siobhan McKenna
Long Wharf Theatre

The Father, Strindberg
Pirie MacDonald
Seattle Repertory

The Rivals, Sheridan
Allen Fletcher
Seattle Repertory

1968
Galileo, Brecht
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Iphigeneia at Aulis, Gluck
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Six Characters in Search of an Author, Pirandello
Zelda Fichandler
Arena Stage

The Duchess of Malfi, Webster
Arvin Brown
Long Wharf Theatre

The Threepenny Opera, Brecht
Donald Moreland
Arena Stage

74
1968  Marat/Sade, Weiss
       Alfred Ryder
       Arena Stage

       Salome, Strauss
       James Lucas
       Baltimore Civic Opera Company Inc.

1969  Cosi Fan Tutte, Mozart
       H. Wesley Balk
       Santa Fe Opera

       The Threepenny Opera, Brecht
       unavailable
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

1970  Macbeth, Shakespeare
       Russell L. Treyz
       McCarter Theatre

       By the Skin of Our Teeth, Wilder
       Jeff Bleckner
       Long Wharf Theatre

       A Place Without Doors, Duras
       Brian Murray
       Long Wharf Theatre

1971  Mother Courage, Brecht
       unavailable
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

       Scratch, Macleish
       Peter Hunt
       St. James Theatre, New York

       Beatrix Cenci, Ginastera
       Gerald Freedman
       Opera Society of Washington

       What the Butler Saw, Orton
       David William
       Arena Stage

       Cyrano De Bergerac, Rostand
       unavailable
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

       Hamlet, Shakespeare
       Arvin Brown
       Long Wharf Theatre

       The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart
       H. Wesley Balk
       Minnesota Opera
1972

Once in a Lifetime, Hart
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Brecht
Peter Hunt
Williamstown Theatre Festival

The Hostage, Behan
Norman Geyantor
Arena Stage

The Nutcracker, Tchaikovsky
Osvaldo Riofrancos
Pennsylvania Ballet, Philadelphia

Agamemnon, Alfred
Hovhanness I. Philikian
McCarter Theatre

Misanthrope, Moliere
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

Loot, Orton
Ted Cornell
Hartford Stage Company

Swan Lake, Tchaikovsky
unavailable
Pennsylvania Ballet

Orfeo, Monteverdi
Gerald Freedman
San Francisco Opera

Mary Stuart, Schiller
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
Zelda Fichandler
Arena Stage

What Price Glory?, Stallings and Anderson
Arvin Brown
Long Wharf Theatre

The Barber of Seville, Rossini
H. Wesley Balk
Minnesota Opera
1973

The Master Builder, Ibsen
Austin Pendleton
Long Wharf Theatre

Nobody's Earnest
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Beatrix Cenci, Ginastera
Gerald Freedman
New York City Opera

Indians, Kopits
Leslie Reidel
Tomlinson Theatre, Temple University

The Au Pair Man, Leonard
Gerald Freedman
Vivian Beaumont Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival

Cosi Fan Tutte, Mozart
H. Wesley Balk
John F. Kennedy Center

St. Joan, Shaw
Arvin Brown
Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles

Other Voices, Other Rooms, Capote
Melvin Bernhardt
Studio Arena Theatre, Buffalo

St. Joan, Shaw
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Ubu Roi, Jarry
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Brecht
Brooks Jones
Long Wharf Theatre

A Day in the Death of Joe Egg, Nichols
Lynne Meadow
Manhattan Theatre Club

Beatrix Cenci, Ginestra
Gerald Freedman
New York City Opera
1974
Lorelei, Solms and Parent
Robert Moore
The Palace Theatre, New York

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams
Michael Kahn
American Shakespeare Festival

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare
Michael Kahn
American Shakespeare Festival

Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
David William
American Shakespeare Festival

Room Service, Murray and Boretz
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare
Michael Kahn
McCarter Theatre

1975
The Leaf People, Reardon
Tom O'Horgan
Booth Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival

Savages, Hampton
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Death in Venice, Britten
Gerald Freedman
San Francisco Opera

The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare
Michael Kahn
McCarter Theatre

King Lear, Shakespeare
Anthony Page
American Shakespeare Festival

The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare
Michael Kahn
American Shakespeare Festival

Our Town, Wilder
Michael Kahn
American Shakespeare Festival
1976

Merton of the Movies, Kaufman and Connelly
Burt Shevelove
Ahmanson Theatre, Los Angeles

Waltz of the Toreador, Anouilh
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Williams
Michael Langham
Guthrie Theatre

Rosencrantz and Guilderstein Are Dead, Stoppard
Michael Langham
Guthrie Theatre

Scarecrow, MacKaye
Austin Pendleton
Washington Opera Society

The Rose Tattoo, Williams
Steven Robman
Long Wharf Theatre

A History of the American Film, Durang
Peter Mark Schiffter
Mark Taper Forum

As You Like It, Shakespeare
Michael Kahn
American Shakespeare Festival

1977

A Moon for the Misbegotten, O'Neill
Michael Langham
Guthrie Theatre

Ballo in Maschera, Verdi
Kurt Herbert Adler
San Francisco Opera

Fedora, Giordano
Colin Graham
Santa Fe Opera

Rain, Colton and Randolph
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

All the Way Home, Mosel
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

Angel City, Shepard
unavailable
Mark Taper Forum
1977
Chez Nous, Nichols
Lynne Meadow
Manhattan Theatre Club

1978
A Month in the Country, Turgenev
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Eugene Onegin, Tchaikovsky
Colin Graham
Santa Fe Opera

The Duchess of Malfi, Oliver
Colin Graham
Santa Fe Opera

Salome, Strauss
Colin Graham
Santa Fe Opera

The Nutcracker Ballet, Tchaikovsky
unavailable
Pennsylvania Ballet

Journey's End, Sherriff
Kenneth Frankel
Long Wharf Theatre

1979
The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Brecht
Peter Hunt
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Werther, Massenet
David Alden
Houston Opera

The Merry Widow, Lehar
Kurt Herbert Adler
Central City Opera

A Lovely Sunday for Creve Cour, Williams
Keith Hack
Hudson Guild Theatre

Camino Real, Williams
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Williamstown Theatre Festival

La Traviatta, Verdi
Colin Graham
St. Louis Opera
1980
The Philadelphia Story, Barry Ellis Rabb
Vivian Beaumont Theatre, New York

II. Designs for Costumes

1966
Beggar's Opera, Gay Gordon Stewart
Yale School of Drama

1968
Camino Real, Williams unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

1971
Overture, Bernstein
Joe Layton
Royal Ballet

1974
Pericles, Shakespeare
Edward Berkeley
New York Shakespeare Festival

1977
Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare
Theodore Mann
Circle in the Square, New York

Julius Caesar, Shakespeare unavailable
American Conservatory Theatre

1980
Chekhov in Yalta, Driver and Haddow
Ellis Rabb and Gordon Davidson
Mark Taper Forum

Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
Ellis Rabb and Diana Maddox
Mark Taper Forum

III. Designs for Stage Settings and Costumes

1956
The Lady's Not for Burning, Fry
F. Curtis Canfield
Yale Dramatic Association
(Co-designers: Scenery - Richard Maltby
Costumes - Thomas Rummler)

1961
The Sap of Life, Maltby
William Francisco
One Sheridan Square
1963  Tambourines to Glory, Hughes
       Nikos Psacharopoulos
       The Little Theatre, New York

1964  The Tempest, Shakespeare
       Jacques Cartier
       Hartford Stage Company

1967  Twelfth Night, Shakespeare
       Gordon Stewart
       Island Repertory Theatre, Martha's Vineyard, Mass.

1968  Have I Got One for You, Blait and Burstein
       Roberta Sklar
       Theatre Four, New York

       King Lear, Shakespeare
       Edwin Sherin
       Arena Stage

1970  Operation Sidewinder, Shepard
       Tom Haas
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

       The Magistrate, Pinero
       Nikos Psacharopoulos
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

       Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare
       Louis Criss
       Globe Theatre, San Diego National Shakespeare Festival

1971  The Grand Tour, Coward
       Joe Layton
       Royal Ballet

1972  Double Exposure
       Joe Layton
       Joffrey Ballet

       Metamorphosis, Dizinzo
       Jacques Cartier
       American Place Theatre

1973  The Good Woman of Setzuan, Brecht
       Ted Cornell
       Williamstown Theatre Festival

       O.W., Walton
       Joe Layton
       Royal Ballet
1973

The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart
H. Wesley Balk
Houston Grand Opera

The Barber of Seville, Rossini
John Cox
Opera Society of Washington

St. Joan, Shaw
Nikos Psacharopoulos
Williamstown Theatre Festival

Cosi Fan Tutte, Mozart
H. Wesley Balk
Washington Opera Society

1974

Richard III, Shakespeare
Mel Shapiro
New York Shakespeare Festival

Juno and the Paycock, O'Casey
George Seaton
Mark Taper Forum

Richard III, Shakespeare
Barry Davis
Long Wharf Theatre

The Threepenny Opera, Brecht
unavailable
Williamstown Theatre Festival

1976

A Midsummer's Night Dream, Shakespeare
David Alden
Filene Center, Vienna, Virginia

Rex, Rodger and Harnick
Edwin Sherin
Lunt-Fontanne Theatre, New York

1977

The Recruiting Officer, Farquhar
Davey Marlin-Jones
Long Wharf Theatre

Bully!, Alden
Peter Hunt
46th Street Theatre, New York

1978

Julius Caesar, Handel
Gerlad Freedman
San Francisco Opera
1978
La Traviatta, Verdi
Charles Nolte
Minnesota Opera

The Turk in Italy, Rossini
Tito Capobianco
New York City Opera

Galileo, Brecht
Paul Weidner
Hartford Stage Company

1979
Miss Havisham's Fire, Argento
H. Wesley Balk
New York City Opera

Lulu, Berg
Colin Graham
Santa Fe Opera

Cyrano de Bergerac, Rostand
Edward Gilbert
Long Wharf Theatre

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare
Mark Lamos
California Shakespeare Festival

1980
The Bacchae, Euripides
Michael Cacoyannis
Circle in the Square, New York

The Magic Flute, Mozart
Colin Graham
St. Louis Opera

Hamlet, Shakespeare
Mark Lamos
California Shakespeare Festival

A Midsummer's Night Dream, Shakespeare
Mark Lamos
California Shakespeare Festival

IV. INCOMPLETE ENTRIES

These entries are missing significant items of information. It is known that John Conklin did these productions in some capacity, but other information is unavailable.

Bagatelles
Pennsylvania Ballet
Play of Daniel
New York Pro Musica

Play of Herod
New York Pro Musica
SOURCES CONSULTED

I. Organizations

Ahmanson Theatre
American Shakespeare Festival
Arena Stage
Baltimore Opera Company
Guthrie Theatre
Hartford Stage Company
Long Wharf Theatre
Manhattan Theatre Club
Mark Taper Forum
McCarter Theatre Company
Minnesota Opera
Museum of New York City Theatre Collection
New York City Opera
New York Library for the Performing Arts
Pennsylvania Ballet
San Francisco Opera
St. Louis Opera
Studio Arena Theatre
Temple University, Department of Theatre
Yale School of Drama Library
Washington Opera Society

II. Published Materials


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Hughes, Catherine, ed. *New York Theatre Annual,* 

___ *New York Theatre Annual,* vol. 2. Detroit: 

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___ *New York Theatre Annual,* vol. 4. Detroit: 


MacKay, Patricia. "John Conklin: Designer of 
Theatrical Gesture." *Theatre Crafts,* May/June 1980, 
pp. 21-23, 46, 51-54.

Parker, W. Oren, and Smith, Harvey K. *Scene Design 
and Stage Lighting,* 4th ed. New York: Holt, 

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Wallach, Susan Levi. "Williamstown: 25 Summers of 
Theatre in the Berkshires." *Theatre Crafts,* 


III. Personal Contact


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