

PAULA COOPER GALLERY

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EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH

**AN EXHIBITION OF WORKS FOR THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION BY
ROBERT WILSON / PHILIP GLASS / LUCINDA CHILDS / CHRISTOPHER KNOWLES**

PAULA COOPER GALLERY
534 W. 21st Street
September 12 – October 13, 2012

NEW YORK – The Paula Cooper Gallery is delighted to mark the revival of Robert Wilson’s and Philip Glass’ masterwork, *Einstein on the Beach*, with an exhibition of drawings, sketches, texts and notations used for the creation of the opera and considered by its authors as the “DNA” of this iconic stage work. The exhibition will include Wilson’s rarely seen storyboards for the piece. A quintessential example of Wilson’s aesthetic, the storyboards were based on the artist’s notebook drawings, which Philip Glass used to compose the score. Texts by Christopher Knowles, a performance score by Philip Glass, and drawings by Lucinda Childs will also be on view, along with Wilson’s *Einstein Chair*, originally created for the performance.

Einstein on the Beach began in the early 1970s as a series of conversations between Philip Glass and Robert Wilson prompted by the desire to collaborate with one another. Turning away from biographical elements or narrative structure, the artists focused on the figure of Albert Einstein as a cipher capable of evoking key themes of the late 20th century: technology, the compression and extension of time, nuclear apocalypse. Einstein became a symbol around which Glass and Wilson built an opera in four acts connected by five interludes or “kneeplays”.

In order to give visual shape to his ideas for the piece, Wilson created a series of storyboards. With their strong diagonals slicing through space, separating zones of deep blackness from atmospheric, hazy expanses, these graphite drawings on paper underscore the interplay of light and darkness as a central element of Wilson’s universe. The visual vocabulary is sparse, organized with an almost cinematic sensibility: a train rumbles into view, a spaceship hovers at dusk, a building towers over a vacant plain. Human figures appear here and there as tiny silhouettes against the emptiness of the horizon.

Wilson’s drawings in turn became foundational for the creation of the score, which became Glass’s first and longest opera score. The composer remembers:

I put [Wilson’s notebook of sketches] on the piano and composed each section like a portrait of the drawing before me. The score was begun in the spring of 1975 and completed by the following November, and those drawings were before me all the time.¹

¹ Laurence Shyer, *Robert Wilson and His Collaborators* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1989), 220.

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Exhibited in December 1976 at the Paula Cooper Gallery, Wilson's storyboards were described by one critic as "serial art, equivalent to the slow-motion tempo of [Wilson's] theatrical style. In drawing after drawing after drawing, a detail is proposed, analyzed, refined, redefined, moved through various positions. You think of Monet's *Haystacks* or cathedral façades."²

Einstein on the Beach is being presented for the first time in 20 years under the supervision of Glass, Wilson and Childs. It will open at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) on September 14, 2012, and continue to tour in Europe, Canada, Mexico and Hong Kong. The tour is produced by Pomegranate Arts. An exhibition at the Morgan Library & Museum presents the second and only alternate version of Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* storyboards along with Glass's entire autograph manuscript, through November 4, 2012.

For more information and images, please contact the gallery: (212) 255-1105;
info@paulacoopergallery.com

² Thomas B. Hess, "Drawing 'Einstein on the Beach'," *New York*, Vol. 9, Dec. 13, 1976, 108-110.