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| **Gill, Eric (1882-1940)** |
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| Eric Gill was an important figure in the development of modern British sculpture in the early twentieth century. As an advocate of hand-making in small workshops, he is considered one of the main proponents of the method of direct carving. Having formed a close working relationship with Jacob Epstein between 1910 and 1912, and with the support of Roger Fry, Gill’s sculptures represent modernity through carving, simplification, and the use of British stones. Gill’s work as a typographer, letter cutter, wood engraver, and essayist also placed him at the heart of many modern movements in Britain during his lifetime, including the Society of Wood Engravers. As a writer and prolific sculptor for public architecture in the 1930s, he became prominent in the popular press. As a Catholic convert, his views and the religious subject matter of his art have complicated his status in the art historical canon. Since his death, his influence and importance has been predominately attributed to his letter cutting and typography. |
| Eric Gill was an important figure in the development of modern British sculpture in the early twentieth century. As an advocate of hand-making in small workshops, he is considered one of the main proponents of the method of direct carving. Having formed a close working relationship with Jacob Epstein between 1910 and 1912, and with the support of Roger Fry, Gill’s sculptures represent modernity through carving, simplification, and the use of British stones. Gill’s work as a typographer, letter cutter, wood engraver, and essayist also placed him at the heart of many modern movements in Britain during his lifetime, including the Society of Wood Engravers. As a writer and prolific sculptor for public architecture in the 1930s, he became prominent in the popular press. As a Catholic convert, his views and the religious subject matter of his art have complicated his status in the art historical canon. Since his death, his influence and importance has predominately been attributed to his letter cutting and typography.  Before studying stone masonry and decorative lettering, Gill trained as an architect. In 1903 he set up business as a decorative letter and inscription cutter, and in 1905 moved to the Arts and Crafts community in Hammersmith. In 1907 Gill moved his family and workshop to Ditchling, Sussex, where he took up wood engraving and, in 1909, carved his first figurative sculpture. In 1911 Gill had his first solo sculpture exhibition at the Chenil Gallery, London. He was supported by William Rothenstein and Roger Fry, and formed close friendships with Augustus John and Jacob Epstein. Gill’s first major public sculptures were the *Stations of the Cross* works for Westminster Cathedral. In 1920 Gill co-founded the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic. A collection of Catholic craftsmen working and living by their own means, it continued until 1989.  The 1920s saw Gill’s career grow and he was one of the founder members of the Society of Wood Engravers in 1920. In 1924 Gill moved to a remote old monastery in South Wales. There he designed his first typeface (Perpetua, 1925-8) before designing his most widely available type Gill Sans in 1927-8. He started a close collaboration with Robert Gibbings of the Golden Cockerell Press, and illustrated and co-designed a number of publications including *The Canterbury Tales* (1929-31) and *The Four Gospels* (1931).  In 1928 Gill left Wales and moved his extended family, workshops, and a printing press to South Buckinghamshire. In early 1928 he held his fourth and last solo exhibition, which included his largest freestanding stone sculpture, *Mankind* (1927-8). From 1929 to his death in 1940, public sculpture commissions dominated Gill’s sculptural output; he was commissioned by the London Underground headquarters (for which he carved three relief *Winds* [1928-9]), the new BBC headquarters (1931–3), the Palestine Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem (1934) and the League of Nations in Geneva (1937–8).  During his career as a sculptor, engraver and letter cutter, Gill was also a prolific writer. His output included essays, books, letters, and pamphlets on diverse subjects ranging from money, to education, to clothing, to religion, to typography. Gill’s legacy is complicated. During his lifetime his philosophy of hand-making in small workshops, and a limited engagement with modernity through architecture and typography was widely discussed and debated in public and artistic circles. The 1989 biography of Gill, revealing his sexual deviancy, has further complicated his place in the history of art. |
| Further reading:  (Collins)  (Gill)  (Gill, Eric Gill: A Bibliography)  (MacCarthy)  (Skeleton)  (Yorke) |