WINDOW SPACE

Xpace Cultural Centre

***Eileen Gray on The Beach***
Jamie Lipson

October 31 – December 12 2026

In a 2014 Parisian production recording of Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's 1976 formalist opera *Einstein on the Beach*, the second scene in the fourth act ("Bed") begins with a tube of white light lying along the entire length of the stage. To the hum of an electric organ, the bar turns slowly upward, rising vertically into an erect column, glowing in the darkness. As the beam floats out of view, a woman emerges from beneath and begins to sing an aria. In the following scene ("Spaceship"), the stage is taken over by a grid of incandescent lights, with each square occupied by a person adjusting the lightbulbs in sync with a cacophonic blend of organs and voices. Bathed in light, sound, and scaffolding, the characters perform in response to the rapidly changing architecture that surrounds them.

The sharp angles in these set designs are reminiscent of Jamie Lipson's pair of sculptures in his similarly named installation, *Eileen Gray on the Beach*, which, as its title would suggest, is an homage to the opera, as well as the influential designer and architect. Offering a new avenue for engaging with these objects and their many values, Lipson recreates versions of Gray's two well-known works, *Screen* (1922) and

*Tube Light Floor Lamp* (1927) for the Window Space at Xpace Cultural Centre. Calling into mind the history of this site as a commercial storefront, Lipson considers the layered and oppositional lineages of architecture, art, craft, design, and engineering. To fans of Gray's œuvre, these sculptures may appear as reproductions to these iconic objects of Modernist design. Upon closer inspection, however, Lipson's traces become clearer. While Gray was well-known for her affinity towards industrial materials in her domestic designs (chrome, lacquered wood, steel, glass, concrete), Lipson chooses to imbue a personal touch, exchanging the superficial hardness of most Modern design for a  measured softness that lies beneath the surface.

In the north quadrant of the Xpace window, *Screen* is, in its general form, a reproduction of Gray's 1922 design. Gray's original functions as a room divider—lacquered in glossy black wood this screen serves its purpose to conceal. The mobility of each rectangular frame, in both Gray's design and Lipson's version, allows for malleability in an otherwise rigid sculptural form.

In Lipson's screen, each transparent glass frame is occupied by a single hockey card. Collected since childhood from McDonald's Happy Meals, the cards' value is uplifted here not only in the method of display, but in conserving a memory from a specific time in the artist's life. Considering the spatial context of the window site as a storefront, the hockey cards also act as tokens of commercialism, as the entire set of 40 collectibles is on view. Here, Lipson's personal achievement of collecting these cards is at odds with the aesthetic value of the design inspired by Gray, inserting the artist's hand in intriguing ways. First, Lipson's hockey cards are symbolic of a Canadian cultural pastime, instantly recognizable within the Torontonian landscape. Similarly, the cards are objects of nostalgia, falling outside of any 'need' or 'use' value. Prioritizing the past,

the cards evoke memories for the collector and the viewer, rather than looking outward to a future.[1]

Additionally, the method of display, a monumental grid of bespoke frames, uplifts each cards' childlike or nostalgic connotations. For Lipson, his impulse of collecting is paired with an obsession for conservation. While many personal archives might be stowed in boxes or tucked away in scrapbooks, Lipson considers alternative ways to exist with these objects. Bringing the cards out of the darkness, Lipson weaves his hockey cards into the lexicon of the Modernist design, blending childhood memories with an adult sensibility for preservation and control.

In the south quadrant  of the Window Space, *Tube Lamp* offers another reference to Gray's body of work, which is more attuned to the artist's desire for precision. A practicing architect, Lipson is seldom in control. As he states, his artistic practice is grounded in a desire to be meticulous. This push for exactitude is demonstrated in the foundation of Lipson's lamp. In contrast to Gray's design, which is built upon a circular chrome base, Lipson uses a granite surface block, an obscure tool used in metrology to measure the flatness of a given surface. Having been manufactured since the 1950s, this surface block also comes from Lipson's personal collection, just like the hockey cards in the adjacent screen, but materially distinctive in its industrial function. The central light fixture, also from Lipson's collection, is a contemporary recreation of the type of fluorescent lamp used in Gray's original. An assemblage of two objects, Lipson creates something new from his sourced materials, bringing to light his personal collections.

But, what does it mean to recreate these iconic objects of Modernist design? For Lipson, it is a question  of exchange and access. Gray's objects, once commercially

[1] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, 135.

produced for domestic decoration, are extremely rare to come by today, not to mention their prohibitive price point. So, the solution is simple: if you can't afford the original, you make it yourself. In this creative interchange, Lipson reveals his skills in control and construction, extending his impulse of collecting from a private pastime to a public display.

Lipson's work brings forth a layered interpretation to how the worth of an object is measured. Whether it is in the aesthetic value of Modernist design, the sentimental value of a hockey card, the monetary value of an Eileen Gray original, or the artist's self-driven values of precision, *Eileen Gray on the Beach* demonstrates how processes of exchange can hold the potential to reevaluate our attachment to objects of desire.

– Austin Henderson