

ONE CLUSTER, ONE NOVA, ONE GALAXY
THE MULTI-PANELED CONSTELLATIONS OF FREDERICK KIESLER

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Recognized today as one of the important avant-garde artists of the 20th Century, Frederick Kiesler (1890-1965) is best known for his achievements in the fields of architecture, as well as theatre and furniture design. Though his impact is considerable, it took decades for it to be acknowledged. This initial oversight was despite the fact that even during his lifetime, Kiesler had exhibited in some of the leading Western art museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; that he had been represented by two of the most powerful American art dealers of the postwar era, Sidney Janis and Leo Castelli, and that he had published and been the subject of countless articles. Yet, by the 1970s, Kiesler's name and influence had almost been forgotten and it was not until 1989, when the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, held a retrospective exhibition of his entire oeuvre that he re-entered the Western canon of art history.

It was largely Kiesler's multi-disciplinary approach to art that kept him out of step with the tastes of his time and hard to categorize ever since. Too diverse and plentiful were his professional pursuits and too expansive his network of influential contacts to easily be labelled. Though he associated with key members of De Stijl, Dada, Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism and Pop-Art, he never did belong to one movement. Nor did he commit himself to one sole artform, having worked in the above-mentioned disciplines, as well as sculpture, painting, drawing, and installation. Though there are many connections to be drawn, Kiesler's oeuvre embodies a unique and lone position.

The most recent retrospective exhibitions of Frederick Kiesler, organized in collaboration with the Austrian Frederick and Lillian Kiesler Foundation, Vienna and held at the Österreichisches Museum für Angewandte Kunst / Gegenwartskunst, Vienna (2016) and the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2017), which re-examined his impact on the art and artists of his time, have argued that in order to better understand Kiesler's oeuvre, it is necessary to explore how its different genres correspond with each other. Among the latter, his multi-paneled paintings and works on paper, which he coined *Galaxies*, have long remained one of the least studied. In a sense, they have been an afterthought despite three remarkable facts: they mark one of his most extensive bodies of work; Kiesler spent almost twenty years developing them, and they were featured in the two most important gallery exhibitions of Kiesler's lifetime. In other words, it is clear that to Kiesler himself, the *Galaxies* had signified a major endeavor.

As a result, this Dissertation aims to provide the first in-depth analysis of Kiesler's *Galaxies* to date. While analyzing their historic, intellectual, and visual context, the text ponders such imperative questions as: *What did Kiesler depict in these compositions and why?; Did the works of other artists impact him and if so, how?; How did the form and content of the Galaxies evolve in the course of two decades? What visual vocabulary and theory did Kiesler establish for these works?*

This Dissertation is accompanied by the illustrated CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ OF FREDERICK KIESLER'S *GALAXIES*, which was assembled on the occasion of this project.