

## **“The Progressive Pencil: George Elmslie’s Prairie School Designs”**

*May 26–August 25, 2013 Cargill Gallery (103) Free exhibition*



George Grant Elmslie, decorative screen, c. 1916, iron, Gift of David and Patricia Gebhard

### **MINNEAPOLIS, MN, APRIL 30, 2013**

This summer, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) presents “The Progressive Pencil: George Elmslie’s Prairie School Designs” in celebration of the 100-year anniversary of the MIA’s beloved Purcell-Cutts House, a gem of the Prairie School style and one of the most significant examples in the country. The exhibition showcases approximately 20 rarely shown lyrical and intricate design drawings from the William Gray Purcell Papers of the Northwest Architectural Archives at the University of Minnesota and a selection of related objects from the MIA’s collection by George Grant Elmslie (1869–1952), a leading designer of the Prairie School style.

“The Progressive Pencil” harks back to an era when contemporary design stemmed from organic principles and natural motifs. The origins of Prairie School design are found in the work of architect Louis Sullivan (1856–1924), who conceived the idea of an authentic American architecture suited to the needs of people living in the modern age. Having worked for Sullivan for nearly 20 years, Elmslie became well-versed in organic design principles, carrying them over to the Minneapolis firms of Purcell, Feick and Elmslie (1910–13) and Purcell and Elmslie (1913–21).

According to Jennifer Komar Olivarez, associate curator in the Department of Decorative Arts, Textiles & Sculpture, “The designs produced by these architecture firms would not have achieved the level of ornament and elegance they did without Elmslie’s skill and experience.” His contributions to the integrated decorative schemes often included a combination of elements, such as terra-cotta, stained glass, stenciling, furniture, murals, and sawn wood, creating a harmonic whole greater than the sum of its parts.

“The Progressive Pencil” focuses on the drawings as art objects and as documents of the collaborative process of producing organic architecture. The exhibition features drawings for the Purcell-Cutts House, designed by Elmslie and William Gray Purcell in 1913. Elmslie’s designs for more than 80 leaded-glass windows, elaborate stencil patterns for every room, and custom furniture unified the interior spaces and gave the home its distinctively organic feel. Located near Lake of the Isles on 2328 Lake Place in Minneapolis, it was bequeathed to the MIA in 1985 and opened to the public in 1990.

The exhibition showcases other notable Purcell and Elmslie projects, such as the Merchants Bank of Winona, Minnesota (1911-13), along with historic photos and selected objects. Recent MIA acquisitions by Elmslie are also featured, including the one-of-a-kind dining room suite (1915) for Mrs. Hanna, with its wealth of detail, recently reunited and appropriately reupholstered thanks to donations from a number of MIA members.

For more information on the Purcell-Cutts House, please visit the *Unified Vision* Web site at <http://www.artsmia.org/unified-vision/purcell-cutts-house/> Tours of the house are available on the second Saturday and Sunday of each month. To make reservations, please call (612) 870-6323, or visit the MIA Web site, [artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org).

## **PRESS CONTACTS**

### **MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS**

Anne-Marie Wagener, (612) 870-3280; [awagener@artsmia.org](mailto:awagener@artsmia.org)

Tammy Pleshek, (612) 870-3171; [tpleshek@artsmia.org](mailto:tpleshek@artsmia.org)

Emmalynn Bauer, (612) 870-6364; [ebauer@artsmia.org](mailto:ebauer@artsmia.org)

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