The Swedish Glass Poet
Edward Hald’s Private Archive

Emilia Ström, Archives and Library
In 2014, the Nationalmuseum received Edward Hald’s private archive as a gift from the artist’s son, the illustrator Niels Christian (Fibben) Hald (b. 1933). Edward Hald (1883–1980), a pioneer in Swedish art industry, is one of Sweden’s foremost and internationally best-known glass artists. When the donation was made, his estate, filling some four metres of shelf space, included a mixture of private papers and professional records. The process of arranging and describing in the archival management software Visual Archive was completed in June 2016. The entire material now comprises 33 volumes. Our ambition with the processing was to highlight Hald’s multifaceted practice, and also, as far as possible, to preserve the context of the documents.¹

Edward Hald was born in Stockholm. In 1903, he began studying at a business school in Leipzig, but switched to architecture at the University of Technology in Dresden in 1905. In 1906, he decided to devote himself entirely to drawing and painting. The same year, he embarked on private lessons in drawing in Dresden. He also studied at the Swedish artist federation Konstnärsförbundet’s school.

Fig. 1 Edward Hald (1883–1980), Alice Roosevelt, alias Else Lisack, Dresden 1906. Pencil on paper, 28 x 21 cm. Nationalmuseum, Edward Hald’s private archive EH 2:8.
in Stockholm in 1908, and the so-called Matisse Academy in Paris in 1908. In 1917, he was employed as a designer first at Rörstrand and then at Orrefors glassworks. From 1918, he was also affiliated to the Sandvik glassworks. Hald’s international break-through came in 1925, with the World Fair in Paris. In 1933–45, he was the CEO of Orrefors, during a period when Swedish art glass and utility glass became globally successful, as exponents of “more beautiful everyday goods”. As a corporate executive, Hald could combine his artistic talent with his marketing skills, his business acumen with his knowledge of glass technology. In 1940, he resumed painting, and from 1947 he was artistic coordinator and advisor for Orrefors glassworks.2

Three of the archive volumes contain Hald’s correspondence, some 400 letters from various people from 1892 to 1980, and a large collection of his draft letters. The material is indicative of the artist’s enormous international network.3 One volume in the archive consists of material relating to 42 exhibitions between 1910 and 1984.4

In eight of the volumes we find Edward Hald’s work and diary notes, and a draft version of his unfinished memoirs. The diaries, which he kept more or less regularly throughout his life, provide some degree of structure and regular rhythm to the artist’s largely spontaneous approach to work. In the diaries he writes about everything from private musings to work-related ideas. Notes on art, literature, philosophy, architecture and design are interspersed with thoughts on existential issues and events in his life. Here, we also find examples of his studio poetry, as he called it.5 One of his poems, dated 1917, combines words and wordlessness, great and small, body and soul.

A room
A sealed room in the universe
A world of its own
With walls stretching skyward

Fig. 2 Edward Hald (1883–1980), The Spanish Lady. Produced by Orrefors glasbruk, 1923. Engraved crystal glass, 29.5 cm (h). Nationalmuseum, NMK 41/1923.
And a ceiling like a peaceful and mighty head
And windows gazing at big eyes
Out over the wide world
And furniture like thoughts and ideas
Both big heavy, and small and capricious
Oh microcosm in the big world
Oh silent abode of my body and soul
May the hymn resound in the dome of your head
Oh creation of a thousand generations’ labour

The artist’s free drawings and sketches, and sketches and drafts for craft objects and design fill nine volumes. This material includes 60 bound sketchbooks, most of which are from the years 1905–40. The years 1905–06, when he was studying in Germany, are especially well-represented, with a large number of draft portraits. It also contains more than 500 sketches and drafts for craft objects and designs on loose sheets.7

In the archive’s pictorial material, one vivid motif occurs a remarkable number of times. It consists of a grid pattern that seems to link all the artist’s life phases and his diverse forms of expression. During his architectural studies in Dresden in 1906, it consists of the millimeter grid paper on which he drew columns and capitals, only to reappear that year in a portrait drawing in the form of a veil enveloping the face of the depicted woman.8 (Fig. 1). The checked mantilla lace also covers the face of “Spanish Lady”, whose head forms the bowl of the glass cup from 1923, which is in the Nationalmuseum collection.9 (Fig. 2).

The grid also features in one of Hald’s drafts for a glass lampshade from 1933.
the year he became CEO of Orrefors. The motif is best known from his Starry Sky globe in the Nationalmuseum collection. The map of the firmament was drawn by mankind to help us navigate the infinite and incomprehensible. In this drawing, the artist has depicted himself standing in a laboratory, as a scientist and visionary. Holding a large test tube with both hands, he gazes at the heavenly canopy. Like the lampshade, his sunglasses protect him from the light, while also enabling him to see (Fig. 3).

The grid recurs again and again, in myriad sketches and engraved glass objects (Fig. 4). It is seen on Grail Glass as abstract patterns, and as fishnet on Fish Grail. It appears again in Hald’s late pictorial improvisations, where fish are caught in a fishnet, as in his “Jeu de Raclure” from 1967. It turns up again in Hald’s “90th Anniversary Vase” from 1973, in a cut decor consisting of nines and zeros in a net pattern. A net can both cover us and leave us naked, it both holds together and separates, in the same way as glass, which can be both transparent and reflective. The grid links and structures randomness and infinity, it unites emotions and art with reason and science. In Hald’s works, the boundaries dissolve between art and crafts, between visual art and design.

Edward Hald’s private archive reflects practically every phase of his long life, and gives an overall picture of his interdisciplinary practice. The material complements the Nationalmuseum’s already capacious collection of crafts and design archives. This unique resource is also a valuable addition to the records on Hald in the artist federation Konstnärsförbundet’s archive, which has long been a part of the Nationalmuseum’s collection.

Notes:
3. EH3:1–EH3:5 Edward Hald’s private archive, Enskilda arkiv (The artists archives), Nationalmuseum’s archives.
4. Ibid., EH4:2.
5. Ibid., EH1:5–EH1:12.
6. Ibid., Diary entry 10 January, 1917, EH1:12.
8. Ibid., In the diary marked: (Mem) 1970–1975 (DB), he writes: “Portrait art” was actually my first artistic interest, although I never pursued it, EH1:11.
9. NMK 41/1923.
10. NMK 142A/1930.
13. Edward Hald, Nationalmuseum exh.cat. 1983, No 301, p 130. The first “90th Anniversary Vase” was presented as a gift to King Gustav VI Adolf 1973, the year when both Hald and the King filled 90 years.