

*Edward Gorey: Overgrown*

Dante Bonanno Portal

Prof. Walsh

ARTH 412 - Senses and Sensibilities

11/12/25

## Scenography

Inspired by *The Evil Garden*, this scenography concept translates Gorey's notion of physical and narrative tension he depicted in his works. This narrowing gallery, part of the exhibition *Edward Gorey: Overgrown* incorporates the senses of touch, smell and hearing, as well as the sixth sense (especially uneasiness and discomfort), key senses to make the audience's experience similar to as if they were reading a book by Edward Gorey.

By covering the gallery's walls with a dark cloth—such as velvet, or translucent colored vinyl—make the room fill with smoke, or having a particular scent, not only evokes that sense of uneasiness—making the viewer feel lost, uncomfortable—a concept that Gorey really venerated throughout his books. Having a particular scent also makes the audience remember the exhibition more clearly. Since scent isn't something that Gorey implicitly represented in his works, since he was an illustrator, it is up to the audience to assign a smell to his works. Having read *The Evil Garden*, and with the concept of this gallery, having a strident scent—such as petrichor, or a subtle smell of spoiled fruit or flowers—will not only create a remarkable feeling in the audience, but also make the sculptures and knitted structures feel more alive, as they will have to scents—touch and smell. The designated gallery for this part of the exhibition is in the Poetter Gallery at the SCAD Museum of Art. It consists of a 138-foot long gallery space with floor-to-ceiling windows on one side and a brick wall on the other. Because the brick wall is protected by the city of Savannah, the museum doesn't allow any artworks to be hung from it, due to this, hanging artworks in this space can only be done by hanging them from the ceiling. The way I'm envisioning the pieces that are going to be hung from the ceiling is by having them in between two plastic, acrylic like panes that protect the pieces and don't put the artworks at risk of being damaged. The element from Gorey that will function best for hanging the pieces from

the ceiling is a chain—a sleek matte black chain that doesn't call the viewer's attention but also doesn't break the contrast from the rest of the elements of the exhibition.

Some of the elements of Gorey I was thinking of incorporating in this gallery are mainly taken from his book *The Evil Garden*, which is also the overarching theme of this exhibition. Some of these elements include vegetation elements that come out of the curtain and fabric that cover the walls of the gallery. In order to achieve this, collaborating with SCAD's Fibers Department will be the best choice to not only make this exhibition cross-departmental, but also to give the students from that department practical, and portfolio-ready experience. Besides collaborating with SCAD's Fibers Department, collaborating with Savannah's artist, Autumn Gary will make this exhibition reach a wider audience, and therefore making Gorey more known not only at SCAD, but in Savannah in general. I'm envisioning these sculptures to have a rusty feel achieved mostly with the painting. Having them be rusty could add to the theme of the gallery, a decaying progression of the previous gallery—The Garden. The material I'm envisioning these plants to be, is like a rug-like, wool material—to create a sensory, tactile material that the audience can get close to and touch even when the atmosphere of the gallery unconsciously tells them not to.

Some of the art historical references in this gallery space include not only works by Edward Gorey, but from movements of the twentieth century such as expressionism, specifically German Expressionism and silent cinema—films such as *Nosferatu* from 1922 and *From Morn to Midnight* from 1920. Both of these films share similarities with Edward Gorey, both in aesthetics, and in the themes that they depict. This gallery shares a parallel perspective to that seen primarily in German expressionist film sets and artworks, where the atmosphere feels distorted and psychologically off. Similar to German Expressionist cinema, Gorey's works tend

to feel that way as well—too tight, almost claustrophobic. This effect is mainly achieved by filling in the background in black, but also with the texture given by the black marker used in the background (see figure 4). Besides German expressionism, this exhibition will be inspired by the works from artists such as Egon Schiele and Ernesto Neto, as they both, in their own ways, provide really interesting sensory experiences. While Neto’s knitted structures engage mostly the senses of touch and smell, Schiele engages more in the sixth sense, and the sense of making ordinary things unfamiliar, uncanny. Incorporating subtle hints of this two artists will blur the boundaries between physical senses that the audience can touch, as well as the sixth sense to strengthen the atmosphere.

Towards the end of the gallery—barely seen from the entrance— covered in smoke, the audience will be forced to take a hard left and exit the gallery by going through a red, theatrical curtain. This addition to the exhibition makes the audience cross a threshold from uncertainty to going back to a space where they feel safe and plays an homage to the stage as a ritual of closure. Thanks to the red color being “energizing and exciting” it gives people confidence to do things.<sup>1</sup> Understanding color psychology will be of tremendous help to give meaning to the “pop of color,” motivating the audience to navigate the gallery and immerse themselves into the uncertainty of the smoke.

This narrowing gallery is the perfect way to wrap up the exhibition *Edward Gorey: Overgrown*, bringing all the concepts from Gorey’s books to a logical finale. This experience plays homage to the works by Edward Gorey and to his humor and surrealism by personifying the intention he had in making something familiar look unfamiliar, uncanny, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> “Color Psychology: How Do Colors Affect Mood & Emotions?,” London Image Institute, accessed November 9, 2025, <https://londonimageinstitute.com/how-to-empower-yourself-with-color-psychology/>

translating that feeling to the audience— guiding them from a state of curiosity, anxiety to freedom as they exit the gallery. By incorporating all these elements and creating a sensory overload experience, this gallery aims to perform Gorey’s works, allowing visitors to discover, or rediscover Gorey through a different lens.

### **Artist Bio**

Born in Portland to a family of artists, Autumn Gary is a visual artist who, throughout her life, has lived in various American cities, and is currently based in Savannah, Georgia. Working primarily in metal, she creates sculptures that reflect the concepts, lessons, metaphors that she gains through the wisdom of the natural world, as well as the experiences that she’s been through in her life.

Some of the themes explored in her sculptures include: the space between things, and the perception of how something may appear positive or negative depending on who’s viewing it. Her work philosophy focuses on art’s therapeutic capacity, with the primary approach to help others rediscover art as an emotional and healing tool.

Autumn’s work will be a great addition to *Edward Gorey: Overgrown*, not only because of the visual aspects of her work. But because she shares themes with the works of Edward Gorey, such as the anthropomorphic and elongated shapes which both Gorey and Autumn combine to strengthen the storytelling of the piece. Below are the questions that I asked Autumn Gary as a part of the artist bio:

#### **What led you to become an artist?**

Funny question...

Because I never ever questioned if I was an artist. I knew I was an artist since as long as I knew it was a thing to be called an artist. I grew up in a family of working artists. My dad was a

fine artist and graphic designer, my mom a painter.. my whole family was creative in their approach to life. I had a friend say in like seventh grade that she was going to be an artist one day and I thought you can't become an artist. You just are. Long story short I knew that whatever came into my life is would be integrated through the lens and language of creating because Art is life.

**When did you first realize you wanted to pursue art as a career?**

Life is creation the process of Creating, Creativity. Once I Make a line I release it from me it no longer belongs to me. It belongs to itself, there is freedom in this understanding that all energy belongs to itself. I suppose the freedom is that I'm stepping out of the way. Not attempting to cover or possess what I do not own. Much like a child belongs to themselves. In this way I also understand that I am part of a larger collective working through me intergenerational timeless

And unlimited. I think it's important to remember that it's not a singular act. Creating. We are a result of everything moving within and through us past present & future. It is the ego that tries to monopolize on creation. This whole thing already exists. We are just giving it form. Guiding it into the shape it wants to be and even then it will still become never ceases to amaze me. I could not imagine a life or career separate from this truth.

**If you're familiar with Edward Gorey, what elements (or themes) of your work would you say feel the most "Gorey-esque"?**

I do feel I have similarities to Edward Gorey. The strong contrast he uses, the positive and negative in exaggerated shapes, the anthropomorphic way characteristics are blended for story telling. I've always changed the physicality of things to meet the needs of the piece. If a finger needs to turn into a lightning bolt, or a shape needs to be sharp for protection and edge, or

if a heart needs a golden eye to have sight. These are ways as an artist we bring the unseen into the seen.

Also I relate to his way of embracing of the shadow and light. Creatures emerge or things unknown can take shape and can be seen in a way that take out the fear or escapism. Rather than running from the shadow within we can embrace it in a way that is honest and even with a bit of humor.

### **What themes or ideas do you explore through your art?**

My sculptures are manifestations that often begin as dreams, intuitive scribbles, little poems of thought strung together. Concepts, lessons, metaphors I gain through the wisdom of the natural world. Often my intention is to allow the unseen to step forth by getting out of the way. Quieting my mind. Releasing myself from attachment and rather going into what I call the heart mind.

It is in this place that I gather and collect form. I find information in the dance between light, shadow, and movement. Contrast. The space between things has always intrigued me. And how we can see something to be either positive or negative based on our perception. This is both true visually and emotionally. Even my final designs for sculptures that are cut in steel I like to keep hand drawn, imperfect. Human, and instinctive.

I find humility here. In nature I love the way things stretch to the light or bend to the shade that nothing is linear even though lines are found everywhere.

### **What do you hope viewers take away from your work?**

I guess I would hope that this would encourage people to connect more with who they are even beyond this earth suit.. what speaks to you in the wind when you listen. What is there in your intuition, your bones, that place that no one sees. Can you be brave enough and vulnerable

enough to explore this uncharted territory? Can you see the space between things? How everything holds everything else. Can you let go and allow yourself to become?

### **Educational Program**

The Fragrant Garden at Forsyth is like an oasis inside of Savannah’s downtown. By collaborating with the SCAD-owned restaurant Gryphon, people can enjoy a midnight tea with flavors that he enjoyed. This program will be offered for free for every SCAD student, as well as Savannah’s community—allowing Edward Gorey’s work to gain more recognition. The tea session is set up by having small tables in the garden that guests can reserve or just walk in. On the menu, there is only one thing, a three-tier stand, with the exception of coffee and tea. On the first level of this three-tier stand, is where the savory foods are. In this program, that would be the place for the eggs and sandwiches—such as his favorite tuna sandwiches. The second level belongs to the scones, or the muffins in this exhibition. These muffins will be served with two small plates along them, one containing cream cheese and the other one containing jam, that way the guests can choose how they want to eat them. And finally, the third and last level belong to the sweets and pastries, this is where the cereals, as well as Gorey’s beloved “grapefruit slices ‘bathed in Coca-Cola’”<sup>2</sup> would come into play.

The tea would include some of Gorey’s favorite foods, this includes: poached eggs, english muffins with cream cheese and cereal, as well as include a wide selection of teas and specialty coffee. Since this is an outdoors program, obviously having a kitchen will not be possible. Because of this, having a small food truck outside of the garden with 1 or 2 people preparing the food, and 3 to 4 servers to guide the customers to their respective table, take their orders, and bring them their food. Inside the garden, the music will be a subtle, chronological

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<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Rose, “My family’s curious correspondence with Edward Gorey,” February 24, 2025, <https://www.tcj.com/the-curious-correspondence/#:~:text=What%20were%20his%20letters%20like,bathed%20in%22%20Coca%2DCola>.

progression of the classical music that Gorey enjoyed, artists like: Monteverdi, Mozart, Bach and finishing off with The Tiger Lillies will predominate, fading with the sound of the fountain inside of the garden.

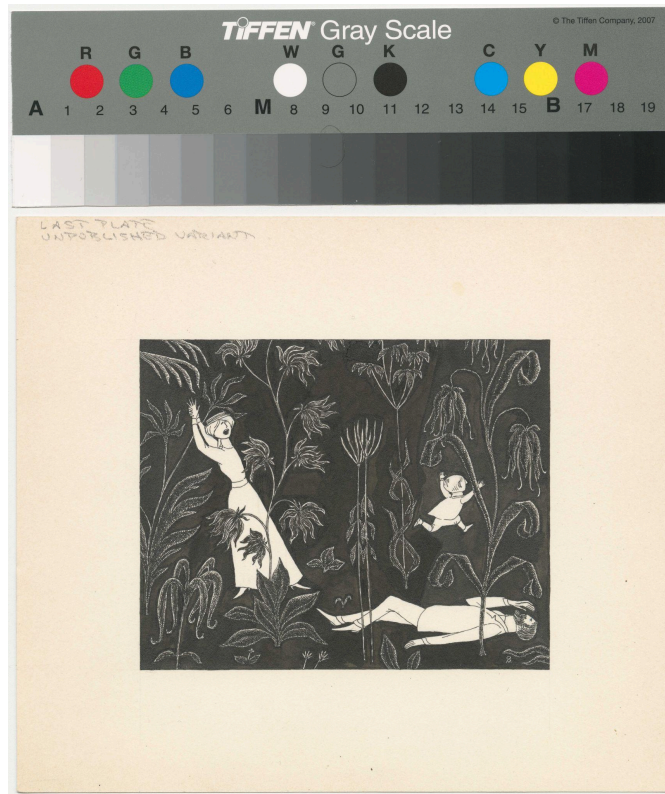
By having this program be at midnight, guests will feel like they're inside one of Gorey's macabre books. The subtle noises and smells of the Fragrant Garden, tied with the eeriness of Savannah's night, amplify the feeling of the sixth sense that Gorey was constantly depicting in his works. His works, especially in *The Evil Garden*, show ordinary scenes but in an eerie, unsettling way, making the audience almost hear the scenes, even though it's just a 2D illustration. The structure of the tea—classical and structured—mirror the meticulousness of Gorey's crosshatching, while the uncertainty of the night evokes the same uneasy sensation that characterizes his illustrations. This program invites guests to get a sip of Gorey's paradoxical sense of beauty and the uncanny—an invitation to step into Gorey's redefined darkness.

### **Section Wall Text**

As you walk through this gradually narrowing gallery, you enter a space that evokes a visceral unease—a sense beyond vision and sound, a sixth sense. In the dark, the scent of petrichor and spoiled fruit, and the muffled sounds of Gorey's beloved musical tastes, this gallery turns Gorey's *The Evil Garden* into a personification. The metal and wool materials invite the audience to touch while resisting comfort. This sensory exhibition echoes the themes in Edward Gorey's works, redefining beauty into something viscerally elegant.

This long, narrow corridor pulls visitors into a cloud of uneasiness, where sight begins to fail. The space comes together at the threshold, they meet a red, theatrical curtain—inviting the viewers to step beyond Gorey's world. This gallery tempts the visitors with the curiosity of stepping into Gorey's world, leaving them with the quiet discomfort of finding the exit.

## Imagined Checklist



Art previews → works-primary → evil\_garden → evil\_garden-31-variant-o-72ppi

**Name of Work:** *The Evil Garden*

**Artist Name:** Edward Gorey (American, 1925-2000)

**Date:** 1966

**Medium:** Ink on paper

**Dimensions:**

**Owner:** Edward Gorey Charitable Trust



Art previews → works-primary → evil\_garden → evil\_garden-25-o-72ppi

**Name of Work:** *The Evil Garden*

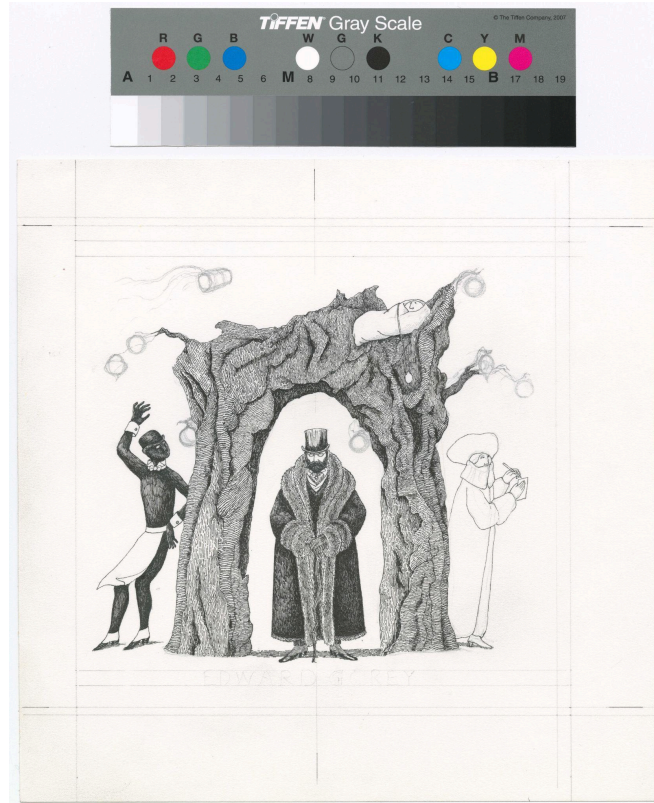
**Artist Name:** Edward Gorey (American, 1925-2000)

**Date:** 1966

**Medium:** Ink on paper

**Dimensions:**

**Owner:** Edward Gorey Charitable Trust



Art previews → miscellaneous → other → tree-vignette-unfinished-o-72ppi

**Name of Work:**

**Artist Name:** Edward Gorey (American, 1925-2000)

**Date:**

**Medium:** Ink on paper

**Dimensions:**

**Owner:** Edward Gorey Charitable Trust



**Name of Work:** *The Nightmare Before Christmas*

**Artist Name:** Tim Burton (American, 1958)

**Date:** 1993

**Medium:** Film still

**Dimensions:** N/A

**Owner:** The Walt Disney Company



**Name of Work:** *From Morn to Midnight*

**Artist Name:** Karlheinz Martin (German, 1846-1948)

**Date:** 1920

**Medium:** Film still

**Dimensions:** N/A

**Owner:** Munich Film Museum



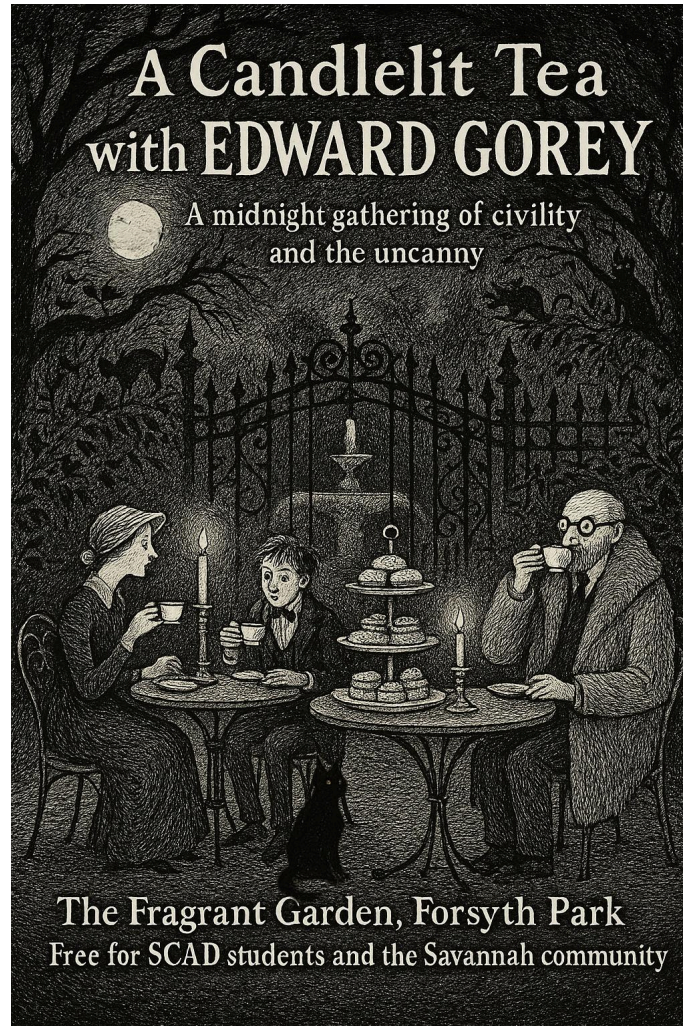


Figure 1. AI Generated Image by Dante Bonanno Portal (Argentine, 2003), *A Candlelit Tea with Edward Gorey*, 2025, Dall-E 3.



Figure 2. Drawing by Edward Gorey (American, 1925-2000), “The Evil Garden,” 1966, Ink on paper, Edward Gorey Charitable Trust.



Figure 3. Film still by Karlheinz Martin (German, 1886-1948), *From Morn to Midnight* 1920, film still, Munich Film Museum.



Figure 4. Drawing by Edward Gorey (American, 1925-2000), “The Evil Garden,” 1966, Ink on paper, Edward Gorey Charitable Trust.

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