



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Mabel Alvarez Papers, 1898-1987, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Mabel Alvarez papers
Date:	1898-1987
Identifier:	AAA.alvamabe
Creator:	Alvarez, Mabel, 1891-1985
Extent:	2.3 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Mabel Alvarez papers measure 2.3 linear feet and date from 1898 to 1987. The papers include scattered biographical information, scattered letters, unpublished prose, printed materials, sketchbooks, expense books, notebooks, diaries and journals, address books, photographs, and scrapbooks documenting the life and career of Los Angeles painter Mabel Alvarez.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Mabel Alvarez papers were donated to the Archives of American Art in 1988 by Glenn Basset, art dealer and friend of Mabel Alvarez.

Alternative Forms Available

The collection is available on 35mm microfilm reels 5672-5675 at Archives of American Art offices, and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was originally processed by Olivia Evens in 1991. A finding aid and reel/box inventory was completed by Rosa M. Fernandez in September 2000.

Preferred Citation

Mabel Alvarez papers, 1898-1987. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use of microfilmed material requires an appointment and is limited to the Washington, D.C. research facility.

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Biographical Note

Mabel Alvarez (1891-1985) established her career as a portrait painter in California. Born in Hawaii, she moved to Los Angeles as a child and later studied with Stanton Macdonald Wright. Her early work was characterized by interests in Symbolism and Art Nouveau as well as the influences of Impressionism. Alvarez also studied with William Cahill at the School for Illustration and Painting which Cahill founded with John Hubbard Rich in 1914.

As a young woman, Alvarez was influenced by the philosophical writings of Will Levington Comfort, who espoused the principles of Theosophy and Eastern mysticism. She attended lectures and meditation sessions at Comfort's Highland Park home, experiences which fostered artistic experimentation and departure. Alvarez became part of the "Group of Eight" in 1922, a forward thinking artists collective which veered away from the predictable standards of the California Art Club. The members of the group were Henri de Kruif, Luvena and Edouard Vysekal, Donna Schuster, Roscoe Shrader, Clarence Hinkle and her former teacher, John Hubbard Rich.

Her work took a decisive turn when she met the painter Morgan Russel in 1927. At this time her paintings became more figurative rather than decorative or ambiguous, with delicate choices of color, a skill she mastered by the end of her career. Mabel Alvarez continued to paint through her sixties and seventies, and to exhibit regularly, including with the Women Painters West organization. She is noted for her important role in the emergence of Southern California Modernism and is remembered for her contribution to California Impressionism as well as to figure, still life and portrait painting.

Mabel Alvarez died on March 13, 1985 at the age of 93.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Mabel Alvarez (1898-1985) measure 2.3 linear feet and date from 1898-1987. The collection documents both her painting career as well as her personal life through correspondence, original writings, sketches, printed material, diaries and journals, financial records, and scrapbooks.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into eleven series based primarily on document type and chronological order.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1907-1970 (Box 1; 3 folders; reel 5672)
- Series 2: Letters, 1909-1978 (Box 1; 1 folder; reel 5672)
- Series 3: Writings, 1898, 1910-1935, undated (Box 1; 11 folders; reel 5672)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1917-1987, undated (Box 1; 10 folders; reel 5672)
- Series 5: Sketchbooks, 1949-1950, undated (Box 1; 2 folders; reel 5672)
- Series 6: Expense Books, 1914-1977 (Box 1; 1 folder; reel 5672)
- Series 7: Notebooks on Exhibition and Paintings, 1921-1953 (Box 1; 1 folder; reel 5673)
- Series 8: Diaries and Journals, 1909-1984 (Box 1-2; 15 folders; reel 5673-5675)
- Series 9: Address Books, undated (Box 2; 2 folders; reel 5675)
- Series 10: Photographs, 1905-1983, undated (Box 2; 5 folders; reel 5675)
- Series 11: Scrapbooks, 1898-1984 (Box 3; 2 scrapbooks; reel 5675)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Art, Modern
- Latino and Latin American artists
- Women artists
- Women painters
- Works of art

Types of Materials:

- Diaries
- Photographs
- Sketchbooks

Names:

- Honolulu Academy of Arts
- Macdonald-Wright, Stanton, 1890-1973
- Otis Art Institute
- San Joaquin Pioneer Museum

Occupations:

- Portrait painters -- California -- Los Angeles

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1907-1970

3 Folders (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes passports, a copy of a birth certificate, handwritten genealogy of the Alvarez family, list of art awards received between 1943 and 1969, and a high school report card from Berkeley High School dated 1907.

Available Formats: Biographical materials are on reel 5672.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 1	General, 1907, 1970, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Art Awards, 1943-1969
Box 1, Folder 3	Passports, 1924, 1954, 1970, undated

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Series 2: Letters, 1909-1978

1 Folder (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Found are personal letters, including one from Mabel's father, Luis F. Alvarez, as well as letters from art institutions regarding art exhibitions. Institutions include the University of California, Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Museum, Honolulu Academy of Arts, the Otis Art Institute, and the San Joaquin Pioneer Museum.

Available Formats: Letters are on reel 5672.

Box 1, Folder 4 [Letters, 1894-1978](#)

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Series 3: Writings, 1898, 1910-1935, undated

11 Folders (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Found are original and unpublished writings by Alvarez such as poetry and short stories.

Available Formats: Writings are on reel 5672.

Box 1, Folder 5	Elementary and High School Writings, 1910, 1922, undated
Box 1, Folder 6	High School Writings, 1910-1911, undated
Box 1, Folder 7-9	"Late Flowering", undated
Box 1, Folder 10	"Autumn Twilight" and "Cross Currents,", undated
Box 1, Folder 11	"Broken Enchantment," "Experiment," "Father's Childhood in Spain," and "How I kept House in Hawaii,", undated
Box 1, Folder 12	"A Man for Sister," "Merry Christmas" and "Mrs. Powell,", undated
Box 1, Folder 13	"The Old Doctor," "The Poisonous Flower" and "Romance,", undated
Box 1, Folder 14	"Tourist and Home," "Heat and Bath," and "The Two Virgins,", undated
Box 1, Folder 15	Miscellaneous Writings, 1898, 1929, 1935

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1917-1987, undated

10 Folders (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Found are exhibition catalogs of Alvarez's solo or group exhibitions including a catalog for the exhibition, *Painting and Sculpture from 16 American Cities* from the 1933 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Publications such as *The American Magazine of Art*, *Art in America*, *Art Forum*, and *Art News* are also found. Newspaper clippings feature articles on the professional lives of Alvarez's brother and nephew and also critical reviews of Alvarez's exhibitions.

Available Formats: Printed materials are on reel 5672.

Available Formats:

Box 1, Folder 16	Exhibition Catalogs, 1917-1933
Box 1, Folder 17	Exhibition Catalogs, 1934-1939
Box 1, Folder 18	Exhibition Catalogs, 1940-1950
Box 1, Folder 20-22	Newspaper Clippings, 1927-1987
Box 1, Folder 23-25	Publications, 1918, 1923, 1931, 1934, 1955, 1964

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Series 5: Sketchbooks, 1949-1950, undated

2 Folders (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Sketchbooks contain pencil and color pencil drawings as well as scattered notes. One sketchbook, although undated, contain sketches completed during her stay at a nursing home.

Available Formats: Sketchbooks are on reel 5672.

Box 1, Folder 26 Sketchbook I, 1949-1950

Box 1, Folder 27 Sketchbook II, undated

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Series 6: Expense Books, 1914-1977

1 Folder (Box 1; reel 5672)

Scope and Contents: Included are six small notebooks with handwritten notations of personal finances and art works sold including final selling price.

Available: Expense books are on reel 5672.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 28	Expense Books, 1914-1977
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Series 7: Notebooks on Exhibitions and Paintings, 1921-1953

1 Folder (Box 1; reel 5673)

Scope and Contents: Found are four notebooks containing sketches of animals, landscapes, and people as well as notes from books and lectures by Stanton Macdonald Wright.

Available: Notebooks on exhibitions and paintings are on reel 5673.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 29	Notebooks, 1921-1953
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Series 8: Diaries and Journals, 1909-1984

15 Folders (Box 1-2; reel 5673-5675)

Scope and Contents: The largest series of the collection, these personal diaries and journals record daily activities and personal thoughts and feelings. Scattered throughout the diaries and journals are letters and sketches.

Available Formats: Diaries and journals are on reel 5673-5675.

Box 1, Folder 30-32	Diaries and Journals, 1909-1938
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Box 2, Folder 1-12	Diaries and Journals, 1925-1984
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Series 9: Address Books, undated

2 Folders (Box 2; reel 5675)

Available Address books are on reel 5675.

Formats:

Box 2, Folder 13-14 Address Books, undated

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Series 10: Photographs, 1905-1983, undated

5 Folders (Box 2; reel 5675)

Available Photographs are on reel 5675.

Formats:

Box 2, Folder 15-21 Photographs, 1905-1983, undated

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Series 11: Scrapbooks, 1898-1984

2 Scrapbooks (Box 3; reel 5675)

Scope and Contents: Included are two scrapbooks, one dismantled, containing mostly newspaper clippings and scattered letters, exhibition announcements, drawings, and other material.

Available Formats: Scrapbooks are on reel 5675.

Box 3 Scrapbooks, 1898-1984

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