



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the American Abstract Artists  
records, 1936-1983, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	American Abstract Artists records
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.amerabst
<b>Date:</b>	1936-1983
<b>Extent:</b>	1.6 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	American Abstract Artists
<b>Language:</b>	Multiple languages  Most of the collection is in English. Some materials are in Danish, French, and German.  Danish; English; French; German
<b>Summary:</b>	The records of the American Abstract Artists measure 1.6 linear feet and date from 1936 through 1983. The records document the founding of the organization in 1936, membership activities, general administration, and exhibitions via correspondence, member writings, financial and legal records, printed materials, and photographs.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The Archives of American Art acquired the American Abstract Artists records in three installments by Presidents Emeriti of the American Abstract Artists. Alice Trumbull Mason first lent papers for microfilming in 1959, and she later gifted the majority of this material in 1969. Following, Leo Rabkin donated records in 1969, and Irene Rousseau gave more papers in 1983.

### Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming available on 35 mm microfilm reels D539, N59-11, N69-72, N69-96, N69-97, N69-137, and N70-48. Much of this material and the papers on reels N70-48 and N59-11 were included in subsequent gifts, and may have been microfilmed again. Loaned materials not donated later are not described in the collection container inventory.

### Related Materials

Among the holdings of the Archives of American Art are the Ruth Bowman Interviews of American Abstract Art members, 1963-1965, and Susan C. Larsen's Interviews of American Abstract Art members, 1973-1978.

## Available Formats

Portions of the collection and material lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels D539, N59-11, N69-72, N69-96, N69-97, N69-137, and N70-48 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

## Processing Information

The collection was preliminarily processed by Carly Dorca in 2012, and more fully processed and a finding aid prepared by Megan Bean in June 2016.

## Preferred Citation

The American Abstract Artists records, 1936-1983. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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## Biographical / Historical

The American Abstract Artists group was established in 1936 in New York, New York by a group of painters and sculptors. The American Abstract Artists contributed to the introduction of abstract art to the American public through exhibitions, publications, and lectures.

During the era of the formation of the American Abstract Artists, abstraction was not critically accepted. In 1937, the American Abstract Artists held their first exhibition at the Squibb Galleries in New York City. It received negative reactions from both the press and the public - the exhibition had a high attendance but poor reviews. The American Abstract Artists addressed the role of the critic through their publications, specifically the 1940 pamphlet "The Art Critics! How Do They Serve the Public? What Do They Say? How Much Do They Know?—Let's Look at the Record!"

The group was most active from 1937 to 1942, and supported the critical success of Abstract Expressionism in later decades.

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## Scope and Contents

The records of the American Abstract Artists measure 1.6 linear feet and date from 1936 through 1983. The records document the founding of the organization in 1936, membership activities, general administration, and exhibitions via correspondence, member writings, financial and legal records, printed materials, and photographs.

Correspondence mainly relates to the exhibitions and member activities of the American Abstract Artists. There are letters from Josef Albers, Alexander Archipenko, Alexander Calder, Lyonel Feininger, Harry Holtzman, Piet Mondrian, and Irene Rousseau, President Emeritus of the American Abstract Artists. Official bulletins sent to members are also found among the correspondence.

Administrative records include founding prospectus, meeting minutes, lists of members, and drafts and amendments to the American Abstract Artists constitution.

Member writings are by Saburo Hasegawa, Henry Billings, Leo Rabkin, and Ruth Gurin. Financial and legal records include ledger books, insurance documents, and other financial material. Printed materials include announcements for the American Abstract Artists' annual exhibitions, as well as exhibition posters. Finally, there are two photographs of collage paintings by members.

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## Arrangement

The arrangement and description in this finding aid refer to unmicrofilmed portions of the collection. Legacy microfilm arrangement is not reflected.

The collection is arranged as 6 series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1937-1982 (Box 1; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 2: Administrative Records, 1937-1982 (Box 1; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 3: Member Writings, 1938-1954 (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 4: Financial and Legal Records, 1942-1983 (Box 1-2; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 5: Printed Materials, 1936-1982 (Box 2-3, OV 4; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 6: Photographs, 1963 (Box 3; 1 folder)

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Societies, etc. -- New York (State) -- New York  
Art, Abstract -- United States  
Painters  
Sculptors

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Albers, Josef  
Archipenko, Alexander, 1887-1964  
Billings, Henry, 1901-  
Calder, Alexander, 1898-1976  
Feininger, Lyonel, 1871-1956  
Gurin, Ruth  
Hasegawa, Saburō, 1906-1957  
Holtzman, Harry  
Mason, Alice Trumbull, 1904-1971  
Mondrian, Piet, 1872-1944  
Rabkin, Leo  
Rousseau, Irene

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Correspondence, 1937 - 1982

#### *0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)*

Correspondence documents Abstract American Artists exhibitions and membership, elections, application decisions, delinquent dues, resignations, supplies, and thank you notes. Also included is correspondence between members, IBM Gallery of Arts correspondence regarding the 1962 annual exhibition, United States Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts correspondence regarding meeting decisions and minutes, and Irene Rousseau letters, written during her years as American Abstract Artists President.

Box 1, Folder 1	Albers, Josef, 1942
Box 1, Folder 2	Archipenko, Alexander, 1943
Box 1, Folder 3	Calder, Alexander, 1942
Box 1, Folder 4	Exhibition Correspondence, 1938-1981 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	Exhibition Correspondence, 1947-1962 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	Exhibition Correspondence, 1963-1967 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 7	Exhibition Correspondence, 1979-1981 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 8	Exhibition Correspondence, IBM Gallery of Arts, 1961-1962
Box 1, Folder 9	Feininger, Lyonel, undated
Box 1, Folder 10	Holtzman, Harry, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	Membership Correspondence, Bulletins, 1944-1965
Box 1, Folder 12-17	Membership Correspondence, 1956-1979
Box 1, Folder 18	Mondrian, Piet, 1938-1942 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 1, Folder 19	Rousseau, Irene (President Emeritus, American Abstract Artists) letters, 1978-1982
Box 1, Folder 20	U.S. Committee of the International Association of Plastic Arts, 1961-1964

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## Series 2: Administrative Records, 1937 - 1982

### *0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)*

Administrative files include application forms, ballots for L'Association Francaise D'Action Artistique, drafts of the constitution, an exhibition guestbook, meeting minutes and notes, general membership records, membership lists, and the general prospectus.

Box 1, Folder 21	Application Forms, 1950-1955
Box 1, Folder 22	Ballots for L'Association Francaise D'Action Artistique, 1955
Box 1, Folder 23	Drafts of the Constitution, 1941-1964
Box 1, Folder 24	Exhibition Guestbook, 1979-1982
Box 1, Folder 25	Founding Prospectus and Statements, 1937
Box 1, Folder 26-28	Meeting Minutes and Notes, 1946-1965
Box 1, Folder 29	Membership Lists, 1936-1964

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## Series 3: Member Writings, 1938-1954

### *4 Folders (Box 1)*

Member writings include "Abstract Art in Japan Today" by Saburo Hasegawa, "Report on the Organization of the International Association of Plastic Arts" by Henry Billings, a statement by Leo Rabkin made upon the 30th annual exhibition of the American Abstract Artists, and the essay "Toward a Fourth Decade," by Ruth Gurin.

Box 1, Folder 30 "Abstract Art in Japan Today", 1953-1954

Box 1, Folder 31 "Report on the Organization of the International Association of Plastic Arts", 1953-1954

Box 1, Folder 32 Statement by Leo Rabkin, circa 1966

Box 1, Folder 33 "Toward a Fourth Decade", circa 1965

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## Series 4: Financial and Legal Records, 1942-1983

*0.5 Linear feet (Box 1-2)*

Financial and legal records include ledger books, check stubs, insurance records, invoices, receipts, bank statements, treasurer's reports, and other miscellaneous financial records.

Box 1, Folder 34-36	Account Books of Ledgers, 1943-1983
Box 1, Folder 37	Check Stubs, 1954-1959
Box 1, Folder 38	Financial Material, 1942-1951
Box 1, Folder 39	Insurance, 1978-1982
Box 2, Folder 40-46	Invoices, Receipts, and Bank Statements, 1949-1954
Box 2, Folder 47	Receipts, 1979-1982
Box 2, Folder 48	Treasurer's Reports

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## Series 5: Printed Materials, 1933-1982

*0.5 Linear feet (Box 2-3; OV 4)*

Printed material consists mainly of exhibition announcements but also includes exhibition catalogs; exhibition posters; the magazine, "Plastique"; newspaper clippings regarding the American Abstract Artists; the pamphlet, "The Art Critics-! How Do They Serve the Public? What Do They Say? How Much Do They Know?—Let's Look at the Record!"; American Abstract Artists press releases; and three American Abstract Artists Yearbooks.

Box 2, Folder 49	Annual Exhibition Announcements , 1938-1964 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 50	Exhibition Announcements, General, 1937-1963 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 51	Exhibition Catalogs, 1938-1979 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 52	Exhibition Catalogs, 1966-1981 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>
Box 2, Folder 53	Exhibition Portfolio, 1937 (two copies)
Box 2, Folder 54	Exhibition Posters, 1951-1956 <i>Oversized material housed in OV 4</i>
Box 2, Folder 55	Event Announcements, 1942-1948
Box 2, Folder 56	Magazine: "Plastique", 1938
Box 3, Folder 57-58	Newspaper Clippings, 1936-1956
Box 3, Folder 59	Pamphlet: "The Art Critics-! How Do They Serve the Public? What Do They Say? How Much Do They Know?--Let's Look at the Record!", 1940
Box 3, Folder 60	Press Releases, 1981-1982
Box 3, Folder 61	Yearbook: 1938, 1938
Box 3, Folder 62	Yearbook: 1939 Book Introduction, 1939 (photocopy)
Box 3, Folder 63	Yearbook: 1946, 1946 (two copies)
Box OV 4	Oversized Exhibition Posters, 1951-1956 Oversized material from Box 3, folder 52

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## Series 6: Photographs, 1963

*1 Folder (Box 3)*

There are two photographs of collage paintings with an attached note.

Box 3, Folder 64

Photographs of Collage Paintings, 1963

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