



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Elise Asher Papers,
1923-1994, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Elise Asher papers
Identifier:	AAA.asheelis
Date:	1923-1994
Extent:	1.6 Linear feet
Creator:	Asher, Elise, 1914-
Language:	English
Summary:	The Elise Asher papers measure 1.6 linear feet and date from 1923 to 1994. The collection includes biographical material, letters, writings, works of art, business records, printed material, and photographs reflecting Asher's career as a poet, painter, and sculptor, and her friendships with many prominent artists of the mid-twentieth century.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Elise Asher papers were donated in 1975, 1976, 1989, 1990 and 1995 by the artist.

Alternative Forms Available

Portions of this collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 4938-4939 at the 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 bulk of the collection was processed by Jean Fitzgerald in 1994. The 1995 donation (in box 3) was integrated into the collection during conversion to in 2002. Partial microfilming of the Elise Asher papers was completed with funds provided by the Helena Rubinstein Foundation.

Preferred Citation

The Elise Asher papers, 1923-1994. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Microfilmed portion must be consulted on microfilm. Use of unmicrofilmed material requires an appointment and is limited to the Washington D.C. research facility.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Elise Asher papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1914, Elise Asher studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, Bradford Junior College, Boston College, and at Simmons College.

She began her career as a poet, culminating in a volume of her poetry entitled *The Meandering Absolute*. Upon her 1947 arrival in New York City, her attention turned to painting and sculpture. The Tanager Gallery mounted her first solo exhibition in 1953.

Asher was married to painter Nanno de Groot from 1949 to 1957. A year later she married poet Stanley Kunitz, whose work she often illustrated.

Scope and Content Note

The Elise Asher papers, 1923-1994, measure 1.6 linear feet and reflect Asher's career as a poet, painter, and sculptor, and her friendships with many of the more prominent artists of the mid-twentieth century. The collection contains biographical material, letters, writings, works of art, business records, printed material, and photographs.

Notable correspondents found in the collection include Fritz Bultman, Helen Frankenthaler, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Norman Mailer, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Jack Tworokov, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into seven series according to material type. The contents of each folder have been arranged chronologically.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1923-1976 (box 1, 1 folder)
 - Series 2: Letters, 1941-1988, undated (box 1, 2 folders)
 - Series 3: Business Records, 1955-1988, undated (box 1, 43 folders)
 - Series 4: Writings, 1973-1979, undated (box 1, 4 folders)
 - Series 5: Artwork, undated (box 1, 2 folders)
 - Series 6: Printed Material, 1929-1994, undated (boxes 1-3, 30 folders)
 - Series 7: Photographs, 1951-1973, undated (box 2, 5 folders)
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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:

Poets -- New York (State) -- New York
Women painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Women sculptors -- New York (State) -- New York
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Christmas cards
Illustrated letters
Photographs
Slides (photographs)

Names:

Bultman, Fritz, 1919-1985
De Groot, Nanno, 1913-1964
Frankenthaler, Helen, 1928-2011
Guston, Philip, 1913-1980
Hofmann, Hans, 1880-1966
Kunitz, Stanley, 1905-2006
Mailer, Norman
Motherwell, Robert
Nevelson, Louise, 1899-1988
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970
Stamos, Theodoros, 1922-1997
Tworkov, Jack
Vonnegut, Kurt
Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1923-1976

1 Folder (Box 1)

This series includes a teacher's report, résumés, and an award certificate.

Biographical material is on reel 4938.

Box 1, Folder 1

Biographical Material, 1923-1976

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Series 2: Letters, 1941-1988, undated

2 Folders (Box 1)

Letters found here are from Asher's colleagues, including Fritz Bultman, Helen Frankenthaler, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, Norman Mailer, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Jack Tworkov, and Kurt Vonnegut. The letters primarily concern their art-related activities.

See Appendix for list of notable correspondents from Series 2

Letters are on reel 4938.

Appendix: Notable Correspondents from Series 2

- Adams, Pat: May 31, 1979
- Albert, Calvin: undated Christmas cards (3), one is illustrated
- Ashton, Dore: undated postcard?; Jun 12, 1985
- Beck, Rosemarie: Jun 1972
- Boghosian, Varujan and Marilyn: undated Christmas card
- Bourgeois, Louise: Jun 15, 1977
- Brooks, Charlotte and Jim: undated letters (2); Apr 3, 1966; Jul 27, 1970; Feb 15, 1971
- Brustlein, Daniel: Sep 8, 1955
- Bultman, Fritz: undated letters (3); Dec 12, 1964; Jan 2, 1965; Dec 1976
- Burlin, Paul and Peggy: Dec 4, 1960
- Busa, Peter: Dec 23, 1964
- Castellon, Hilda, Paul, and Fred: undated Christmas card
- Cavallon, Giorgio: Nov 15, 1955; Sep 8, 1963; Oct 22, 1963; Jan 6, 1965; Oct 3, 1966; Mar 12, 1974
- De Kooning, Lisa: 1979 (incomplete letter)
- Dorfman, Elsa: undated letter
- Ferber, Ilse and Herbert: undated Christmas card; Oct 24, 1960? (with 5 photographs of works)
- Ferren, John: undated Christmas card (illustrated); Feb 11, 1964; Jun 30, 1964
- Frankenthaler, Helen: undated letters (2); Aug 2, 1956; Jan 19, 1960; Oct 2, 1960; Apr 1, 1961; Mar 1, 1969; Aug 18, 1969; also see Robert Motherwell
- Friedman, Sanford: undated postcard; Jul 7, 1969; Dec 26, 1981; Apr 19, 1988; Dec 27, 1988
- Greene, Stephen and Sigrid: undated Christmas cards (2)
- Gross, Chaim and Renee: 1967 Christmas card; 1968 Christmas card; 1983 Christmas card
- Gruen, John: undated Christmas card
- Guston, Philip and Musa: undated Christmas card with illustration; undated letters (3); Jul 29, 1958; Aug 17, 1960; Sep 19, 1963 (illustrated); Jan 10, 1964 (illustrated); Aug 17, 1964 (illustrated); Nov 6, 1964; Sep 22, 1969; Oct 13, 1970; Feb 15, 1971; [1971]; Apr 9, 1971; Aug 2, 1971; Sep 19, 1972; Dec 22, 1972; Jun 12, 1973; Jul 16, 1973 (illustrated); Aug 27, 1974; Dec 1, 1974; Jan 9, 1975; Aug 16, 1979
- Hare, David: Mar 7, 1957; Jun 15, 1979; Aug 4, 1980; Jul 14, 1981; Apr 1, 1983
- Harmon, Lily: undated Christmas card
- Hess, Thomas: undated letters (2); Nov 12, 1974 (envelope only)
- Hofmann, Hans and Miz: undated letter; Dec 23, 1952; Dec 1957; Jun 25, 1958; Dec 1, 1958; Jun 3, 1960; Jun 13, 1962; Apr 18, 1963
- Kahn, Wolf: Oct 16, 1955
- Kootz, Sam and Jane: undated Christmas card
- Kuh, Katharine: undated letter; Dec 28, 1974
- Mailer, Norman: Apr 11, 1968
- Manso?, Leo: Dec 1979 illustrated envelope

- Miller, Dorothy: Aug 26, 1953
- Morris, Hilda: undated letters (3)
- Motherwell, Robert and Renata Ponsold: Mar 3, 1975; Oct 1, 1977; Oct 16, 1978; Feb 25, 1985; Nov 29, 1988; also see Helen Frankenthaler
- Nevelson, Louise: Dec 20, 1960 (illustrated card)
- O'Doherty, Brian: undated letter; Jul 31, 1967; Aug 5, 1968 Sep 20, 1982
- Pavia, Philip: Aug 17, 1982
- Reis, Bernard and Becky: undated Christmas cards (2)
- Resnick, Milton: Feb 23, 1956
- Rosati, James and Carmel: undated Christmas cards (2); also see Art Work
- Rothko, Mark: undated letters (2); Jul 20, 1959; Aug 9, 1961; also see Photographs
- Stamos, Theodorus: undated letter; Jan 3, 1962; Aug 6, 1964; Jul 14, 1965; Aug 19, 1965; Jul 15, 1966; Jul 19, 1967; Jun 29, 1968; Aug 5, 1968; Jul 23, 1973; Dec 11, 1981
- Stevens, May: Jul 14, 1975
- Stout, Myron: Mar 25, 1980
- Terris, Albert and Virginia: Dec 1953 (illustrated Christmas card)
- Tworokov, Jack and family: undated letters (2); Dec 22, 1955 (illustrated Christmas card); Aug 27, 1956; Jul 5, 1960; Dec 11, 1960; Oct 21, 1968; Jan 4, 1983
- Varian, Elayne: Oct 6, 1969; Dec 19, 1969
- Vonnegut, Kurt: undated letters (2); Jan 29, 1975
- Watson, Hildegard: Feb 24, 1946; Jun 12, 1948; Mar 31, 1951; Jan 27, 1956; Aug 9, 1958
- Webb, Nancy: Jan 6, 1986; Dec 15, 1986 (illustrated Christmas card)
- Wesley, John: Mar 21, 1987
- White, Emil: see Art Work
- Williams, William Carlos: Jul 2, 1949 (photocopy); also see Photographs
- Wilson, Jane: see John Gruen
- Yunkers, Adja: undated cards (2), one illustrated; Feb 3, 1951; Dec 16, 1964

Box 1, Folder 2-43

Letters, 1941-1988, undated

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Series 3: Business Records, 1955-1988, undated

43 Folders (Box 1)

This series consists of miscellaneous loan agreements and receipts.

Business records are on reel 4938.

Box 1, Folder 44-45 Loan agreements and receipts, 1955-1988, undated

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Series 4: Writings, 1973-1979, undated

4 Folders (Box 1)

Writings include poems and artist statements by Asher. Also found here are miscellaneous writings about Asher: *Elise Asher at Ingber* by Carl Little (undated); *Asher's Outscapes at Ingber* by Ellen Romano Russotto (undated); *Another World: Elise Asher at Ingber Gallery* by Ellen Russotto (undated); excerpts of Brian O'Doherty's article, "Elise Asher: Ut Pictura Poesis," *Art In America* (1973); and *Elise Asher at the Ingber Gallery* by Jeanne Miles.

Writings are on reel 4938.

Box 1, Folder 46	Poems by Elise Asher, undated
Box 1, Folder 47	Artist's Statements, 1973-1975, undated
Box 1, Folder 48	Typescript for Exhibition Catalog <i>The Book As Art</i> by Daniel Fendrick, 1975
Box 1, Folder 49	Miscellaneous Writings About Asher, 1973-1979, undated

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Series 5: Artwork, undated

2 Folders (Box 1)

Found here are two collages by James Rosati and a watercolor by Emil White.

Artwork is on reel 4938.

Box 1, Folder 50 Collages by James Rosati (2), undated

Box 1, Folder 51 Watercolor by Emil White, undated

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1929-1994, undated

30 Folders (Boxes 1-3)

Printed material includes clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, press releases, brochures, programs, a published poem by Stanley Kunitz, and three books.

Printed material is on reels 4938-4939.

Box 1, Folder 52-59	Clippings, 1953-1989, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Clippings, 1988-1992
Box 1, Folder 60-66	Exhibition announcements and catalogs for Asher, 1952-1969, undated
Box 2, Folder 1-5	Exhibition announcements and catalogs for Asher, 1970-1989
Box 3, Folder 2	Exhibition announcements and catalogs, 1979-1992, undated
Box 2, Folder 6	Exhibition catalog and price list for Nanno de Groot, 1982
Box 2, Folder 7	Press releases, 1976-1986
Box 2, Folder 8	Brochures, 1950-1976
Box 2, Folder 9	Puppet show programs, 1929-1930
Box 2, Folder 10	Book, <i>The Meandering Absolute</i> by Elise Asher, 1955
Box 2, Folder 11	Books, <i>This Book Is A Movie</i> edited by Jerry Bowles and Tony Russell, and <i>The Provincetown Artists Cookbook</i> by Christopher Busa, 1971, 1988
Box 3, Folder 3	Book, <i>The Visionary Gleam</i> by Elise Asher, 1994
Box 1, Folder 67	Published poem <i>The Long Boat</i> by Stanley Kunitz, circa 1987

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Series 7: Photographs, 1951-1973, undated

5 Folders (Box 2)

Photographs consist of six images of Asher, including one each with Mark Rothko (undated) and William Carlos Williams (1951), and one taken by Hans Namuth. There are also photographs of art works, and photographs of an exhibition installation.

Photographs are on reel 4939.

Box 2, Folder 12	Photographs of Elise Asher (6), 1951-1972
Box 2, Folder 13-15	Photographs of works of art, 1971-1973, undated
Box 2, Folder 16	Photographs of exhibition installation at The Contemporaries Gallery, 1966

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