



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Milton Avery Papers, 1926-1982(bulk 1950-1982), in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

February 06, 2007

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Milton Avery papers
Date:	1926-1982 (bulk 1950-1982)
Identifier:	AAA.avermilt
Creator:	Avery, Milton, 1885-1965
Extent:	2.8 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of abstract painter Milton Avery measure 2.8 linear feet and date from 1926 to 1982, with the bulk of the collection dating from 1950 to 1982. Almost the entire collection consists of records of the Milton Avery Trust (2.4 linear feet) maintained by Avery's wife Sally, who served as a trustee. Milton Avery's business and personal correspondence (five folders) contains letters from friends and fellow artists, including a few from George Duthuit, Louis Eilshemius, Marsden Hartley, Wallace Putnam, and Mark Rothko. Also found are scattered writings about Avery, price lists, estate records, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and news clippings.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Milton Avery papers were donated in 1968, 1969, and 1982 by his widow Sally Avery, including a few letters previously loaned for microfilming.

Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming on reels N68-95, N68-115, N69-63, and 2535 including six scrapbooks, a sketchbook, Christmas cards, exhibition catalogs, and photographs. Loaned materials were returned to the lender and are not described in the collection container inventory.

Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Milton Avery** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2007, and total 6,149 images.

Materials lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels N68-95, N68-115, N69-63, and 2535 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

Many of the letters loaned by Sally Avery and microfilmed on reel N69-63 were later donated. These were merged with additional accessions and fully processed, arranged, and described in 2007 by Erin Corley, and digitized in 2007 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Milton Avery papers, 1926-1982. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via the Archives of American Art's website.

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Biographical Note

Milton Avery (1885-1965) was born in Altmar, New York and grew up in Hartford, Connecticut. Around 1905 he began attending the Connecticut League of Art Students in Hartford where he studied life drawing while also working full-time as a factory worker and file clerk. In 1915 he had his first public exhibition and, in 1918, transferred to the School of Art Society in Hartford. In 1924 he met Sally Michel (1905-2003), a student at the Art Students League in New York, and moved to New York City to be closer to her. They married one year later. Around this time Avery also altered his year of birth to 1893, perhaps due to the age difference between him and Sally. After their marriage Sally worked as an illustrator so that Avery could paint full time.

During the early 1920s, Avery's works were traditional figurative and genre subjects, influenced by American Impressionism. By the mid 1920s, with his move to New York, Avery began to simplify his forms and use broader expanses of flat color. Although his paintings became increasingly abstract, he never fully abandoned representational subject matter, painting figure groups, still lifes, landscapes, and seascapes. By the mid-1940s, Avery's work was characterized by a reduction of elements and elimination of detail, filled with an emphasis on arbitrary color.

Avery exhibited in a group show at The Opportunity Gallery in 1928 which also featured Mark Rothko and the two became close friends. He became friends with many other artists including Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Marsden Hartley. Avery's color work was an important influence on many younger artists, particularly Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Helen Frankenthaler, and other Color Field painters. The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. was the first museum to purchase one of his paintings in 1929 and to give him his first solo museum exhibition in 1944.

In 1949 Milton Avery suffered a major heart attack and began making monotypes during his recovery. He returned to painting despite periods of ill-health, and his reputation grew rapidly over the next ten years, culminating in a retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 1960. He also exhibited along with his wife Sally Avery and their daughter, March Avery Cavanaugh (born in 1932), both of whom were also painters. Avery died in 1965 and left behind an oeuvre of paintings that numbers in the thousands. His wife Sally managed his estate and the sale of his works to many major museums, and served as a trustee for the Milton Avery Trust until her death in 2003.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of abstract painter Milton Avery measure 2.8 linear feet and date from 1926 to 1982, with the bulk of the collection dating from 1950 to 1982. Almost the entire collection consists of business files maintained by Milton Avery's wife Sally as a trustee for the Milton Avery Trust (2.4 linear feet). Milton Avery's business

and personal correspondence (five folders) contains letters from friends and fellow artists, including a few from George Duthuit, Louis Eilshemius, Marsden Hartley, Wallace Putnam, and Mark Rothko. Also found are scattered writings about Avery, price lists, estate records, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and news clippings.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 7 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1964, 1975 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1935-1981 (Box 1; 10 folders)
- Series 3: Subject Files, 1950-1981 (Box 1-4; 2.4 linear feet)
- Series 4: Writings, circa 1951-1979 (Box 4; 5 folders)
- Series 5: Financial & Legal Records, 1943-1982 (Box 4; 6 folders)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1926, 1962-1977 (Box 4; 4 folders)
- Series 7: Photographs, circa 1970 (Box 4; 1 folder)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Painting, Abstract

Names:

Avery, Sally
Duthuit, Georges, 1891-
Eilshemius, Louis M. (Louis Michel), 1864-1941
Hartley, Marsden, 1877-1943
Putnam, Wallace, 1899-1989
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1964, 1975

1 Folder (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: One folder containing a list of Milton Avery anecdotes, excerpts from reviews, a brief biographical note, a certificate from the National Council of Jewish Women, and a brief list of biographical sources.

Box 1, Folder 1 [Biographical Material, 1964, 1975](#)

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1935-1981

10 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence consists of five folders of letters to Milton Avery and correspondence with Sally Avery and the Milton Avery Trust. Letters to Milton Avery consist of letters from people purchasing works of art, including Joseph Hirshhorn, letters from art galleries concerning the exhibition or purchase of artwork, requests for information from researchers or journalists, and several letters of congratulations for the 1960 Whitney Museum of American Art retrospective. Also found are a few letters from friends and fellow artists, including Mark Rothko, Louis Eisshemius, Marsden Hartley, Wallace Putnam, and George Duthuit.

Sally Avery's correspondence, often addressed to the Milton Avery Trust, is primarily business correspondence regarding the handling of her husband's legacy of artwork. Included are letters with individuals, galleries, and museums regarding sales and loans. Other topics include research questions, thanking her for visits, and congratulations for exhibitions. Although most of the correspondence is incoming, there are also scattered copies of outgoing correspondence. A large amount of similar business correspondence is also filed in Series 2: Subject Files.

Box 1, Folder 2	Letters to Milton Avery, 19-- , 1935-1947
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters to Milton Avery, 1950-1959
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters to Milton Avery, 1960
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters to Milton Avery, 1962-1964
Box 1, Folder 6	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1946-1969
Box 1, Folder 7	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1970-1973
Box 1, Folder 8	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1974-1977
Box 1, Folder 9	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1978
Box 1, Folder 10	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1979
Box 1, Folder 11	Sally Avery (Milton Avery Trust) correspondence, 1980-1981

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Series 3: Subject Files, 1950-1981

2.4 Linear feet (Box 1-4)

Scope and Contents: Subject files consist of alphabetical business files maintained by Sally Avery for art galleries, museums, collectors, colleges and universities, and other art organizations which exhibited or purchased works by Milton Avery. Files contain a wide variety of documentation, including correspondence between the organization and Sally Avery, loan agreements, exhibition or sales receipts, lists of artworks, price lists, legal documents, and printed material such as news clippings and exhibition announcements. Although most of the files are for sales and loans, some of the files are for art galleries which represented and sold Avery's work, such as the Grace Borgenicht Gallery and Gallery Reese Palley. Also found in this series is a file Sally Avery kept regarding published biographies of Milton Avery. Files are arranged alphabetically by either name or topic and documents are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 1, Folder 12	Achim Moeller Ltd., 1973
Box 1, Folder 13	Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 14	Akron Art Institute, 1980
Box 1, Folder 15	Aldis Browne Fine Arts, 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 16	Allentown Art Museum, 1971
Box 1, Folder 17	Alpha Gallery, 1969-1970
Box 1, Folder 18	Alpha Gallery, 1971-1972
Box 1, Folder 19	Alpha Gallery, 1973-1974
Box 1, Folder 20	Alpha Gallery, 1975-1979
Box 1, Folder 21	American Federation of Arts (Milton Avery Retrospective), 1959-1961
Box 1, Folder 22	American Federation of Arts, 1962-1965
Box 1, Folder 23	American Embassy, Prague, 1966-1970
Box 1, Folder 24	Andre Emmerich Gallery, 1973-1974
Box 1, Folder 25	Arkansas Art Center, 1966
Box 1, Folder 26	Associated American Artists, 1963-1965
Box 1, Folder 27	Associated American Artists, 1966-1968
Box 1, Folder 28	Associated American Artists, 1969-1970

Box 1, Folder 29	Associated American Artists, 1971-1972
Box 1, Folder 30	Associated American Artists, 1973-1974
Box 1, Folder 31	Associated American Artists, 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 32	Associated American Artists, 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 33	Association of Contemporary Artists Galleries, 1968-1981
Box 1, Folder 34	Barbara Mathes Gallery, 1978-1981
Box 1, Folder 35	Bard College, 1970-1971
Box 1, Folder 36	Biographies of Milton Avery, 1969-1979
Box 1, Folder 37	Bonfoey Company, 1976
Box 1, Folder 38	Cape Split Place, Inc., 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 39	Carl Solway Gallery (Flair Gallery), 1968-1971
Box 1, Folder 40	Charles H. Scott Gallery (Emily Carr College of Art), 1980-1981
Box 1, Folder 41	Charles E. Slatkin, Inc. Galleries, 1968-1980
Box 1, Folder 42	Cleveland Museum of Art, 1971, 1975
Box 1, Folder 43	College of Wooster, 1980
Box 1, Folder 44	Comsky Gallery, 1972-1973
Box 1, Folder 45	Comsky Gallery, 1974-1979
Box 1, Folder 46	Connecticut Fine Arts, Inc., 1973-1979
Box 1, Folder 47	David Gallery, 1971-1978
Box 1, Folder 48	David Mirvish Gallery, 1967-1969
Box 1, Folder 49	David Mirvish Gallery, 1970-1973
Box 1, Folder 50	David Mirvish Gallery, 1974-1978
Box 1, Folder 51	Dayton Art Institute, 1969-1971
Box 1, Folder 52	Donald Morris Gallery, 1958-1964

Box 1, Folder 53	Donald Morris Gallery, 1965-1966
Box 1, Folder 54	Donald Morris Gallery, 1967-1968
Box 1, Folder 55	Donald Morris Gallery, 1969-1970
Box 1, Folder 56	Donald Morris Gallery, 1971
Box 1, Folder 57	Donald Morris Gallery, 1972-1973
Box 1, Folder 58	Donald Morris Gallery, 1974-1977
Box 1, Folder 59	Donald Morris Gallery, 1978-1980
Box 1, Folder 60	Edmonton Art Gallery, 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 61	Esther Stuttman Gallery, 1965-1973
Box 1, Folder 62	Everson Museum of Art, 1975-1977
Box 2, Folder 1	Felix Landau Gallery, 1956-1965
Box 2, Folder 2	Fogg Museum, 1972-1974
Box 2, Folder 3	Fontana Gallery, 1969-1980
Box 2, Folder 4	Forum Gallery, 1980-1981
Box 2, Folder 5	Galerie Beyeler, 1971-1976
Box 2, Folder 6	Galerie du Jonelle, 1966-1974
Box 2, Folder 7	Galerie Internationale, 1960-1961
Box 2, Folder 8	Gallery 14, 1960-1967
Box 2, Folder 9	Gallery Reese Palley, 1964-1965
Box 2, Folder 10	Gallery Reese Palley, 1966
Box 2, Folder 11	Gallery Reese Palley, 1967-1968
Box 2, Folder 12	Gallery Reese Palley, 1969-1970
Box 2, Folder 13	Gallery Reese Palley, 1971
Box 2, Folder 14	Gallery Reese Palley, 1972-1974

Box 2, Folder 15	Gimpel Fils, Ltd., 1973-1976
Box 2, Folder 16	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1951-1957
Box 2, Folder 17	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1958-1964
Box 2, Folder 18	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1965-1968
Box 2, Folder 19	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1969-1971
Box 2, Folder 20	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1972-1974
Box 2, Folder 21	Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1975-1980
Box 2, Folder 22	Graphics International Ltd. (Lunn Gallery), 1971-1972
Box 2, Folder 23	Graphics International Ltd. (Lunn Gallery), 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 24	Graphics International Ltd. (Lunn Gallery), 1975-1977
Box 2, Folder 25	Graphics International Ltd. (Lunn Gallery), 1978-1979
Box 2, Folder 26	Greenberg Gallery, 1973-1982
Box 2, Folder 27	Guggenheim Museum, 1965, 1977-1978
Box 2, Folder 28	Gump's Gallery, 1964-1968
Box 2, Folder 29	Harmon Gallery, 1965-1970
Box 2, Folder 30	Heritage Plantation of Sandwich, 1977
Box 2, Folder 31	Hirschl & Adler Galleries, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 32	Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, 1971-1980
Box 2, Folder 33	Indianapolis Museum of Art, 1976-1978
Box 2, Folder 34	International Exhibition Foundation, 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 35	International Gallery, Inc., 1964-1965
Box 2, Folder 36	Jack Fader Collection, 1971-1975
Box 2, Folder 37	Jane Haslem Gallery, 1975
Box 2, Folder 38	Jarvis Gallery, 1972-1978

Box 2, Folder 39	Joan Whitney Payson Gallery of Art, 1977-1979
Box 2, Folder 40	John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 1977
Box 2, Folder 41	Katonah Gallery, 1975-1977
Box 2, Folder 42	Kay Kaz Gallery, 1965-1969
Box 2, Folder 43	Lehigh University, 1980
Box 2, Folder 44	Little Gallery (Janet Fleisher), 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 45	Louisiana Gallery, 1968-1971
Box 2, Folder 46	Louisiana Gallery, 1972-1976
Box 2, Folder 47	Louisiana Gallery, 1977-1981
Box 2, Folder 48	MacDowell Gallery, 1972-1974
Box 2, Folder 49	Makler Gallery, 1960-1967
Box 2, Folder 50	Makler Gallery, 1968-1971
Box 2, Folder 51	Makler Gallery, 1972-1980
Box 2, Folder 52	Marianne Friedland Gallery, 1976-1979
Box 2, Folder 53	Mattatuck Museum, 1967-1971
Box 2, Folder 54	Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 55	Metropolitan Opera Association, 1977-1978
Box 2, Folder 56	Michael Berger Gallery, 1973-1980
Box 2, Folder 57	Michigan State University, 1969, 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 58	Mid-American Arts Alliance, 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 59	Minnesota Museum of Art, 1977-1979
Box 2, Folder 60	M. Knodler & Co., 1950-1979
Box 2, Folder 61	Mobile Art Gallery, 1964-1969
Box 2, Folder 62	Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1977

Box 2, Folder 63	Museum of Modern Art, 1961-1971, 1973
Box 2, Folder 64	New Britain Museum of American Art, 1968
Box 2, Folder 65	New York WPA Artists, Inc., 1977
Box 2, Folder 66	Noah Goldowsky Inc., 1969-1973
Box 2, Folder 67	Paintings & Drawings Ltd., 1964-1977
Box 2, Folder 68	Parliament Gallery, 1971
Box 2, Folder 69	Pasadena Art Museum, 1971
Box 2, Folder 70	Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976-1978
Box 2, Folder 71	Phillips Collection, 1965, 1977
Box 2, Folder 72	Pratt Graphics Center, 1973, 1980-1981
Box 2, Folder 73	Princeton University Library, 1977
Box 3, Folder 1	Richard Gray Gallery, 1971-1976
Box 3, Folder 2	Robert Hull Fleming Museum, University of Vermont, 1976
Box 3, Folder 3	Rudolph Gallery, 1959-1970
Box 3, Folder 4	Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1965
Box 3, Folder 5	Shore Studio Galleries, 1961
Box 3, Folder 6	Smithsonian Institution, 1972-1974, 1979
Box 3, Folder 7	Society of the Four Arts, 1977-1978
Box 3, Folder 8	Southern Methodist University, Meadows Museum & University Gallery, 1980-1981
Box 3, Folder 9	Sterling & Francine Clark Art Institute, 1978-1981
Box 3, Folder 10	Strathcona, 1980
Box 3, Folder 11	Summit Art Center, 1975-1977
Box 3, Folder 12	Syracuse University, 1970, 1972-1973
Box 3, Folder 13	Tanglewood Gallery, 1959-1965

Box 3, Folder 14	Terry Dintenfass, Inc. (Contemporary Paintings), 1959-1965
Box 3, Folder 15	Thomas Gibson Fine Art Ltd., 1973-1979
Box 3, Folder 16	Thorne Art Gallery (Keene State College), 1970-1973
Box 3, Folder 17	Tirca Karlis Gallery, 1965-1976
Box 3, Folder 18	University of California, Irvine, 1970-1971
Box 3, Folder 19	University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979-1980
Box 3, Folder 20	University of Oregon, 1968-1969
Box 3, Folder 21	University of Texas at Austin, 1975-1977
Box 3, Folder 22	Vassar College Art Gallery, 1970-1977
Box 3, Folder 23	Waddington Galleries, 1962-1964
Box 3, Folder 24	Waddington Galleries, 1965
Box 3, Folder 25	Waddington Galleries, 1966-1967
Box 3, Folder 26	Waddington Galleries, 1968-1970
Box 3, Folder 27	Waddington Galleries, 1971-1972
Box 4, Folder 1	Waddington Galleries, 1973
Box 4, Folder 2	Waddington Galleries, 1974
Box 4, Folder 3	Wadsworth Atheneum, 1962-1964
Box 4, Folder 4	Webb & Parsons Gallery, 1974-1979
Box 4, Folder 5	Western Electric, Corporate Education Organization, 1979
Box 4, Folder 6	Whitney Museum of American Art, 1966, 1979-1980
Box 4, Folder 7	Wichita State University, 1974-1977
Box 4, Folder 8	William Benton Museum of Art, 1975-1976
Box 4, Folder 9	William Zierler, Inc., 1968-1976
Box 4, Folder 10	Woodstock Artists Association, 1977

Box 4, Folder 11 [Woodward Foundation, 1963-1972](#)

Box 4, Folder 12 [Yares Gallery, 1976-1978](#)

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Series 4: Writings about Avery, circa 1951-1979

5 Folders (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Writings consist of essays about Milton Avery, including a draft essay by Wolf Kahn for the *Art Journal*, a few poems written by Aaron Cohen describing certain paintings by Avery, and a few notes written by Sally Avery. Also found are a typescript and handwritten draft of a tribute to Avery written by Mark Rothko shortly after Avery's death.

Box 4, Folder 13	Aaron E. Cohen, Poetry, circa 1951
Box 4, Folder 14	Wolf Kahn, "Milton Avery's Good Example," , circa 1979
Box 4, Folder 15	Annette and Louis Kaufman, "Milton Avery: Fauve Portraitist", circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 16	Mark Rothko, Written Tribute to Avery, circa 1965
Box 4, Folder 17	Notes by Sally Avery, circa 1970

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Series 5: Financial & Legal Records, 1943-1982

6 Folders (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Found here is a photocopy of Milton Avery's Last Will and Testament, a detailed appraisal of nearly 1000 works of art in the Milton Avery estate, price lists, and a small number of loan forms and sales receipts. Also found is one folder of the legal and financial records of the Milton Avery Estate.

Box 4, Folder 18	Last Will and Testament, 1962
Box 4, Folder 19	Estate Appraisal of Artwork, 1965
Box 4, Folder 20	Price Lists, 1960-1974
Box 4, Folder 21	Price Lists, 1960-1974
Box 4, Folder 22	Milton Avery Estate Legal and Financial Records, 1962-1972
Box 4, Folder 23	Artwork Loans and Sales Receipts, 1943-1982

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1926, 1962-1977

4 Folders (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Printed Material focuses primarily on Avery's later career and legacy. Included are exhibition announcements and catalogs, news clippings, various brochures, bulletins, and other announcements.

Box 4, Folder 24 [Exhibition Announcements, 1966-1973](#)

Box 4, Folder 25 [Exhibition Catalogs, 1926, 1966-1977](#)

Box 4, Folder 26 [News Clippings, 1963-1973](#)

Box 4, Folder 27 Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1962-1974
(Not scanned)

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Series 7: Photographs, circa 1970

1 Folder (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: This series contains five photographs of an unidentified exhibition of photography that does not include Avery's artwork.

Box 4, Folder 28	Photographs of an Unidentified Exhibition, circa 1970 (Not scanned)
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