



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Fred Uhl Ball Papers, 1936-2002, in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Fred Uhl Ball papers
Date:	1936-2002
Identifier:	AAA.ballfred
Creator:	Ball, Fred Uhl, 1945-1985
Extent:	1 Linear foot
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of enamelist and sculptor, Fred Uhl Ball, measure 1.0 linear feet and date from 1936 to 2002. The collection provides scattered documentation of Ball's career through biographical material, family photographs, photographs of artwork, and printed material. The collection also includes a small group of papers concerning Ball's father, ceramicist F. Carlton Ball, his mother, illustrator and enamelist Kathryn Uhl Ball, and his grandfather, silversmith George Uhl.

Administrative Information

Provenance

At his death, Fred Uhl Ball's art passed to his mother, Kathryn, who died in 2000 without any heirs. Susan J. Willoughby, a close family friend, served as Trustee of the Kathryn Uhl Ball Trust. Unfortunately, most of Ball's papers were discarded after his death. The remainder of the collection was assembled by Lois and David Warren, and given to the Archives of American Art by Susan J. Willoughby in 2001. Several 2002 news clippings were added to the collection in 2002.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Frank Thompson and Stephanie Ashley in 2002 with funding provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Preferred Citation

Fred Uhl Ball papers, 1936-2002. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

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Biographical Note

Fred Uhl Ball was born in Oakland, California, in 1945. Ball's interest in enameling began in childhood, and was fostered by his mother, Kathryn Uhl, an illustrator and enamelist who taught life drawing at Mills College, and his father, a ceramicist, who was head of the art department at Mills.

Ball received his bachelor's and master's degrees in art from Sacramento State University. His first exhibition was a two-man show with Gerald Silva at the Barrios Gallery. His first national exhibition was held the same year, and his work was shown in Stuttgart, Germany, two years later. In the early 1970s Ball began experimenting with test tiles and assembling torch-fired enamels on thin copper foil into collage-like panels. He also experimented with using brass as a surface and with exposing white enamel to varying degrees of heat to produce a range of hues. In 1972, he published *Experimental Techniques in Enameling* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold), which has since been considered the definitive text on enameling.

Ball was best known in Sacramento, where he lived and had his studio, for his large-scale public murals. In 1976 he joined the city's federally funded Comprehensive Employment and Training program (CETA) and created his first truly large-scale mural for the Sacramento Community Center. The mural won him critical acclaim and for the remainder of his career Ball would combine his personal work with additional commissions, and would continue to experiment with innovative enameling techniques and material in his sculptural collages. His Sacramento parking garage mural is one of the largest enameled murals ever attempted.

During the last decade of his life Ball was commissioned to create a number of large, site-specific works for corporate clients in the Sacramento area. In September of 1985 he was working on a fifty-foot copper mural, *The Great Sacramento Valley*, when he was assaulted at his studio. Ball died three months later at the age of forty from injuries sustained during the attack. The mural was completed by his mother and his associate, Bruce Beck, and was unveiled at Sacramento's Sutter General Hospital in December, 1986. A memorial retrospective of Ball's work, organized by the Creative Arts League, was held at the Crocker Art Museum from March to April of 1987.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of enamelist and sculptor, Fred Uhl Ball, measure 1.0 linear feet and date from 1936 to 2002. The collection provides scattered documentation of Ball's career through biographical material, family photographs, photographs of artwork, and printed material. The collection also includes a small group of papers concerning Ball's father, ceramicist F. Carlton Ball, his mother, illustrator and enamelist Kathryn Uhl Ball, and his grandfather, silversmith George Uhl. The collection consists primarily of photographs and slide transparencies of Ball's artwork, but also includes photographs of Ball, his studio and some of his exhibitions. Papers and printed material include a vita compiled after Ball's death, news clippings providing an overview of his career, a folder of writings, and several items commemorating him.

Arrangement

The collection was assembled by Lois and David Warren after Ball's death and their original arrangement has been retained.

The papers are arranged into two series:

- Series 1: Papers and Printed Material, 1936-2002, undated (box 1; 0.3 linear ft.)
- Series 2: Photographs, 1945-1987, undated (box 1; 0.7 linear ft.)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Enamel and enameling
- Enamellers -- California -- Sacramento
- Silverwork

Types of Materials:

- Photographs
- Slides (photographs)
- Visitors' books

Names:

- Ball, F. Carlton, 1911-1992
- Ball, Kathryn Uhl, 1910-2000
- Uhl, George A.

Container Listing

Series 1: Papers and Printed Material, 1936-2002, undated

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains a small amount of scattered documentation of Fred Ball's life and three folders of material relating specifically to Ball's father, F. Carlton Ball, his mother, Kathryn Uhl Ball, and his grandfather, George Uhl. One additional folder contains records of an Altar Show Tribute titled "Fred the Glad" by Jean C. Roach in 2005.

Ball's papers include a copy of his influential text on enameling *Experimental Techniques in Enameling*, a vita of his career compiled in 2001 by Lois and David Warren, memorial resolutions passed in his honor, and birth and death certificates.

News clippings include newspaper and magazine articles written about Ball and his work, including tributes to him after his death. The clippings are an excellent source of information about Ball's significant achievements over the course of his career.

Writings include enameling notes, a partial draft of *Experimental Techniques in Enameling*, and a copy of an article by Ball, in addition to his work of art commission agreement and a reference from Phillip L. Isenberg.

"Tributes to Fred Uhl Ball - September, 1985" is the guest book for the one-man show at Artists Contemporary Gallery that Ball was preparing for when he was attacked in 1985. The book is signed with messages from people who attended the exhibition and also includes signatures of people who attended a memorial service for Ball on January 3, 1986. The folder contains an announcement for the exhibition and a copy of the program from the memorial service.

Papers of F. Carlton Ball and Kathryn Uhl Ball include photographs of each, news clippings, a letter from F. Carlton Ball to his son, an exhibition announcement for F. Carlton Ball, a letter of recommendation from Lyonel Feininger for Kathryn Uhl Ball, her résumé, photographs of her artwork, and a program from her memorial service. Also found is an October 1985 letter from Kathryn Uhl Ball to Lois and David Warren following her son's hospitalization describing to his condition and the process of working with him in the hospital to continue his work to his specifications. Papers of George Uhl consist of a program for an exhibition at E. B. Crocker Art Gallery in 1945, featuring Uhl's metal work and ceramics by Kathryn and Carlton Ball. There is also a photograph of a silver punch bowl, ladle and cups by George Uhl.

Box 1, Folder 1 Ball, F. Carlton, 1938-1968, undated

Box 1 Ball, Fred Uhl

Box 1, Folder 2 Birth and Death Certificates, 1945, 1985

Box 1, Folder 3 Copy of Experimental Techniques in Enameling, 1972

Box 1, Folder 4 Letter from Sandy Shannonhouse? to Fred Ball, 1973

Box 1, Folder 5 Memorial Resolution, California State Assembly, 1986

Box 1, Folder 6	Memorial Resolution, City of Sacramento, 1985
Box 1, Folder 7-9	News Clippings, 1963-1987, 2002
Box 1, Folder 10	Visitor Book, "Tributes to Fred Uhl Ball - September, 1985," 1985
Box 1, Folder 11	Vita, 2001
Box 1, Folder 12	Writings, 1981, 1985, undated
Box 1, Folder 13	Ball, Kathryn Uhl, 1936-2000, undated
Box 1, Folder 14	Uhl, George, 1945, undated
Box 1, Folder 15	Roach, Jean C., "Fred the Glad" Altar Show Tribute, 2005

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Series 2: Photographs, 1945-1987, undated

1.1 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

Scope and Contents: This series contains photographs of Ball throughout his life, in addition to photographs of artwork and exhibitions. Photographs of Ball include portraits of the artist in his studio, and family photographs include baby, childhood, and high school pictures. There are also photographs of Ball demonstrating at the State Fair (1965); at an installation and in his studio; and with his mother and half-brother. One photograph of Ball as an infant is labeled "date unknown, photo possibly by Imogen Cunningham." Three photographs show Kathryn Ball and Bruce Beck working on Ball's Sutter Hospital Mural which they completed in 1986.

Binder 1: Photographs #1 contains photographs of commissions in California, Nevada, and New Jersey arranged alphabetically by name of site; and material relating to the 1987 *Fred Uhl Ball Retrospective* at Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento, including a catalog of the exhibition, photographs of the installation and transparencies of works from the catalog.

Binder 2: Photographs #2 contains miscellaneous color photographs of work completed between 1968 and 1985, with some photographs of undated work. Binder 3: Slides #1 contains slides of Ball, including shots of him in his studio, and slides of exhibitions and artwork including commissions. Binders 4 and 5 contain slides of artwork organized by type of work or media.

Arrangement: The photographs and slides in this series were donated to the Archives of American Art in archival binders. They have been removed from their original binders. The original arrangement has been maintained, and the content notes for slides are generally taken directly from the labels provided in the binders.

Box 1, Folder 16	Photographs of Ball, circa 1980s
Box 1, Folder 17-18	Photographs of Ball, Family Photos, 1945-1986
Box 1, Folder 19	Photographs 1, Commissions, 1977-1986
Box 1, Folder 20	Photographs 1, Fred Uhl Ball Retrospective (including catalog of exhibition), 1987
Box 1, Folder 21	Photographs 1, Transparencies of Works from Retrospective Catalog, 1987
Box 1, Folder 22-23	Photographs 2, Miscellaneous, 1968-1985, undated
Box 1, Folder 24	Slides 1, Studio and Early Work, 1962-1984
Box 1, Folder 25	Slides 1, Exhibitions and Works with Titles and/or in Private Collections, 1959-1987, undated Notes: Exhibitions include: Unknown Date or Venue; Sacramento Library, One-Man Show; Barrio's with Gerald Silva; <i>Fred Uhl Ball: Enamels</i> , Last Show, Artist's Contemporary Gallery, <i>Fred Uhl Ball Retrospective</i> , Creative Arts League at Crocker Art Museum; <i>Retrospective</i> Catalog Photos
Box 1, Folder 26	Slides 1, Commissioned Works, circa 1970s-1980s
Box 1, Folder 27-28	Slides 2, Sculpture - Low Relief and Flat Works, circa 1963-1986

Notes: Sculpture includes beds and pillows, bag lunch, gift boxes, match books, and miscellaneous.

Low relief and flat works includes bowls, envelopes, copper foil relief wall pieces, copper foil tooled 3-part screen, copper foil tooled city scene, city scene drawings, city scene enameled, copper foil tooled suns and sunflowers, bird and fish themes, copper foil and relief panels, wire inlay, copper foil and lacquer, soft white torch-fired on copper foil, soft white frames with life forms, soft white "Bessies," transparent flux on copper foil, and red and black calligraphic strokes on copper foil.

Box 1, Folder 29-30

Slides 3, circa 1968-1986

Notes: Includes small wall pieces, figural pieces, Sgraffito technique, Daphne blue enameled pieces, jig-saw works, stenciled squares, late squares, painted liquid white, bronze-textured panels, gold enamel on copper foil, models for landscape, blue "Seascape" on foil, miscellaneous, brass with thinly brushed flux, brass relief and flat panels, brass landscape series, brass tree series, brass square, and titanium.

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