



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Maurice Becker
Papers in the Archives of American Art

Judy Ng

Processing of this collection was funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Maurice Becker papers
Identifier:	AAA.beckmaur
Date:	circa 1910-1970
Extent:	2.3 Linear feet
Creator:	Becker, Maurice, 1889-1975
Language:	The collection is in English.
Summary:	The papers of painter and political cartoonist Maurice Becker measure 2.3 linear feet and date from circa 1910 to 1970. Found within the papers are biographical material; personal and professional correspondence; writings; printed material, including radical labor and political periodicals; artwork; and photographs of Becker, his family and friends, and his artwork.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Maurice Becker donated his papers in several increments between 1962-1966.

Separated Materials

There are scattered Maurice Becker papers found within the Art Young papers at the Tamiment Library in New York. These were loaned to the Archives in 1971 for microfilming on reel 96. These papers are not described in the container inventory of this finding aid but include approximately 20 postcards, catalogs, sketches, photographs, and other printed materials.

Duplicate magazines, catalogs, and clippings were transferred to the National Portrait Gallery Library in 1977.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection and material lent for microfilming are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 96, 128 and 4909 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 papers received a preliminary level of processing upon receipt and were microfilmed onto reels 128 and 4909. All previously filmed and unfiled accessions were merged, fully processed, and described by Judy Ng in 2013 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Maurice Becker papers, circa 1910-1970. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical / Historical

Painter and political cartoonist Maurice Becker (1889-1975) lived and worked in New York City, New York and Tioga County, Pennsylvania, and was a frequent contributor to contemporary periodicals of the 1910s.

Becker was born in Nizhni-Novgorod (now Gorky), Russia to Isor and Rose Becker. In 1892, his family immigrated to the United States and settled in the Jewish community of Manhattan's Lower East Side. After graduating from high school, Becker took night classes in bookkeeping and art, studied with Robert Henri and Hugo Boss, and worked days as a sign painter and garment factory worker. He began illustrating for the *New York Tribune* and Scripps newspapers from 1914 to 1915, and contributed artwork to numerous contemporary periodicals in the 1910s, including *Harper's Weekly*, *Saturday Review*, and *Metropolitan*. Becker was also a frequent contributor to more radical political journals, including *The Masses*, *Liberator*, and *One Big Union Monthly*.

In 1918, he married Dorothy Baldwin, who was a registered Socialist. After stating his conscientious objection to World War I, Becker traveled to Mexico to avoid the draft and was arrested upon his return in 1919. After his trial and sentencing, he served 4 months of hard labor before President Wilson's commutation of all objectors to the war. From 1921 to 1923, Becker lived in Mexico working as an illustrator for *El Pulsa de México*, and began to devote himself to painting full time.

After his return to New York City, Becker held a series of one-man shows at the Whitney Studio Club (1924-1928), J.B. Neumann Gallery (1924-1931), and Delphic Studios (1930). Becker was a member of the Society of Independent Artists and the Artists' League of America and remained a pacifist for the rest of his life. He died in 1975.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter and political cartoonist Maurice Becker measure 2.3 linear feet and date from circa 1910 to 1970. Found within the papers are biographical material; personal and professional correspondence; writings; printed material, including radical labor and political periodicals; artwork; and photographs of Becker, his family and friends, and his artwork.

Biographical materials consist of a curriculum vitae and a list of artworks.

Correspondence is primarily with Becker's family, friends, and business associates. There are letters from his wife, Dorothy Baldwin Becker, a letter from friend and artist Elizabeth Lancaster, and a letter from Artists for Victory. There is also a letter from Becker to his friend J. B. Neumann containing a draft of Becker's will authorizing Neumann to sell and distribute his paintings upon his death or incapacitation; a letter of invitation to artists and writers interested in reviving a new *Masses* style journal; and letters from magazine editors regarding freelance commissions.

Printed material includes bulletins, clippings and labor newspapers, exhibition announcements and catalogs, periodicals, press releases, and miscellaneous printed material. Periodicals include whole issues of *Liberator*, *The Masses*, *New Masses*, and *One Big Union Monthly*, where Becker's political cartoons were frequently featured.

Artwork includes paintings, over 800 graphite and pen and ink sketches, watercolors, and prints depicting Becker's figure drawings, caricatures, portrait drawings of men and women, and sketches of animals and landscapes. Many of these sketches were the basis for panels that later appeared in the *New York Tribune*, *The Masses*, and *Liberator*.

Photographs are of Maurice Becker with family and friends, and five photographs of his artwork.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 6 series.

- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1925-1964 (2 folders; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1919-1964 (4 folders; Box 1)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1920-1960 (2 folders; Box 1)
- Series 4: Printed material, circa 1910-1970 (1 linear foot; Box 1, 4, OV 5)
- Series 5: Artwork, circa 1910-1965 (1.2 linear feet; Box 1-3, OV 6-8)
- Series 6: Photographs, circa 1910-1966 (3 folders; Box 3)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Caricatures and cartoons -- New York (State) -- New York
Cartooning -- United States
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Painting, American -- New York (State) -- New York
Politics in art

Types of Materials:

Paintings
Photographs
Prints
Sketches
Watercolors

Names:

Artists for Victory, Inc.
Becker, Dorothy Baldwin
Lancaster, Elizabeth G. (Elizabeth Grieg), 1889-
Neumann, J. B. (Jsrael Ber)

Occupations:

Cartoonists -- New York (State) -- New York

Preferred Titles:

Liberator (New York, N.Y.: 1918)
Masses (New York, N.Y.)
New masses

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1925-1964

2 Folders (Box 1)

Biographical materials consist of a curriculum vitae and a list of artworks dating from 1927 to 1959.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 1	Curriculum Vitae, 1925-1963
Box 1, Folder 2	List of Artworks, circa 1925-1964

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1919-1964

4 Folders (Box 1)

Correspondence is primarily with Becker's family, friends, and business associates. The series includes correspondence from his wife, Dorothy Baldwin Becker, letters from magazine editors regarding freelance commissions, and correspondence from artist friend Elizabeth Lancaster. There are also draft copies of Becker's will dating from 1956 and a letter of invitation to artists and writers interested in reviving a new *Masses* style journal dating from 1925.

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Box 1, Folder 3	Miscellaneous, A-Z, 1919-1964
Box 1, Folder 4	Becker, Dorothy Baldwin, 1964
Box 1, Folder 5	Becker, Maurice, 1919-1962
Box 1, Folder 6	Illegible and Unknown, circa 1930-1939

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Series 3: Writings, circa 1920-1960

2 Folders (Box 1)

Writings consist of notes by Becker and an excerpt from an essay describing Becker's exhibition at the Artists' League of America by an unknown author.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 7 Essay, "Formalism Uber Alles," Unknown Author, circa 1920-1960

Box 1, Folder 8 Notes, circa 1920-1960

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Series 4: Printed Material, circa 1910-1970

1 Linear foot (Box 1, 4, OV 5)

Printed material includes bulletins, clippings and labor newspapers, exhibition announcements and catalogs, periodicals, press releases, and miscellaneous printed material. Periodicals include whole issues of *Liberator*, *The Masses*, *New Masses*, and *One Big Union Monthly*, where Becker's political cartoons were frequently featured. Other radical magazines and newspapers include *Blast*, *Maccabaeon*, *Revolt*, and *Worker's Monthly* are also included in the series.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 9	Booklet, <i>City Where Crime is Play</i> , 1914
Box 1, Folder 10	Bulletins, 1937, 1951
Box 1, Folder 11	Clippings, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 5.
Box 1, Folder 12-14	Clippings, 1912-1968
Box 1, Folder 15	Miscellaneous Clippings, circa 1920-1965
Box 1, Folder 16	Miscellaneous Labor Newspapers, 1916-1965 Oversized material housed in Box 4, F1.
Box 1, Folder 17-18	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1929-1961
Box 1, Folder 19	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Other Artists, 1927-1965
Box 1	Periodicals
Box 1, Folder 20	<i>Americana</i> , circa 1935-1955
Box 1, Folder 21	<i>Art News</i> , 1940
Box 1, Folder 22	<i>Arts</i> , 1928
Box 1, Folder 23	<i>Blast</i> , 1917
Box 1, Folder 24	<i>Coming Nation</i> , 1912 Oversized material housed in Box 4, F2.
Box 1, Folder 25	<i>Good Morning</i> , 1919-1920
Box 1, Folder 26	<i>Harper's Weekly</i> , 1913

Box 1, Folder 27	<i>L'Assiette au Beurre</i> , circa 1910-1915
Box 1, Folder 28	<i>La Revue Moderne</i> , 1960
Box 1, Folder 29	<i>Les Annales</i> , 1914
Box 1, Folder 30-33	<i>Liberator</i> , 1918-1920
Box 1, Folder 34-37	<i>Liberator</i> , 1922-1924
Box 1, Folder 38	<i>Maccabaeon</i> , 1916
Box 1, Folder 39	<i>Mainstream</i> , 1961
Box 1, Folder 40	<i>Masses</i> , 1954, 1913-1917, 1911 Oversized material housed in Box 4, F3-6.
Box 1, Folder 41-42	<i>New Masses</i> , 1944, 1927
Box 1, Folder 43	<i>New York Call</i> , 1913-1914, 1917 Oversized material housed in Box 4, F7.
Box 1, Folder 44	<i>One Big Union Monthly</i> , 1919-1920
Box 1, Folder 45	<i>Pathfinder</i> , 1932
Box 1, Folder 46	<i>Studio News</i> , 1934
Box 1, Folder 47	<i>Survey</i> , 1919
Box 1, Folder 48	<i>Worker's Monthly</i> , 1925
Box 1, Folder 49	Miscellaneous Periodicals, 1954-1964 Oversized material housed in Box 4, F8.
Box 1, Folder 50	Press Release, 1947
Box 1, Folder 51	Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1920-1970
Box 1, Folder 52	Miscellaneous Printed Material, Artwork, circa 1920-1970
Box OV 5	Oversized Clippings, circa 1910-1965

	Oversized material from Box 1, F11.
Box 4, Folder 1	Oversized Labor Newspaper, 1916 Oversized material from Box 1, F16.
Box 4, Folder 2	Oversized Periodical, <i>Coming Nation</i> , 1912 Oversized material from Box 1, F24.
Box 4, Folder 3-6	Oversized Periodical, <i>Masses</i> , 1913-1916 Oversized material from Box 1, F40.
Box 4, Folder 7	Oversized Periodical, <i>New York Call</i> , 1913-1917 Oversized material from Box 1, F43.
Box 4, Folder 8	Oversized Miscellaneous Periodicals, 1954-1964 Oversized material from Box 1, F49.

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Series 5: Artwork, circa 1910-1965

1.2 Linear feet (Box 1-3, OV 6-8)

Artwork includes paintings, over 800 graphite and pen and ink sketches, watercolors, and prints depicting Becker's figure drawings, caricatures, portrait drawings of men and women, and sketches of animals and landscapes. Many of these sketches were the basis for panels that later appeared in the *New York Tribune*, *The Masses*, and *Liberator*. Labor leaders, politicians, and artists identified in these sketches include Mother Jones, Samuel Gompers, Herbert Hoover, William Glackens, and Max Eastman.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 53	Paintings, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 7.
Box 1, Folder 54	Pastel, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 55	Pen and Ink, Caricatures, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 6 and OV 7.
Box 1, Folder 56	Pen and Ink, Figures, circa 1910-1965 Oversized materials housed in OV 7.
Box 1, Folder 57-58	Pen and Ink, Groups, circa 1910-1965 Oversized materials housed in OV 6.
Box 1, Folder 59	Pen and Ink, Men, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 60	Pen and Ink, Women, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 6.
Box 1, Folder 61	Pen and Ink, Animals and Landscapes, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 6.
Box 1, Folder 62	Prints, circa 1920-1965
Box 1, Folder 63	Sketchbook, Pen and Ink, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 64	Sketches, Artists, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 65	Sketches, Caricatures, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 66	Sketches, Family, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 67	Sketches, Labor Organizers, circa 1910-1965
Box 1, Folder 68	Sketches, Mexico, circa 1910-1965

Box 1, Folder 69	Sketches, Politicians , circa 1910-1965
Box 2, Folder 1	Sketches, Trial Coverage , circa 1910-1965
Box 2, Folder 2	Sketches, Other Identified Individuals, circa 1910-1965
Box 2, Folder 3-4	Sketches, Groups, circa 1910-1965 Oversized materials housed in OV 6 and OV 8.
Box 2, Folder 5-6	Sketches, Men, Figures, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 8.
Box 2, Folder 7	Sketches, Men, Figures and Portraits, circa 1910-1965
Box 2, Folder 8-12	Sketches, Men, Portraits, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 6.
Box 3, Folder 1-3	Sketches, Men and Women, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material housed in OV 6.
Box 3, Folder 4	Sketches, Women, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 5	Sketches, Women, Figures, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 6	Sketches, Animals, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 7	Sketches, Landscapes, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 8	Watercolors, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 9	Other Artists, circa 1910-1965
Box OV 7	Oversized Painting and Pen and Inks, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material from Box 1, F53, F55-56.
Box OV 6	Oversized Pen and Inks and Sketches, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material from Box 1, F55, F57, F60-61; Box 2, F3, F8; and Box 3, F1.
Box OV 8	Oversized Sketches, circa 1910-1965 Oversized material from Box 2, F3, F5.

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Series 6: Photographs, circa 1910-1966

3 Folders (Box 3)

Photographs are of Maurice Becker with family and friends, and five photographs of his artwork.

Materials are arranged by subject type.

Box 3, Folder 10	Photographs of Maurice Becker, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 11	Photograph of Dorothy Baldwin Becker, circa 1910-1965
Box 3, Folder 12	Photographs of Artwork, circa 1910-1965

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