



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Michael Bell Papers, 1942-1988, in the Archives of American Art

Ricky Gomez

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2021 March 19

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Names and Subjects	3
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1988.....	4
Series 2: Writings, 1980-1987.....	5
Series 3: Administrative Files, 1976-1988.....	6
Series 4: Exhibition Files, 1982-1988.....	8
Series 5: Printed Material, 1942-1988.....	9
Series 6: Photographic Material, 1970-1987.....	10

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Michael Bell papers
Date:	1942-1988
Identifier:	AAA.bellmich
Creator:	Bell, Michael S., 1946-
Extent:	4.4 Linear feet
Language:	English , French , Spanish; Castilian .
Summary:	The papers of Michael Bell measure 4.4 linear feet and date from 1942 to 1988. The papers document his career as an art curator and administrator, artist, and research on Surrealism through correspondence with artists; lecture notes, manuscripts, and other writings; documents from his time on the Registrar Committee for the American Association of Museums, Surrealist artist files, and administrative files; materials relating to exhibitions he participated in such as the "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition; exhibition catalogs, published manuscripts, and other printed material; and photographs of works by Surrealist artists.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated 1982-1988 by Michael Bell.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Ricky Gomez in 2021.

Preferred Citation

Michael Bell papers, 1942-1988. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Researchers interested in accessing born-digital records and audiovisual recordings in this collection must use access copies. Contact References Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

Michael Bell (1946-) is a curator and arts administrator who has worked at institutions such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Bell also served on the Registrar Committee for the American Association of Museums during the late 1970s. Bell began work on contemporary Surrealists in 1975 under George Neubert at the Oakland Museum, and collected materials on Surrealism privately under the title "American Surrealist Initiative."

Scope and Contents

The papers of Michael Bell measure 4.4 linear feet and date from 1942 to 1988. The papers document his career as an art curator and administrator, artist, and research on Surrealism through correspondence with artists; lecture notes, manuscripts, and other writings; documents from his time on the Registrar Committee for the American Association of Museums, Surrealist artist files, and administrative files; materials relating to exhibitions he participated in such as the "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition; exhibition catalogs, published manuscripts, and other printed material; and photographs of works by Surrealist artists.

Correspondence is primarily with colleagues concerning grant proposals, plans for seminars, activities of the American Surrealist Initiative, and the American Association of Museum Registrars' Committee, 1977-1979.

Writings consist of notes, lectures, and manuscripts of articles on Surrealist art. Also included is a floppy diskette containing Bell's writings.

Administrative materials consist of material from Bell's time as a member of the American Association of Museum Registrars' Committee. Materials include notes, vocabularies, and formats for condition reports; condition report task force meeting notes, annual meeting notes, and Western region meetings. Other material includes Surrealist artists files compiled by Bell. These files appear to have been compiled for Bell's own research into Surrealist art, but some appear to be related to grants that artists applied for. Artist files consist of resumes, photographs, and printed material.

Exhibition material consists of correspondence, notes, printed material, and some administrative material related to exhibitions that Bell participated. Some of the exhibition include: "Art Exposition 1985," "Human form, Prismatic Color," and "100 Vows of the Sun: Surrealist Sculpture, Painting, and Poetry." The "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition also includes one audio cassette and one video cassette of related material.

Printed material includes photocopies of articles on Surrealist art collected by Bell for his research, photocopies of articles annotated by Bell, exhibition announcements, exhibition catalogs, and advertisements featuring Surrealist art.

Photographic material is primarily photographs compiled by Bell of Surrealist art arranged alphabetically by artist. There is one large group photograph of Bell and attendees at the opening reception for the "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition in 1985.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into six series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1988 (1.1 linear feet; Boxes 1-2)
- Series 2: Writings, 1980-1987 (0.2 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 3: Administrative Files, 1976-1988 (1.5 linear feet; Boxes 2-3)
- Series 4: Exhibition Files, 1982-1988 (0.5 linear feet; Boxes 3-4)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1942-1988 (0.5 linear feet; Box 4)
- Series 6: Photographic Material, 1970-1987 (0.6 linear feet; Boxes 4-5)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Surrealism

Types of Materials:

Sound recordings

Video recordings

Occupations:

Museum administrators -- California -- San Francisco

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1988

1.1 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is primarily with colleagues concerning grant proposals, plans for seminars, activities of the American Surrealist Initiative, and the American Association of Museum Registrars' Committee, 1977-1979.

Box 1, Folder 1-8	Correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 9	Correspondence, 1977-1982
Box 1, Folder 10-19	Correspondence, 1983
Box 1, Folder 20-35	Correspondence, 1984
Box 1, Folder 36-47	Correspondence, 1985
Box 1, Folder 48-60	Correspondence, 1986
Box 1, Folder 61-66	Correspondence, 1987
Box 2, Folder 1-3	Correspondence, 1987
Box 2, Folder 4	Correspondence, 1988
Box 2, Folder 5	American Surrealist Initiative, 1982-1986
Box 2, Folder 6	Beyond War, 1986-1987
Box 2, Folder 7	Contemporary Surrealist Symposium, 1983-1984
Box 2, Folder 8	Guggenheim Foundation, 1982-1983
Box 2, Folder 9	Magical Blend, 1983-1987
Box 2, Folder 10	Irving Norman Estate, 1983-1988

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Writings, 1980-1987

0.2 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Writings consist of notes, lectures, and manuscripts of articles on Surrealist art. Also included is a floppy diskette containing Bell's writings.

Box 2, Folder 11	Floppy Diskette, undated 1 Floppy disc
Box 2, Folder 12	Lecture Notes, 1982-1985
Box 2, Folder 13	Notes, circa 1982-1986
Box 2, Folder 14	"Murals and Social Surrealism: A Personal View", undated
Box 2, Folder 15	"Visionary Art: A History", undated
Box 2, Folder 16	"Towards an Understanding of Contemporary Surrealism", 1983
Box 2, Folder 17	"Surromantic Realism", 1983 October 24
Box 2, Folder 18	"Surrealization and Fine Art", 1984
Box 2, Folder 19	"Surrealism - An Alternative Approach: Veristic Attitudes in the Works and Writings of Contemporary Surrealists", 1984
Box 2, Folder 20	"No More Pistols in the Theatre: Surrealism and Cultural Suigenicide", 1984 November 23
Box 2, Folder 21	"Irving Norman - Social Surrealist", 1985 October 7
Box 2, Folder 23-24	Miscellaneous Manuscripts, 1981-1987
Box 2, Folder 25	By Others, 1981-1987

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Administrative Files, 1976-1988

1.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Administrative materials consist of material from Bell's time as a member of the American Association of Museum Registrars' Committee. Materials include notes, vocabularies, and formats for condition reports; condition report task force meeting notes, annual meeting notes 1977-1978, and Western region meetings 1977-1978. Other material includes Surrealist artists files compiled by Bell. These files appear to have been compiled for Bell's own research into Surrealist art, but some appear to be related to grants that artists applied for. Artist files consist of resumes, photographs, and printed material.

Arrangement: The series is divided into two sub-series.

- 3.1: Registrar Committee, 1976-1980
- 3.2: Surrealist Artist Files, 1982-1988

3.1: Registrar Committee, 1976-1980

Box 2, Folder 26-32	Condition Reports Research Notes, 1976-1977
Box 2, Folder 33-34	Condition Reports Sample Formats, 1976-1978
Box 2, Folder 35-37	Condition Reports Sample Vocabularies, 1976-1978
Box 2, Folder 38	"Notes Towards a Condition Report", 1977
Box 2, Folder 39-40	Condition Report Questionnaire Results, 1977
Box 2, Folder 41-52	Condition Report Task Force, 1977-1978
Box 2, Folder 53-54	"Expanded Notes Towards a Condition Report", 1978
Box 3, Folder 1	"Expanded Notes Towards a Condition Report", 1978
Box 3, Folder 2-4	AAM Annual Meeting, 1978
Box 3, Folder 5-7	Condition Report Task Force, 1979-1980
Box 3, Folder 8	WAAM Annual Meeting, 1977
Box 3, Folder 9	WRC Annual Meeting, 1977
Box 3, Folder 10-11	WRC/WAAM Annual Meeting, 1978
Box 3, Folder 12	Joslyn Art Museum Consultancy, 1977

3.2: Surrealist Artist Files, 1982-1988

Box 3, Folder 13 "Blasphemous Art History: An Interview with Michael S. Bell", 1985 January 7

Box 3, Folder 14-15	A, 1983-1985
Box 3, Folder 16	B, 1983-1985
Box 3, Folder 17	C, 1983-1984
Box 3, Folder 18	D, circa 1983
Box 3, Folder 19	E-F, 1983-1984
Box 3, Folder 20	G, circa 1984
Box 3, Folder 21	H-I, 1983-1987
Box 3, Folder 22	J, 1983
Box 3, Folder 23	K, 1982
Box 3, Folder 24	L-M, 1983
Box 3, Folder 25	O-P, 1983-1988
Box 3, Folder 26	Q-R, 1983
Box 3, Folder 27	S, 1983-1985
Box 3, Folder 28	T, 1983
Box 3, Folder 29	U-Z, 1983
Box 3, Folder 30	Address Card File, A-B, undated
Box 3, Folder 31	Address Card File, C-D, undated
Box 3, Folder 32	Address Card File, E-G, undated
Box 3, Folder 33	Address Card File, H-K, undated
Box 3, Folder 34	Address Card File, L-M, undated
Box 3, Folder 35	Address Card File, N-R, undated
Box 3, Folder 36	Address Card File, S, undated
Box 3, Folder 37	Address Card File, T-Z, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Exhibition Files, 1982-1988

0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4)

Scope and Contents: Exhibition material consists of correspondence, notes, printed material, and some administrative material related to exhibitions that Bell participated. Some of the exhibition include: "Art Exposition 1985," "Human form, Prismatic Color," and "100 Vows of the Sun: Surrealist Sculpture, Painting, and Poetry." The "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition also includes one audio cassette and one video cassette of related material.

Box 3, Folder 38	"Art Explosion 1985", 1985
Box 3, Folder 39-40	"Contemporary Art: 30,000 BC-Present", 1985
Box 3, Folder 41	"Contemporary Surrealism", 1984
Box 3, Folder 42	"Dream Imagery: Creative Growth", 1984
Box 3, Folder 43	Holdings Related to Gordon Onslow Ford, 1982
Box 3, Folder 43	"How Shall We Travel in the Future", 1983
Box 3, Folder 44	"Human Form: Prismatic Color", 1984
Box 3, Folder 45	"Master of Surrealism", 1984-1988
Box 3, Folder 46	"100 Vows of the Sun: Surrealist Sculpture, Painting and Poetry", 1985
Box 4, Folder 1-3	"100 Vows of the Sun: Surrealist Sculpture, Painting and Poetry", 1985 1 Sound cassette 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 4, Folder 4	"A Peace Palette", 1984
Box 4, Folder 5	"Peak Family", 1986
Box 4, Folder 6	"Religion: 1984", 1984
Box 4, Folder 7	Seers Institute "Life Within Life" Video, 1986
Box 4, Folder 8	"Surreal Ecstasy of Women", 1987
Box 4, Folder 9	"This is Surrealism", 1985

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, 1942-1988

0.5 Linear feet (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes photocopies of articles on Surrealist art collected by Bell for his research, photocopies of articles annotated by Bell, exhibition announcements, exhibition catalogs, and advertisements featuring Surrealist art.

Box 4, Folder 10-16 American Surrealist Initiative: Primary Sources, 1968-1986

Box 4, Folder 17 Announcements, 1983-1988

Box 4, Folder 18-19 Articles Annotated by Bell, circa 1983-1984

Box 4, Folder 20 Articles by Bell, 1984-1987

Box 4, Folder 21-25 Exhibition Catalogs, 1942-1986

Box 4, Folder 26 Surrealist Advertising, circa 1984-1985

Box 4, Folder 27-29 Miscellaneous, 1983-1988

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Photographic Material, 1970-1987

0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)

Scope and Contents: Photographic material is primarily photographs compiled by Bell of Surrealist art arranged alphabetically by artist. There is one large group photograph of Bell and attendees at the opening reception for the "100 Vows of the Sun" exhibition in 1985.

Box 4, Folder 30	Artists, 1977-1986
Box 4, Folder 31	Artists Works of Art, A, undated
Box 4, Folder 32	Artists Works of Art, Ricardo Anguia, 1979
Box 4, Folder 33	Artists Works of Art, B, 1975-1981
Box 4, Folder 34	Artists Works of Art, Susan Seddon Boulet, circa 1981
Box 4, Folder 35	Artists Works of Art, C, 1980-1984
Box 4, Folder 36	Artists Works of Art, Guy Colwell, 1979-1983
Box 4, Folder 37	Artists Works of Art, Heita Copony, undated
Box 4, Folder 38	Artists Works of Art, D, 1978-1983
Box 4, Folder 39	Artists Works of Art, Davidson, 1981-1984
Box 4, Folder 40	Artists Works of Art, Claire Desouches, 1984
Box 4, Folder 41	Artists Works of Art, E-F, 1983-1984
Box 4, Folder 42	Artists Works of Art, Sybil Erden, 1985-1987
Box 4, Folder 43	Artists Works of Art, G-H, 1983-1985
Box 4, Folder 44	Artists Works of Art, Tyler James Hoare, undated
Box 4, Folder 45	Artists Works of Art, Mark Johnson, undated
Box 4, Folder 46	Artists Works of Art, Barry Johnston, undated
Box 4, Folder 47	Artists Works of Art, K, circa 1985
Box 4, Folder 48	Artists Works of Art, Barbara Kahn, 1973-1983
Box 5, Folder 1	Artists Works of Art, L, 1980-1983
Box 5, Folder 2	Artists Works of Art, T. Laurant, undated

Box 5, Folder 3	Artists Works of Art, M, 1984-1985
Box 5, Folder 4-5	Artists Works of Art, Irving Norman, 1974-1985
Box 5, Folder 6	Artists Works of Art, P-Q, circa 1984
Box 5, Folder 7	Artists Works of Art, Pashilk, undated
Box 5, Folder 8	Artists Works of Art, R, 1978-1983
Box 5, Folder 9	Artists Works of Art, Lynn Randolph, undated
Box 5, Folder 10	Artists Works of Art, Renaker, 1984
Box 5, Folder 11	Artists Works of Art, S, 1970-1983
Box 5, Folder 12	Artists Works of Art, K. Sarngi, undated
Box 5, Folder 13	Artists Works of Art, Verena Schindler, 1976-1983
Box 5, Folder 14	Artists Works of Art, Douglas Straight, 1983
Box 5, Folder 15	Artists Works of Art, T-V, circa 1983
Box 5, Folder 16	Artists Works of Art, W-Y, circa 1977
Box 5, Folder 17	Artists Works of Art, Allan Williams, undated
Box 5, Folder 18	Artists Works of Art, Gilbert Williams, undated
Box 5, Folder 19	"100 Vows of the Sun" Exhibition Opening Reception, 1985 April 6
Box 5, Folder 20	Miscellaneous, 1977-1984

[Return to Table of Contents](#)