



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Leon Berkowitz
and Ida Fox Berkowitz Papers, circa
1900-1986, in the Archives of American Art

Rebecca Williams

1989

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Leon Berkowitz and Ida Fox Berkowitz papers
Date:	circa 1900-1986
Identifier:	AAA.berkleon
Creator:	Berkowitz, Leon, 1919-1987
Extent:	3.02 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection, which measures 3.02 linear feet and dates from circa 1900 to 1986, documents the lives of painter and educator Leon Berkowitz and his first wife, poet Ida Fox Berkowitz, and provides insight into the cultural and artistic climate in 1940s and 1950s Washington D.C. through correspondence, notes, sketches, photographs, printed material, and audio cassettes.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Leon Berkowitz donated the papers of his first wife, Ida Fox, in 1987. After his death in 1987, his second wife, Maureen Berkowitz, donated his papers to the Archives of American Art. In addition to these two accessions, one folder of material on Leon Berkowitz was donated in 1979. This material was microfilmed on reel 2786.

Related Material

Also available in the Archives of American Art are two audio cassettes of a transcribed oral history interview with Leon and Ida Fox Berkowitz, June 5, 1979.

Alternative Forms Available

Portions of this collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reel 2786 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 collection was processed by Rebecca Williams in 1989. The finding aid was revised by Stephanie Ashley during conversion to EAD in 2002.

Preferred Citation

Leon Berkowitz and Ida Fox Berkowitz papers, circa 1900-1986. 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.

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Biographical Note

Leon Berkowitz (1911-1987), a painter associated with the Washington Color School, was born in Philadelphia (the 1919 birth date given by Berkowitz in *Who's Who in American Art* is incorrect). He met and married his first wife, Ida Fox, between 1935 and 1937. Berkowitz received a B.F.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1942 and an M.A. from George Washington University in 1948.

From 1943 to 1945, he served as a private in the U.S. Army, participating in a psychiatric program involving art therapy at Camp Lee, Virginia. Berkowitz taught art at Eastern and Western high schools in Washington, D.C. from 1945 to 1956 and taught at Western again in the late 1960s. In 1969 Berkowitz became chairman of the Corcoran School of Art's painting department and taught there until his death.

In 1945, the Berkowitzes founded the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts with Helmuth Kern. The Center, an important part of the city's cultural life during the 1940s and 1950s, offered courses in art, music, theatre and dance. Many of the artists who later became prominent in the Washington Color School taught at the center, including Morris Louis, Ken Noland, Gene Davis, Jacob Kainen and Jack Perlmutter. The center also sponsored a retrospective for Willem de Kooning in 1953. The Berkowitzes and Kern were also active in establishing the shortlived (1949-1953) cooperative radio station WCFM.

The center collapsed in 1956, shortly after the Berkowitzes' departure on a sabbatical painting trip to Spain. They spent much of the next decade abroad, including a two-and-a half year stay in Wales and a visit of several months to Jerusalem. During this period, Berkowitz expanded his interest in light, creating paintings by priming canvases with a white ground, then using multiple layers of thin oil paint washes.

Berkowitz had his first one-man museum show at the Corcoran in 1966. Ida Fox died during the 1970s and Berkowitz then married his second wife, Maureen. He continued to paint and exhibit until his death from cancer in 1987.

Poet Ida Fox (1913-197?) was born in Philadelphia. She married Leon Berkowitz between 1934 and 1937 and moved with him to Washington, D.C. where she attended American University from 1942 to 1945. During World War II she worked as a statistician for the U.S. government. In 1945 she cofounded the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts. Fox became its director in 1947, resigning the position in 1955 to accompany her husband to Spain. She published poetry in several literary and artistic periodicals, including a series, "Painting Thru a Poet's Eye," inspired by works of art. In 1970 she published a collection of poetry, *In the Wind: An American Poet in Wales* (St. David's, Wales: Antiphon Press, 1970), illustrated by Arthur Okamura.

Scope and Content Note

The collection measures 3.02 linear feet and dates from circa 1900 to 1986. In addition to documenting the artistic development of Leon Berkowitz and, to a lesser extent, Ida Fox, the collection provides insight into the cultural and artistic climate in Washington D.C. during the 1940s and 1950s.

The collection includes correspondence, primarily between Leon and Ida Fox Berkowitz, notes, sketches, personal photographs, printed material, and a cassette tape. There are notes on Leon Berkowitz's philosophy of painting, reports from a 1940s U.S. Army art therapy project in which he participated, and scattered correspondence, financial records, and promotional materials from the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts and WCFM radio. Also found here are lecture notes and administrative materials relating to Leon's Berkowitz's teaching career, papers he wrote for several education courses, his master's thesis, sporadic business records concerning shipments and sales of paintings and gallery exhibitions, and drafts of catalogs.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into nine series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-circa 1974, undated (box 1, 3 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1931-1985, undated (boxes 1-2, 27 folders)
- Series 3: Teaching Files, 1939-1950s, 1985-1986, undated (box 2, 4 folders)
- Series 4: Exhibitions, 1944-1985, undated (box 2, 4, 10 folders)
- Series 5: Washington Workshop Center for the Arts, 1940s-1950s (boxes 2-3, 14 folders)
- Series 6: Other Projects, 1944-1985 (box 3, 4 folders)
- Series 7: Notes and Writings, 1940s-1971, undated (box 3, 8 folders)
- Series 8: Artwork, circa 1950s, undated (box 3, 5 folders)
- Series 9: Photographs, circa 1900-1970s (box 3, 5 folders)
- Series 10: Interview on Audio Cassette, [1974?] (box 3, 1 folder)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Philosophy
Art -- Study and teaching
Color-field painting
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Burton, Scott
De Kooning, Elaine
Fox, Ida
Kern, Helmuth F.
Okamura, Arthur

Ulbricht, John, 1926-
Washington Workshop Center for the Arts

Occupations:

Painters -- Washington (D.C.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-circa 1974, undated

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material found in this series includes educational and war service records, résumés, biographical sketches, and certificates of awards.

Box 1, Folder 1 Address Book, undated

Box 1, Folder 2-3 Biographical Material, 1934-circa 1974, undated

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1931-1985, undated

27 Folders (Boxes 1-2)

Scope and Contents: The bulk of the correspondence found here consists of letters between Leon and Ida Berkowitz, written during trips in the 1950s or during Leon's World War II service from 1943 to 1945. Leon's 1940s letters contain occasional pen and ink sketches of life at Camp Lee, Virginia, fellow servicemen, and a few self-portraits. The majority of the remaining letters were written during the 1950s. Correspondents include Helmuth F. Kern (often addressed as "Du"), cofounder of the WWCA, painters John Ulbricht, Elaine de Kooning (five letters to Ida Fox during 1957 and 1958), Arthur Okamura, sculptor Scott Burton (1957-1961), describing his studies in painting with Hans Hofmann at Provincetown, and Jim V. Baker and Laura de Freitas (who often signed letters as "Me").

Arrangement: The correspondence is arranged chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, Incoming, undated
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence, Outgoing, undated
Box 1, Folder 7-20	Correspondence, 1931-1954
Box 2, Folder 1-9	Correspondence, 1955-1985
Box 2, Folder 10	Postcards, 1950-1974, undated

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Series 3: Teaching, 1939-1950s, 1985-1986, undated

4 Folders (box 2)

Box 2, Folder 11	Clippings, circa 1950s
Box 2, Folder 12	Correspondence, 1939-1950s, 1985-1986, undated
Box 2, Folder 13	Lecture Notes, undated
Box 2, Folder 14	Student Art Tours, undated

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Series 4: Exhibitions, 1944-1985, undated

10 Folders (Box 2, 4)

Arrangement: Catalogs and announcements include vitae, and printed material relating to exhibitions which were donated separately in 1979. Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Folder 4	Berkowitz Resume and Catalog
Box 2, Folder 15-17	Catalogs and Announcements, 1950-1978, undated
Box 2, Folder 18	Clippings, 1956-1973, undated
Box 2, Folder 19	Drafts of Corcoran Exhibition Catalog, 1968-1969
Box 2, Folder 20-21	Gallery Receipts, 1950-1985
Box 2, Folder 22	Inventory of Paintings, circa 1976-1977
Box 2, Folder 23-24	Other Artists, Catalogs and Announcements, 1944-1985, undated

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Series 5: Washington Workshop Center for the Arts, 1940s-1950s

14 Folders (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence in this series includes general business records for the center, such as meeting minutes and financial statements.

Arrangement: Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Box 2, Folder 25-26	Announcements, Brochures and Catalogs, 1940s-1950s
Box 2, Folder 27	Clippings, 1940s-1950s
Box 2, Folder 28-37	Correspondence, 1943-1956, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Draft of Radio Script, circa 1940-1950

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Series 6: Other Projects, 1944-1985

4 Folders (Box 3)

Arrangement: Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Box 3, Folder 2 Art Therapy Project, U.S. Army, 1944-1945

Box 3, Folder 3 Jury Judging, 1983-1985

Box 3, Folder 4 WCFM Radio Station, 1949-1953

Box 3, Folder 5 Washington Arts Council, 1947-1954

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Series 7: Notes and Writings, 1940s-1971, undated

8 Folders (Box 3)

Arrangement: Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Box 3, Folder 6	Essay, "Art in the Extra-Curriculum," undated
Box 3, Folder 7	Essay, "The Job of the Art Supervisor," undated
Box 3, Folder 8	Master's Thesis, "Factors Significant in the Success of a Creative Arts Center," 1948
Box 3, Folder 9	Notes, undated
Box 3, Folder 10	Notes, Art and Society (course), 1942
Box 3, Folder 11	Notes, Draft of "Wind Among the Leaves," undated
Box 3, Folder 12	Notes, On Paintings, 1940s, 1968-1971
Box 3, Folder 13	Poems, Ida Fox Berkowitz, undated

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Series 8: Artwork, circa 1950s, undated

5 Folders (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: Artwork by Leon Berkowitz includes eleven undated sketchbooks, many of Paris; eleven loose, undated sketches and six illustrated letters (found in the correspondence for 1943-1945). In addition, the collection contains one woodcut print by Arthur Okamura titled "Angel."

Arrangement: Folders are arranged alphabetically.

Box 3, Folder 14	Loose Sketches, undated
Box 3, Folder 15	Reproductions of Artwork, undated
Box 3, Folder 16-17	Sketchbooks, undated (11 sketchbooks)
Box 3, Folder 18	Woodblock Print, Arthur Okamura, circa 1950s

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Series 9: Photographs, circa 1900-1970s

5 Folders (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: The photographs consist primarily of black and white travel photographs of Leon and Ida, taken during trips to Mexico, Spain, and Wales. The collection also includes scattered family photographs from the early part of the twentieth century, childhood portraits of Leon, some pictures of Leon in uniform during the 1940s, and scattered photographs of paintings.

Arrangement: Folders are arranged alphabetically. Within folders photographs are arranged chronologically, with negatives following positives.

Box 3, Folder 19-21	Photographs and Negatives, circa 1900-1970s
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Box 3, Folder 22	Photographs of Paintings, circa 1950s-1970s
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Box 3, Folder 23	Photographs of Washington Workshop Center for the Arts, circa 1950s
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Series 10: Audio Cassette, [1974?]

1 Folder (Box 3)

Box 3, Folder 24

Audio Cassette of Taped Conversations, 1974, undated

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