



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Avis Berman
Research Material on Art and Artists,
1976-1994, in the Archives of American Art

Ryan Evans

2022 May 12

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	3
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1989	5
Series 2: Artists and Art Workers Files, circa 1976-1990	6
Series 3: Topical Files, circa 1980-1994	9
Series 4: Unprocessed Addition, circa 1997-2007	10

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Avis Berman research material on art and artists
Date:	1976-2007
Identifier:	AAA.bermavis
Creator:	Berman, Avis
Extent:	3.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	Avis Berman research material on art and artists measures 3.2 linear feet and dates from 1976-2007. Included are interviews conducted by Berman, correspondence, printed material, and drafts of writing for articles and essays published by Berman in preparation for various books, articles and exhibitions, magazines and museum and gallery catalog essays. Subjects include Romare Bearden, Adelyn Breeskin, Howard Chandler Christy, Chaim Gross, Geoffrey Holder and Carmen de Lavallade, Jacob Lawrence, Marisol, Mary Miss, Reuben Nakian, Maxfield Parrish, Helen Farr Sloan, John Sloan, Raphael Soyer, and others. There is a 0.8 linear foot unprocessed addition to this collection donated in 2024 that includes files on Philip Martiny, Margery Ryerson and Bill Scott containing notes, writings, interview transcripts, printed material. Files, drafts and correspondence regarding an essay Rave Reviews: 100 Years of Great American Art for the National Academy by Berman. Materials date from circa 1997-2007.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated incrementally by Avis Berman 1981-1993, 2021 and 2024.

Related Materials

Also in the Archives are the Avis Berman research material on Katharine Kuh, 1939-2006, research material on Julianna Force, circa 1930-2020, research material on Elie Nadelman, 2001, and an interview of Reuben Nakian conducted by Berman for the Archives Oral History Program, June 1981.

Available Formats

35mm microfilm reels 2786 and 4909 are available at Archives of American Art office reading rooms in Washington, D.C. and New York City.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Ryan Evans in 2022.

Preferred Citation

Avis Berman research material on art and artists, 1976-2007. 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.

Conditions Governing Use

Interviews with Gross, Lawrence, and Nakian: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from Avis Berman. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Conditions Governing Use

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Conditions Governing Use

The donor has retained all intellectual property rights, including copyright, that they may own in the following material: All material created by Avis Berman.

Biographical / Historical

Avis Berman (1949-) is a writer, curator, and historian of American art, architecture and culture based in New York, N.Y. She holds a bachelor's degree from Bucknell University and an master's degree from Rutgers Univerisy, both in English literature. She is the author of numerous books including *Rebels on Eighth Street: Juliana Force and the Whitney Museum of American Art*, *James McNeill Whistler*, and *Edward Hopper's New York*. She was also co-author and editor of Katharine Kuh's memoir, *My Love Affair with Modern Art: Behind the Scenes with a Legendary Curator*.

Berman has written numerous articles on subjects including painting, sculpture, photography, illustration, design, architecture, and the social history of the visual arts for a broad range of publications including *The New York Times*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Washington Post*, *Smithsonian*, *Saturday Review*, *The Boston Book Review*, *American Art*, *ARTnews*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Baltimore Sun*, *Art in America*, *Art & Antiques*, *House & Garden*, and *Architectural Digest*.

Throughout the 1980s 1990s and 2000s Avis served as a consultant for the Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., in her capacity as interviewer for the oral history project for which she has researched and interviewed countless artists, collectors, and other figures in the art world in Europe and the United States.

Scope and Contents

Avis Berman research material on art and artists measures 3.2 linear feet and dates from 1976-2007. Included are interviews conducted by Berman, correspondence, printed material, and drafts of writing for articles and essays published by Berman in preparation for various books, articles and exhibitions, magazines and museum and gallery catalog essays. Subjects include Romare Bearden, Adelyn Breeskin, Howard Chandler Christy, Chaim Gross,

Geoffrey Holder and Carmen de Lavallade, Jacob Lawrence, Marisol, Mary Miss, Reuben Nakian, Maxfield Parrish, Helen Farr Sloan, John Sloan, Raphael Soyer, and others.

Correspondence consists primarily of letters received from artists and art professionals Berman contacted during her research process for various assignments. This type of correspondence also appears in the artist and art workers files and the topical files of this collection.

The artist and art workers files contains a wide range of research material including correspondence, notes, and copies of published articles and book chapters, generally collected in preparation for a writing assignment. Some drafts for those writing assignments appear in the files as well.

Topical files consist of research materials compiled by Avis Berman on topics she researched and deloped primarily for the sake of writing projects, including correspondence, notes, and copies of published sources.

There is a 0.8 linear foot unprocessed addition to this collection donated in 2024 that includes files on Philip Martiny, Margery Ryerson and Bill Scott containing notes, writings, interview transcripts, printed material. Files, drafts and correspondence regarding an essay Rave Reviews: 100 Years of Great American Art for the National Academy by Berman. Materials date from circa 1997-2007.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in four series:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1989 (0.1 Linear feet: Box 1)
- Series 2: Artists and Art Workers Files, circa 1976-1990 (1.2 Linear feet: Box 1-2)
- Series 3: Topical Files, circa 1980-1994 (1.1 Linear feet: Box 2-3)
- Series 4: Unprocessed Addition, circa 1997-2007 (0.8 linear feet: Box 4-5)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Women art dealers
Women art historians
Women authors

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Bearden, Romare, 1911-1988
Breeskin, Adelyn Dohme, 1896-1986
Foster, James W., 1920-
Gross, Chaim, 1904-1991
Lawrence, Jacob, 1917-2000
Nakian, Reuben, 1897-1986
Rosenthal, Gertrude, 1903-
Sloan, Helen Farr, 1911-2005

Occupations:

Art critics -- New York (State) -- New York
Art historians -- New York (State) -- New York
Authors -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1983-1989

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence consists primarily of letters received from artists and art professionals Avis Berman contacted during her research process for various assignments. This type of correspondence also appears in the artist and art workers files and the topical files of this collection.

Box 1, Folder 1 Correspondence, 1983

Box 1, Folder 2 Artists' Letters, circa 1986-1989

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Artists and Art Workers Files, circa 1976-1990

1.2 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: The artist and art workers files contains a wide range of research material including correspondence, notes, and copies of published articles and book chapters, generally collected in preparation for a writing assignment. Some drafts for those writing assignments appear in the files as well.

Romare Bearden

Box 1, Folder 3-5 Research Material, circa 1980-1985

Box 1, Folder 6 Interview with Romare Bearden and Avis Berman (1980 July 31), circa 1980
6 Sound cassettes (Two of the sound cassettes are original, Tape 1 and 2.)
Notes: Berman's interview of painter Romare Bearden was conducted 1980 July 31 in Bearden's studio, Long Island City, New York. Bearden discusses his mural commissions; his youth; his time in Paris; working out of the blues tradition; the influence of the South; and changes in his work. He recalls Constantin Brancusi, Jacob Lawrence, Henri Matisse, Duke Ellington, Stuart Davis, and others.

Adelyn Breeskin

Box 1, Folder 7 Research Material, circa 1977

Box 1, Folder 8 Interview with Adelyn Breeskin and Avis Berman (1976 Sept. 8 and Nov. 2)
Transcript, circa 1976
Notes: Breeskin speaks of her educational background; working at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum; her early interest in reading and illustrated books; her role as Curator of Prints and Director of the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Sadie May, Claghorn, Garrett, and Cone Collections; the financial management of the Baltimore Museum of Art; the Venice Biennale, 1960; and her research concerning Mary Cassatt and Romaine Brooks. She recalls Katherine B. Child, Claribel and Etta Cone, William Ivins, Jr., Gertrude Stein, Alice B. Toklas and others.

Box 1, Folder 9 Interview with James Foster and Avis Berman Regarding Adelyn Breeskin
(1976 Dec. 10) Transcript, circa 1976

Box 1, Folder 10 Interview with Gertrude Rosenthal and Avis Berman Regarding Adelyn
Breeskin (1977 Jan. 14) Transcript, circa 1977

Box 1, Folder 11 Howard Chandler Christy, circa 1990

Box 1, Folder 12 Marisol (Escobar), circa 1983

Box 1, Folder 13	Chaim Gross, Interview with Chaim Gross and Avis Berman, Audio Recording (1981 Mar. 7), circa 1981 2 Sound cassettes Notes: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from Avis Berman. Contact Reference Services for more information.
Box 1, Folder 14	Geoffrey Holder, circa 1984-1985 Includes one sound cassette, a conversation with Geoffrey Holder, Carmen de Lavallade, and Avis Berman (1984 Dec. 27).
Jacob Lawrence	
Box 1, Folder 15-16	Research Material, circa 1982-1987
Box 1, Folder 17-18	Interview with Jacob Lawrence and Avis Berman (1982 July 30 and Aug. 4), Audio Recording and Transcript, circa 1983 Includes seven sound cassettes in folder 17, the original on three sound cassettes. Notes: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from Avis Berman. Contact Reference Services for more information.
Box 1, Folder 19	Jacob Lawrence in Conversation with Avis Berman, "Sunday at the MET" (1983 Feb. 6) Audio Recording, 1983 1 Sound cassette Notes: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from Avis Berman. Contact Reference Services for more information.
Mary Miss	
Box 1, Folder 20	Research Material, circa 1980s
Box 2, Folder 1	Research Material, circa 1980s
Box 2, Folder 2	Interview with Mary Miss and Avis Berman (1987 May 19) Sound Recording and Transcript, circa 1987 Includes one sound cassette.
Box 2, Folder 3	Interview with Mary Miss and Avis Berman (1989 June 20) Sound Recording, circa 1987 1 Sound cassette
Box 2, Folder 4	Reuben Nakian, Interview with Reuben Nakian and Avis Berman (1981 April 1) Audio Recording, circa 1981

2 Sound cassettes (One sound cassette is original; one is a duplicate.)

Notes: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from Avis Berman. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Box 2, Folder 5

Maxfield Parrish, circa 1979

Box 2, Folder 6

Helen Farr Sloan, Interview with Helen Farr Sloan and Avis Berman (1988 July 17), circa 1988

2 Sound cassettes (One cassette is original; one is a duplicate.)

Notes: The interview with Helen Farr Sloan, widow of painter John Sloan, was conducted by Berman on 1988 July 17 for an audience at the Delaware Art Museum.

Box 2, Folder 7

Raphael Soyer, circa 1979-1985

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Topical Files, circa 1980-1994

1.1 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Topical files consist of research materials compiled by Avis Berman on topics she researched and developed primarily for the sake of writing projects, including correspondence, notes, and copies of published sources.

Box 2, Folder 8	Older (Aging) Artists, circa 1983
Box 2, Folder 9-15	Public Art, circa 1981-1991
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Andy Warhol Museum, circa 1990-1994
Box 3, Folder 3-4	Women Artists in 1980, circa 1980

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Unprocessed Addition, circa 1997-2007

0.8 Linear feet

Box 4 Unprocessed Papers

Box 5 Unprocessed Papers

[Return to Table of Contents](#)