



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Eugene Berman Papers, 1926-1975, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Eugene Berman papers
Date:	1926-1975
Identifier:	AAA.bermeuge
Creator:	Berman, Eugene, 1899-1972
Extent:	6.7 Linear feet
Language:	Some of the papers are in Italian, French, and Russian.
Summary:	The papers of painter and theatrical set designer Eugene Berman date from 1926-1975 and measure 6.7 linear feet. Found within the papers are scattered letters, primarily postcards, from various colleagues including Juliet and Man Ray and Berman's brother Leonid. There are also notes, scattered artwork, printed material, and extensive photographs, many of Mexico.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Eugene Berman papers were donated by the artist's sister-in-law, Sylvia Marlowe Berman, in 1978.

Processing Information

Portions of the collection received a very basic level of processing at some point after donation. The collection was further arranged and described by Jean Fitzgerald in July 2010.

Preferred Citation

Eugene Berman papers, 1926-1975. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Eugene Berman (1899-1972) worked in New York City, Los Angeles, California, and Rome, Italy as a Neo-Romantic painter and designer of theatrical sets and costumes for opera and ballet productions.

Eugene Berman was born on November 4, 1899 in St. Petersburg, Russia, the son of Lydia and Gustav Berman, who died when Eugene was seven years old. His stepfather was a wealthy banker who paid for his education in Germany, Switzerland, and France. In 1918, the family fled to Paris to escape the Bolshevik Revolution.

While in Paris, Berman studied at the Academie Ranson from 1920 to 1922, under Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard, and Félix Vallotton. With his brother Leonid, Berman joined a group of painters who became known as Neo-Romantics whose paintings were of melancholy dreamlike scenes with mournful figures, defying the prevalent abstract movements in art. By the late 1920s, Berman was beginning to successfully sell his paintings and after meeting American gallery owner Julian Levy, he was offered an exhibition in New York. Berman continued to exhibit at the Julian Levy Gallery from 1929 to 1947.

In 1935, Eugene and Leonid Berman became war refugees and came to New York City. Eugene Berman designed covers for fashionable publications and by 1937, he was painting murals in private residences and designing sets and costumes for opera and ballet performances including those at the Metropolitan Opera.

Berman moved to California in 1938, settling in Los Angeles, and continued to paint murals and design for the theater. He became an American citizen in 1944. Between 1947 and 1949, he received Guggenheim Fellowships to obtain background images from the Southwest United States and Mexico for use in his art work. Berman married actress Ona Munson in 1949.

Two years after his wife's suicide in 1955, Berman moved to Rome, Italy where he continued to paint and design sets for the theater.

Eugene Berman died on December 14, 1972 in Rome, Italy.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of painter and theatrical set designer Eugene Berman date from 1926-1975 and measure 6.7 linear feet. Found within the papers are scattered letters, primarily postcards, from various colleagues including Juliet and Man Ray and Berman's brother Leonid. There are also notes, scattered artwork, printed material, and extensive photographs, many of Mexico.

Notes include a booklet of photocopies of notes in Italian concerning miscellaneous art work, including prices. There are also scattered notes in French concerning miscellaneous topics.

Art work consists of miscellaneous sketches, primarily on the reverse sides of postcards, depicting human figures and architectural details, sometimes annotated in Russian and Italian.

Printed material includes clippings concerning Eugene and Leonid Berman's art work, exhibition announcements and catalogs, reproductions of art work by Berman, picture postcards, a ballet program, and a guide book for Grado, Italy.

Photographs comprise the largest series in this collection. Photographs of Eugene Berman include two by Russell Lynes. Photographs are also of Berman's wife, Ona Munson, unidentified colleagues, exhibition installations, art work executed by Berman between 1937 and 1948, and miscellaneous photographs of Italy including images by Vincenzo Galdi and Wilhelm von Gloeden. There are ten portfolios of photographs of Mexico, primarily taken by Berman, but Portfolios 1, 6, 9, and 10 include images photographed by Hugo Brehme. There are also commercially produced photographs of various scenes and art work primarily in Italy and Mexico, publicity photographs of ballet and opera performers, and two stereographs of novelty subjects.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 5 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Letters, 1926-1970 (Box 1, 8; 12 folders)
- Series 2: Notes, 1944 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 3: Art Work, 1947 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1941-1975 (Box 1, 8; 1.5 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1933-1956 (Box, 2-9; 4.9 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Graphic artists
Painters -- Italy -- Rome
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Set Designers

Types of Materials:

Notes
Postcards
Sketches

Names:

Berman, Leonid, 1896-1976
Galdi, Vincenzo
Gloeden, Wilhelm von, Baron, 1856-1931
Lynes, Russell, 1910-1991
Ray, Man, 1890-1976

Occupations:

Painters -- California -- Los Angeles

Places:

Italy -- Description and travel, Photographs
Mexico -- Description and travel, Photographs

Container Listing

Series 1: Letters, 1926-1970

12 Folders (Box 1, 8)

(Box 1, 8; 12 folders)

Scope and Contents: Scattered letters, consisting primarily of postcards, are from various colleagues including Matta, Juliet and Man Ray, and Berman's brother Leonid.

Box 1, Folder 1	Correspondents with Unknown Surnames, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondents with Surnames "A" - "M," undated (Oversized Material Housed in Box 8)
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondents with Surnames "N" - "Z," undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters, 1926-1938
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters, 1939
Box 1, Folder 6	Letters, 1940-1941
Box 1, Folder 7	Letters, 1942-1944
Box 1, Folder 8	Letters, 1945
Box 1, Folder 9	Letters, 1946-1949
Box 1, Folder 10	Letters, 1950-1957
Box 1, Folder 11	Letters, 1962-1970 (Oversized Material Housed in Box 8)
Box 8, Folder 1	Oversized Letter from Eugene Berman, undated, (from Box 1, Folder 2)
Box 8, Folder 1	Oversized Letter from Eugene Berman, 1962, from Box 1, Folder 11

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Series 2: Notes, 1944

2 Folders (Box 1)

(Box 1; 2 folders)

Scope and Contents: Notes consist of a booklet of photocopies of notes on miscellaneous art work, including prices. There are also scattered notes on miscellaneous topics.

Box 1, Folder 12 Booklet of Photocopies of Notes on Art Work, undated

Box 1, Folder 13 Miscellaneous Notes, 1944, undated

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Series 3: Art Work, 1947

2 Folders (Box 1)

(Box 1; 2 folders)

Scope and Contents: Art work consists of miscellaneous sketches of human figures and architectural details.

Box 1, Folder 14-15	Miscellaneous Sketches, undated (2 folders)
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Series 4: Printed Material, 1941-1975

1.5 Linear feet (Box 1, 8)

(Box 1, 8; 1.5 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, reproductions of art work, picture postcards of scenes and art work found in various countries, and miscellaneous printed material.

Box 1, Folder 16	Clippings, undated
Box 1, Folder 17	Clippings, 1949-1975
Box 1, Folder 18	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1941-1949
Box 1, Folder 19	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1959
Box 1, Folder 20	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1962-1963
Box 1, Folder 21	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1964
Box 1, Folder 22	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1965
Box 1, Folder 23	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1966
Box 1, Folder 24	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1970-1973
Box 1, Folder 25	Exhibition Announcements for Leonid Berman, undated
Box 1, Folder 26-31	Reproductions of Art Work by Berman, undated (6 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 8)
Box 1, Folder 32	Picture Postcard of Corsica, undated
Box 1, Folder 33	Picture Postcard of Cuba (Havana), undated
Box 1, Folder 34	Picture Postcards of France, undated
Box 1, Folder 35	Picture Postcards of Germany, undated
Box 1, Folder 36	Picture Postcards of Great Britain, undated
Box 1, Folder 37	Picture Postcard of Greece (Athens), undated
Box 1, Folder 38-87	Picture Postcards of Italy, undated (50 folders)
Box 2, Folder 1-6	Picture Postcards of Italy, undated

	(6 folders)
Box 2, Folder 7-20	Picture Postcards of Mexico, undated (14 folders)
Box 2, Folder 21-22	Picture Postcards of The Netherlands, undated (2 folders)
Box 2, Folder 23	Picture Postcards of Spain, undated
Box 2, Folder 24	Picture Postcard of Switzerland, undated
Box 2, Folder 25-40	Picture Postcards of the United States, undated (16 folders)
Box 2, Folder 41	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1950, undated
Box 8, Folder 2	Oversized Reproductions of Art Work by Berman, undated, (from Box 1, Folder 30)

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Series 5: Photographs, 1933-1956

4.9 Linear feet (Box, 2-9)

(Box, 2-9; 4.9 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Eugene Berman (including ones taken by Russell Lynes), his wife, colleagues, exhibition installations, art work, and various travel locations. There are also commercially produced photographs of various scenes and art work primarily in Italy and Mexico, publicity photographs of ballet and opera performers, and stereographs of novelty subjects.

Box 2, Folder 42	Photographs of Eugene Berman, 1935, undated (Oversized Material housed in Box 8)
Box 2, Folder 43	Photographs of Ona Munson, Friends, and Colleagues, 1956, undated
Box 2, Folder 44-46	Photographs of Exhibition Installations, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 47-58	Portfolio "Photos of E. B. Paintings," 1948 (12 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 9)
Box 2, Folder 59-61	Photographs of Miscellaneous Costume and Set Designs, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 62-64	Photographs of Costume and Set Designs for <i>Così fan tutti</i> , 1956 (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 65-71	Photographs of Art Work, undated (7 folders)
Box 3, Folder 1-9	Photographs of Art Work, undated (9 folders)
Box 3, Folder 10	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1937, undated
Box 3, Folder 11	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1940, undated
Box 3, Folder 12-13	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1941, undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 14	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1942, undated
Box 3, Folder 15-17	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1943, undated (3 folders)
Box 3, Folder 18-20	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1944, undated (3 folders)
Box 3, Folder 21-22	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1945, undated

(2 folders)

Box 3, Folder 23	Photographs of Art Work Executed in 1947, undated
Box 3, Folder 24-36	Photographs of Scenes in Italy, 1953 (13 folders)
Box 3, Folder 37-43	Photographs of Scenes in Italy, 1956 (7 folders)
Box 3, Folder 44-58	Miscellaneous Photographs of Scenes in Italy, undated (15 folders)
Box 3, Folder 59-68	Portfolio 1: Photographs of Mexico, undated (10 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 9)
Box 3, Folder 69-74	Portfolio 2: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947 (6 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 9)
Box 4, Folder 1-7	Portfolio 3: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947 (7 folders)(Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 4, Folder 8-11	Portfolio 4: "Mexican Photos," 1947 (4 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 4, Folder 12-22	Portfolio 5: "Mexican Photos - Contact and Enlargement," 1947 (11 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 4, Folder 23-32	Portfolio 6: "Mexican Photos - Instituto de los Monumentos Coloniales," undated (10 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 4, Folder 33-39	Portfolio 7: "Mexico Photographs for Ona," 1947 (7 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 5, Folder 1-7	Portfolio 8: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947 (7 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 5, Folder 8-11	Portfolio 9: "Mexican Photos - Brehme," 1947, undated (Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 5, Folder 12-20	Portfolio 10: "Mexican Photos - Instituto de los Monumentos Coloniales," undated (9 folders) (Oversized Material Housed in Box 10)
Box 5, Folder 21-26	Miscellaneous Photographs of Scenes in Mexico, 1947, undated (6 folders)
Box 5, Folder 27	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Austria, undated
Box 5, Folder 28-31	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in France, undated

	(4 folders)
Box 5, Folder 32	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Great Britain, undated
Box 5, Folder 33-62	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Italy, undated (30 folders; Oversized Material Housed in Box 9)
Box 6, Folder 1-22	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Italy, undated (22 folders)
Box 7, Folder 1-11	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Italy, undated (11 folders)
Box 7, Folder 12-16	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Mexico, 1933, undated (5 folders)
Box 7, Folder 17	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Russia, undated
Box 7, Folder 18	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Spain, undated
Box 7, Folder 19-22	Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in the United States, undated (4 folders)
Box 7, Folder 23-24	Miscellaneous Commercial Photographs of Scenes and Art Work in Unidentified Locations, undated (2 folders)
Box 7, Folder 25-27	Photographs of Miscellaneous Ballet and Opera Performers, 1951, undated (3 folders)
Box 7, Folder 28	Stereographs of Novelty Subjects, undated
Box 8, Folder 3	Two Oversized Photographs of Eugene Berman by Russell Lynes, 1935, (from Box 2, Folder 42)
Box 8, Folder 4	Oversized Album of Photographs of Art Work, undated
Box 9, Folder 1	Oversized Album of Photographs of Drawings of Mexico, 1947
Box 9, Folder 2	Oversized Cover for Portfolio "Photos of E. B. Paintings," 1948, (from Box 2, Folder 47)
Box 9, Folder 3	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 1: Photographs of Mexico, undated, (from Box 3, Folder 59)
Box 9, Folder 3	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 2: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947,

(from Box 3, Folder 69)

Box 9, Folder 4	Oversized Portfolio of Miscellaneous Scenes in Mexico, undated
Box 9, Folder 5	Four Oversized Commercial Photographs of Art Work in Italy (Florence), undated, (from Box 5, Folder 45)
Box 10, Folder 1	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 3: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947, (from Box 4, Folder 1)
Box 10, Folder 1	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 4: "Mexican Photos," 1947, (from Box 4, Folder 8)
Box 10, Folder 2	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 5: "Mexican Photos - Contact and Enlargement," 1947, (from Box 4, Folder 12)
Box 10, Folder 2	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 6: "Mexican Photos - Instituto de los Monumentos Coloniales," undated, (from Box 4, Folder 23)
Box 10, Folder 3	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 7: "Mexico Photographs for Ona," 1947, (from Box 4, Folder 33)
Box 10, Folder 3	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 8: "Mexican Photos - Enlargements," 1947, (from Box 5, Folder 1)
Box 10, Folder 4	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 9: "Mexican Photos - Brehme," 1947, undated, (from Box 5, Folder 8)
Box 10, Folder 4	Oversized Cover for Portfolio 10: "Mexican Photos - Instituto de los Monumentos Coloniales," undated, (from Box 5, Folder 12)

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