



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Wallace Berman  
Papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979),  
in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

1998

Archives of American Art  
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	2
Arrangement.....	3
Names and Subjects .....	3
Container Listing .....	5
Series 1: Letters, 1957-1979, undated.....	5
Series 2: Notes from Interview, 1967.....	7
Series 3: Writings by Others, 1972, undated.....	8
Series 4: Artwork, 1956-1976.....	9
Series 5: Semina, 1955-1967.....	10
Series 6: S. M. S., 1968.....	11
Series 7: Printed Material, 1907-1976.....	12
Series 8: Photographs, 1956-1976.....	16
Series 9: Sound Recordings, 1962-1965.....	17

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Wallace Berman
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.bermwall
<b>Date:</b>	1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979)
<b>Extent:</b>	5 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Berman, Wallace, 1926-1976
<b>Language:</b>	English
<b>Summary:</b>	The Wallace Berman papers date from 1907 to 1979 (bulk 1955-1979). The collection measures 5 linear feet and presents a cursory overview of Berman's career as an assemblage artist and poet. The collection contains business correspondence, letters from other artists and writers of the Beat movement, writings by others, scattered artwork by Berman, photographs by Robert F. Heinecken, and sound recordings of poetry readings.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

The Wallace Berman papers were donated by Tosh Berman, Wallace Berman's son, in 1992.

### Alternative Forms Available

This collection is available on 35 mm microfilm reels 5282-5284 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.

Most of the sound recordings have been digitized for research access and are available at the Archives of American Art offices.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed and the finding aid written by Jean Fitzgerald in 1998. The finding aid was modified during conversion to EAD by Stephanie Ashley in 2001.

### Preferred Citation

Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Patrons must use microfilm copy. Use of audiovisual recordings with no duplicate access copy requires advance notice.

## Ownership and Literary Rights

The Wallace Berman papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

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## Biographical Note

Wallace Berman was born in 1926 in Staten Island, New York. In the 1930s, his family moved to the Jewish district in Los Angeles. After being expelled from high school for gambling in the early 1940s, Berman immersed himself in the growing West Coast jazz scene. During this period, he briefly attended the Jepson Art School and Chouinard Art School, but departed when he found the training too academic for his needs.

In 1949, while working in a factory finishing antique furniture, he began to make sculptures from unused scraps and reject materials. By the early 1950s, Berman had become a full-time artist and an active figure in the beat community in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Many art historians consider him to be the "father" of the California assemblage movement. Moving between the two cities, Berman devoted himself to his mail art publication *Semina*, which contained a sampling of beat poetry and images selected by Berman.

In 1963, permanently settled in Topanga Canyon in the Los Angeles area, Berman began work on verifax collages (printed images, often from magazines and newspapers, mounted in collage fashion onto a flat surface, sometimes with solid bright areas of acrylic paint). He continued creating these works, as well as rock assemblages, until his death in 1976.

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## Scope and Content Note

The Wallace Berman papers, 1907-1979 (bulk 1955-1979), measure 5 linear feet and present a cursory overview of Berman's career as an assemblage artist and poet. The collection is valuable not only for its documentation of the work of Wallace Berman, but for its documentation of the California beat movement of the late 1950s through the early 1970s.

Found are numerous letters, writings, poems, and other published material which portray the thoughts, attitudes, and trends popular in a prominent underground culture which eventually led to radical changes in America and American art. The collection contains business correspondence, letters from other artists and writers of the beat movement, writings by others, scattered artwork by Berman, and photographs by Robert F. Heinecken. In addition, the collection contains files for Berman's mail art publications *Semina* and *S.M.S.* Also of note is the large volume of printed material (2.7 feet), much of it in the form of books and other published material. Sound recordings include poets Michael McClure, Kenneth Patchen, David Melzer, and another unidentified writer performing their work.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged into nine series which generally reflect material type.

With the exception of the letters in Series 1, each series is arranged chronologically. The original arrangement of the letters has been maintained, with a chronological arrangement of miscellaneous business letters and an alphabetical arrangement of the letters from Berman's more prominent colleagues.

- Series 1: Letters, 1957-1979, undated (box 1, 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 2: Notes from Interview, 1967 (box 1, 1 folder)
- Series 3: Writings by Others, 1972, undated (box 1, 6 folders)
- Series 4: Artwork, 1956-1976 (box 1, 4 folders)
- Series 5: Semina, 1955-1967 (boxes 1-2, 26 folders)
- Series 6: S. M. S., 1968 (box 2, 1 folders)
- Series 7: Printed Material, 1907-1976 (boxes 2-5, 2.7 linear feet)
- Series 8: Photographs, 1956-1976 (box 5, 6 folders)
- Series 9: Sound Recordings, 1962-1965 (box 5, 6 folders)

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- California -- San Francisco Bay Area  
Assemblage (Art)  
Assemblage artists  
Beat generation -- California  
Collage  
Photography, Artistic  
Poets  
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Drawings  
Photographs  
Sound recordings

Names:

Bengston, Billy Al  
DeFeo, Jay, 1929-1989  
Di Prima, Diane  
Duncan, Robert Edward, 1919-  
Fonda, Peter, 1940-  
Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-  
Heinecken, Robert, 1931-  
Herms, George, 1935-  
Hirschman, Jack, 1933-  
Hopper, Dennis, 1936-  
Jess, 1923-  
Johnson, Ray, 1927-

Jordan, Patricia M., 1937-1989  
Lamantia, Philip, 1927-  
McClure, Michael  
Meltzer, David  
Miller, Henry, 1891-  
Patchen, Kenneth, 1911-1972  
Perkoff, Stuart Z.  
Ruscha, Edward  
Sherman, Donald  
Wieners, John, 1934-

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Letters, 1957-1979, undated

*0.5 Linear feet (box 1, OV 7)*

This series consists of miscellaneous business letters, ten letters from Berman, and letters from colleagues.

The letters are arranged chronologically.

Letters are on reel 5282.

Box 1, Folder 1-6	Miscellaneous Business Letters, 1959-1975, undated
Box 1, Folder 7	From Wallace Berman, 1960-1964, undated
Box 1, Folder 8	From Branaman, Robert, undated <i>(1 letter)</i>
Box 1, Folder 9	From Collins, Jess and R. D., 1964-1965 <i>(4 letters)</i>
Box 1, Folder 10	From DeFeo, Jay, 1965-1973 <i>(5 letters)</i>
Box 1, Folder 11	From DiPrima, Diane, 1979 <i>(1 letter enclosing a braid of hair)</i>
Box 1, Folder 12	From Driscoll, Bob, 1964 <i>(1 letter)</i>
Box 1, Folder 13	[From Duncan, Robert], 1963 <i>(1 letter)</i>
Box 1, Folder 14	From Ginsberg, Allen, 1965 <i>(1 letter)</i>
Box 1, Folder 15-16	From Hirschman, Jack, 1967-1972, undated <i>(10 letters; see also OV 7)</i>
Box 1, Folder 17	From Johnson, Ray, 1965-1968, undated <i>(9 letters)</i>
Box 1, Folder 18-20	From McClure, Michael, 1957-1971, undated <i>(26 letters)</i>
Box 1, Folder 21	From Meltzer, David, 1970, undated <i>(2 letters)</i>
Box 1, Folder 22	From Miller, Henry, 1964

*(1 letter)*

Box 1, Folder 23      From Perkoff, Stuart, 1973, undated  
*(2 letters)*

Box 1, Folder 24-25      From Weiners, John, 1960-1969  
*(11 letters)*

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*



## Series 2: Notes from Interview, 1967

### *1 Folder (box 1)*

This series consists of one folder of sentence fragments taken from a London interview of Berman undertaken by Sandrada.

Notes from interview are on reel 5282.

Box 1, Folder 26          Notes from London Interview by Sandrada, 1967

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 3: Writings by Others, 1972, undated

### *6 Folders (box 1)*

This series includes a typescripts for two manuscripts and poems by Michael McClure, David Meltzer, and John Wieners.

Writings by others are on reel 5282.

Box 1, Folder 27	Typescript: "Eats" by Unidentified Author, undated
Box 1, Folder 28	Typescript for Book <i>Love Lion Book</i> , by Michael McClure, undated
Box 1, Folder 29	Poem by Unidentified Author, undated
Box 1, Folder 30	Poems by Michael McClure, 1972, undated
Box 1, Folder 31	Poems by David Meltzer, undated
Box 1, Folder 32	Poem by John Wieners, undated

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 4: Artwork, 1956-1976

*4 Folders (box 1, OV 7)*

This series consists of eleven collages and nine drawings by Berman, and eight "photograms" by Robert F. Heinecken.

Artwork is on reel 5282.

Box 1, Folder 33-35      Artwork by Berman, 1956-1976, undated  
*(see also OV 7)*

Box 1, Folder 36      Artwork by Others-Photograms by Robert F. Heinecken, 1971

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 5: Semina, 1955-1967

*26 Folders (boxes 1-2)*

This series consists of copies of Berman's mail art publication *Semina*. There are multiple copies of Nos. 1, 2, 4-8, and an envelope for No. 9. The files also contains Semina Art Gallery announcements.

Semina files are on reel 5282.

Box 1, Folder 37-51	<i>Semina</i> , Nos. 1 - 9, 1955-1964
Box 2, Folder 1-9	<i>Semina</i> , Nos. 1 - 9 cont., 1955-1964
Box 2, Folder 10	Semina Art Gallery Announcements, [1965-1967]

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 6: S. M. S., 1968

*1 Folder (box 2)*

This series consists of a copy of No. 1 of the mail art publication S. M. S.

S.M.S. file is on reel 5282.

Box 2, Folder 11            S. M. S., No. 1, 1968

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 7: Printed Material, 1907-1976

### 2.7 Linear feet (boxes 2-5)

This series consists of clippings, exhibition announcements, catalogs, brochures, booklets, scripts written by Berman's colleagues, seventy-four books, and miscellaneous printed material. Exhibition announcements and catalogs for others includes a catalog autographed by Jasper Johns.

The series is arranged as two subseries.

- 7.1: General Printed Material, 1908-1976
- 7.2: Books, 1907-1974, undated

Printed materials are on reels 5282-5284.

### 7.1: General Printed Material, 1908-1976

Box 2, Folder 12-24	Clippings, 1962-1976, undated
Box 2, Folder 25-29	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs for Berman, 1968-1975, undated
Box 2, Folder 30-32	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs for Others, 1964-1971, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Brochures, 1964-1974
Box 3, Folder 2	Booklets, "Kolner Puppen-Theater," Vols. 2, 4, by Fritz Honig, 1908-1910
Box 3, Folder 3	Booklets, "Work of the Chariot," 1970
Box 3, Folder 4	Booklets, ["Moulin a Papier Richard de Bas in Ambert, France,"], 1974
Box 3, Folder 5	Scripts, <i>The Beard</i> , by Michael McClure, 1965
Box 3, Folder 6	Scripts, <i>The Yin and the Yang</i> , by Don Sherman, Dennis Hopper, and Peter Fonda, 1966 <a href="#">Image(s)</a>

### 7.2: Books, 1907-1974, undated

The books in this subseries include works on various religions, theories, and philosophies fundamental to the beat movement. There are first edition publications by many of the movement's leaders.

The books are arranged chronologically.

Box 3, Folder 7	<i>Phanopoeia Pavane: Dance - Play in Verse</i> by unidentified author, undated
Box 3, Folder 8	<i>Another Academy</i> by Charles Bukowski, undated
Box 3, Folder 9	<i>Kabbalah</i> by Rabbi Levi L. Krakowsky, undated
Box 3, Folder 10	<i>Ozma of Oz</i> by L. Frank Baum, 1907
Box 3, Folder 11	<i>The Book of formation or Sepher Yetzirah</i> by Knut Stenring, 1923

- Box 3, Folder 12      *The Story of Modern Science* by Henry Smith Williams, 1923
- Box 3, Folder 13      *Rota ou & La Roue Celeste* by Enel, 1930
- Box 3, Folder 14      *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* by Ernest Fenollosa, edited by Ezra Pound, 1936
- Box 3, Folder 15      *The Journal of Albion Moonlight* by Kenneth Patchen, 1944
- Box 3, Folder 16      *Pictures of Life and of Death* by Kenneth Patchen, 1946
- Box 3, Folder 17      *Poems 1948-49* by Robert Duncan, [1949]
- Box 3, Folder 18      *The Waters Reglitterized* by Henry Miller, 1950
- Box 3, Folder 19      *Howl* by Allen Ginsberg, 1956
- Box 3, Folder 20      *The Pearl Tears* by Nickolas Logan, 1956
- Box 3, Folder 21      *Collectanea: I E Alexander*, , 1957  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 3, Folder 22      *Images de Jean Cocteau*, preface de Georges Noel, [1957?]
- Box 3, Folder 23      *The Wisdom of the Kabbalah*, foreword by Dagobert D. Runes, 1957
- Box 3, Folder 24      *Hymns to St. Geryon and Other Poems* by Michael McClure, 1959
- Box 3, Folder 25      *Ragas* by David Meltzer, 1959
- Box 3, Folder 26      *Letters* by Robert Duncan, 1958
- Box 3, Folder 27      *Gallery of Women* by Ruth Weiss, 1959  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 3, Folder 28      *The First War Planes* by William E. Barrett, , 1960
- Box 3, Folder 29      *A Correspondence of Americans* by Jack Hirschman, 1960
- Box 3, Folder 30      *Wobbly Rock* by Lew Welch, 1960
- Box 3, Folder 31      *Poems for Selected People* by Idell, 1961  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 3, Folder 32      *Destroyed Works* by Philip Lamantia, 1962
- Box 3, Folder 33      *We All Have Something to Say to Each Other* by David Meltzer, 1962
- Box 4, Folder 1      *Robert Ronnie Branaman*, , 1963
- Box 4, Folder 2      *Television Decollage & Morning Glory/ 2 Pieces* by Volf Vostell, , 1963

- Box 4, Folder 3            *Points in Time by Zack Walsh, , 1963*
- Box 4, Folder 4            *Ballads by Helen Adams, illustrated by Jess, 1964*
- Box 4, Folder 5            *Black Pilgrimage by Cameron, 1964*  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 4, Folder 6            *Ghost Tantras by Michael McClure, 1964*
- Box 4, Folder 7            *The Esoteric Tarot by Simon Kasdin, 1965*
- Box 4, Folder 8            *The Process by David Meltzer, 1965*
- Box 4, Folder 9            *Chinoiserie by John Wieners, 1965*
- Box 4, Folder 10           *The Hotel Wentley Poems by John Wieners, 1965*
- Box 4, Folder 11           *Bruce Connor/Michael McClure, , 1966*
- Box 4, Folder 12           *Sapphobones by Kirby Doyle, 1966*
- Box 4, Folder 13           *A Portents Semina, Portents #6, (for Wallace Berman) By Samuel Charters, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 14           *A Dream by Steve Elvin, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 15           *Love Dragon Poem by Michael L. Fram, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 16           *The Soap Opera by Piero Heliczer, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 17           *William Blake by Jack Hirschman, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 18           *Zen Love Poems by Idell, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 19           *Golden Sardine by Bob Kaufman, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 20           *Lying Together; Turning the Head & Shifting the Weight; The Produce District, & Other Places; Moving -- A Spring Poem by Ron Loewinsohn, 1967*
- Box 4, Folder 21           *Business Cards by Billy Al Bengston and Ed Ruscha, 1968*
- Box 4, Folder 22           *The Finger by Bobbie Creeley, 1968*
- Box 4, Folder 23           *Hail Thee Who Play by Michael McClure, 1968*
- Box 4, Folder 24           *Round the Poem Box; Rustic & Domestic Home Movies for Stan & Jane Brakhage by David Meltzer, 1969*
- Box 4, Folder 25           *Black Alephs by Jack Hirschman, 1969*
- Box 4, Folder 26           *Shekinah by Jack Hirschman, 1969*



Box 4, Folder 27	<i>Hymns to St. Geryon and Other Poems/Dark Brown</i> by Michael McClure, 1969
Box 4, Folder 28	<i>Gallowsongs: Galgenlieder</i> by Christian Morgenstern Versions by Jess, 1970
Box 4, Folder 29	<i>General Principles of the Kabbalah</i> by Rabbi Moses C. Luzzatto, 1970
Box 4, Folder 30	<i>Greenspeech</i> by David Meltzer, 1970
Box 4, Folder 31	<i>Luna</i> by David Meltzer, 1970
Box 4, Folder 32	<i>Altars</i> by Clayton Eshleman, 1971
Box 4, Folder 33	<i>Scintilla</i> by Jack Hirschman, 1971
Box 4, Folder 34	<i>Knots</i> by David Meltzer, 1971
Box 4, Folder 35	<i>An Excerpt from "The Disconcerting Games of Vadim the Mechanic"</i> by Ben Talbert, 1971
Box 4, Folder 36	<i>Kabbala Surrealism: An Essay and The R of the Ari's Raziel</i> by Jack Hirschman, 1972
Box 4, Folder 37	<i>The Mammals</i> by Michael McClure, 1972
Box 4, Folder 38	<i>Spectral Measures on the Unit Disc</i> by Bartholomew, 1973
Box 4, Folder 39	<i>Hero/Lil</i> by David Meltzer, 1973
Box 5, Folder 1	<i>Kabbalah</i> by Charles Ponce, 1973
Box 5, Folder 2	<i>Alphabet</i> by Stuart Z. Perkoff, 1973
Box 5, Folder 3	<i>Cantillations and DJackson</i> by Jack Hirschman, 1974
Box 5, Folder 4	<i>Igitur</i> by Stephane Mallarme, 1974
Box 5, Folder 5	<i>Rare Angel</i> by Michael McClure, 1974
Box 5, Folder 6	<i>September Blackberries</i> by Michael McClure, 1974
Box 5, Folder 7	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1970-1974

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Series 8: Photographs, 1956-1976

### *6 Folders (box 5, OV 7)*

This series contains photographs of Berman, his wife, his colleagues, the Poets' Parade, and his work *Wall Painting*. The five photographs of Berman show him with Artie Richer, B. Alexander, David Meltzer at Fergus Gallery, his son Tosh, and William Hillman. Photographs of colleagues include: Cameron, 1962; Richard Constantino, 1958; S. Berman and Samson de Brier, 1956; Samson de Brier, 1957; Bill Eisenlord, undated; George Herms, 1960; Louise Herms, 1958; Pat Jordan, 1960; Philip Lamantia, 1958 and 1959; Michael McClure (16 undated photographs); Artie Richer with Berman, 1958; John Wieners, 1959 and 1964.

Photographs are on reel 5284.

Box 5, Folder 8	Photographs of Berman, 1957-1976 <i>(5 photographs; see also OV 7)</i>
Box 5, Folder 9-11	Photographs of Colleagues, 1956-1964 <i>(see also OV 7)</i>
Box 5, Folder 12	Photographs of the Poets' Parade, 1958 <i>(3 photographs)</i>
Box 5, Folder 13	Photographs of Artwork "Wall Painting" by Berman, 1974 <i>(2 photographs)</i>

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Series 9: Sound Recordings, 1962-1965

### *6 Folders (box 6)*

This series contains twelve reel-to-reel tapes of poetry readings by Michael McClure, David Meltzer, and Kenneth Patchen.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Box 6, Folder 1   | Michael McClure and Unidentified Poet Performing with Sound Effects, undated<br><i>1 Sound tape reel</i>   |
| Box 6, Folder 2   | Poetry Readings by David Meltzer and Kenneth Patchen, 1962<br><i>1 Sound tape reel</i>   |
| Box 6, Folder 3-6 | Michael McClure Poetry Reading at the Lion House, San Francisco; recorded by Bruce Kansas Connor, 1965<br><i>10 Sound tape reels (multiple copies of limited edition sound publication)<br/>(9 identical copies)</i> |

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*