



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Isabel Bishop Papers,
1914-1983, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	3
Arrangement.....	3
Names and Subjects	4
Container Listing	6
Series 1: Biographical Material, 1943-1975.....	6
Series 2: Correspondence, 1939-1983.....	7
Series 3: Organization Files, 1924-1937, 1951-1952.....	9
Series 4: Writings & Notes, 1937-1960s.....	10
Series 5: Printed Material, 1930-1979.....	11
Series 6: Photographs, 1914, circa 1920s-1975.....	12
Series 7: Artwork, circa 1940s-1970s.....	13

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Isabel Bishop papers
Identifier:	AAA.bishisab
Date:	1914-1983
Extent:	2.6 Linear feet
Creator:	Bishop, Isabel, 1902-1988
Language:	English
Summary:	The papers of realist painter Isabel Bishop date from 1914 to 1983 and measure 2.6 linear feet. The collection documents Bishop's painting career, her friendship with other artists, and her participation in several arts organizations. There are scattered biographical documents, correspondence with fellow artists such as Peggy Bacon, Warren Chappell, Edward Laning, and R. B. Kitaj, and with writers, curators, museums, galleries, arts organizations, and others. Also found are arts organization files, Bishop's writings about Warren Chappell and friend Reginald Marsh, notes, exhibition catalogs, news clippings, and other printed material, photographs of Bishop and her artwork, and photographs of Reginald and Felicia Marsh. Original artwork includes 8 sketchbooks, loose sketches, prints, and watercolor figure studies.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The collection was donated in several installments by Isabel Bishop from 1959 to 1983.

Related Material

Also found at the Archives of American Art are three oral history interviews with Isabel Bishop, April 15, 1959, May 29, 1959, and November 12-December 11, 1987.

The Whitney Museum of American Art and Midtown Galleries loaned additional Bishop papers to the Archives for microfilming on reels NY59-4 and NY59-5. These items were returned to the lenders after microfilming and are not described in the container listing of this finding aid.

Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Isabel Bishop** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2008 , and total 2,150 images.

Processing Information

Portions of this collection received a preliminary level of processing at some point after donation. The collection was typically microfilmed in the order in which it was received on reels NY59-4, NY59-5, D283, D359, 2, 64, 100, and 4938. The entire collection was fully processed, arranged, and described by Erin Corley in 2007 and scanned in 2008 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Isabel Bishop papers, 1914-1983. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Isabel Bishop 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.

Biographical Note

Isabel Bishop (1902-1988) was born in Cincinnati, Ohio to John Remsen Bishop and Anna Bartram Newbold Bishop. Shortly after her birth the family moved to Detroit, Michigan. As a child Bishop took art classes and had a growing interest in drawing. In 1918 at the age of 16 she left home and moved to New York City where she enrolled in the School of Applied Design for Women to be an illustrator. However, her real interest was in painting, not the graphic arts, and she enrolled in the Art Students League in 1920. There she studied with Kenneth Hayes Miller and Guy Pene du Bois and met many young artists, including Reginald Marsh and Edwin Dickinson, both of whom became close friends. She took classes until 1924 and rented a studio and living space on 14th Street in a neighborhood where many artists maintained studios at the time.

Bishop began exhibiting her work and participated in artist groups, including the Whitney Studio Club and the New Society of Artists. During the 1920s and 1930s she developed a realist style of painting, primarily depicting women in their daily routine on the streets of Manhattan. Her work was greatly influenced by Peter Paul Rubens and other Dutch and Flemish painters that she had discovered during trips to Europe. In 1932 Bishop began showing her work frequently at the newly opened Midtown Galleries, where her work would be represented throughout her career.

In 1934 she married Harold Wolff, a neurologist, and moved with him to Riverdale, New York. Bishop kept her studio in Manhattan, moving from 14th Street to Union Square. She remained in her Union Square studio for fifty years (1934-1984). From 1936 to 1937 she taught at the Art Students League and in 1940 her son Remsen was born. In 1941 she was named a member of the National Academy of Design and from 1944 to 1946 she was the Vice President of the National Institute of Arts & Letters, the first woman to hold an executive position with that organization. She wrote articles and joined other artists in speaking out in support of realist painting and against the abstract style that was dominating the New York art scene.

During her long career which lasted into the 1980s, Bishop exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions, traveled throughout the U. S. as an exhibition juror, and won many awards for her work,

including the award for Outstanding Achievement in the Arts presented by President Jimmy Carter in 1979.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of realist painter Isabel Bishop date from 1914 to 1983 and measure 2.6 linear feet. The collection documents Bishop's painting career, her friendship with other artists, and her participation in several arts organizations. Scattered biographical documents include awards and a file on her participation in art juries.

Bishop was friends with many artists and cultural figures and her correspondence includes letters to and from artists such as John Taylor Arms, Peggy Bacon, Peter Blume, Warren Chappell (many letters from Chappell are illustrated), Sidney Delevante, Edwin Dickinson, Philip Evergood, John Folinsbee, Malvina Hoffman, Jo Hopper, James Kearns, Leon Kroll, Clare Leighton, Jack Levine, Alice Neel, Hobson Pittman, Fairfield Porter, Abraham Rattner, Katherine Schmidt, Henry Schnakenberg, Raphael Soyer, George Tooker, Stuyvesant Van Veen, Franklin Watkins, Mahonri Young, and William Zorach. Bishop not only corresponded with artists but also many poets, authors, historians, and dancers, such as Van Wyck Brooks, John Canaday, John Ciardi, Merce Cunningham, Babette Deutsch, Edna Ferber, Richmond Lattimore, Marianne Moore, Lewis Mumford, Kurt Vonnegut, and Glenway Westcott. Also found are letters from many galleries, museums, and schools which exhibited or purchased her work, including curators Juliana Force and Una Johnson.

Bishop kept files from her affiliations with the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers and the New Society of Artists, containing mostly membership and financial records, and a file on a UNESCO conference. Unfortunately, files documenting her membership and vice presidency of the National Institute of Arts & Letters are not found here.

A small amount of Bishop's writings and notes include essays about friends and artists Reginald Marsh and Warren Chappell. Printed material consists of exhibition catalogs and announcements, news clippings, magazines, and a design by G. Alan Chidsey for a book about Bishop. Photographs depict Bishop with her husband and in her studio, her artwork, and also include three photographs of her friend, Reginald Marsh.

Original artwork includes eight small sketchbooks, loose pen and ink sketches, intaglio prints, watercolor figure studies, and a drawing of Bishop by Aaron Bohrod.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 7 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1943-1975 (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1939-1983 (Box 1; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 3: Organization Files, 1924-1937, 1951-1952 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 4: Writings & Notes, 1937-1960s (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1930-1979 (Box 2; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 6: Photographs, 1914, circa 1920s-1975 (Box 2, OV 5; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 7: Artwork, circa 1940s-1970s (Box 2-4, OV 5; 0.4 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Realism in art

Types of Materials:

Illustrated letters
Photographs
Prints
Sketchbooks
Sketches
Watercolors

Names:

American Society of Painters, Sculptors and Gravers
Arms, John Taylor, 1887-1953
Bacon, Peggy, 1895-1987
Blume, Peter, 1906-1992
Brooks, Van Wyck, 1886-1963
Canaday, John, 1907-1985
Chappell, Warren, 1904-
Ciardi, John, 1916-
Cunningham, Merce
Delevante, Sidney, 1894-
Deutsch, Babette, 1895-1982
Dickinson, Edwin Walter, 1891-
Evergood, Philip, 1901-1973
Ferber, Edna, 1887-1968
Folinsbee, John Fulton, 1892-1972
Force, Juliana, 1876-1948
Hoffman, Malvina
Hopper, Jo N. (Josephine Nivison), 1883-1968
Johnson, Una E.
Kearns, James
Kitaj, R. B.
Kroll, Leon, 1884-1974
Laning, Edward, 1906-
Lattimore, Richmond Alexander, 1906-1984
Leighton, Clare, 1899-
Marsh, Reginald, 1898-1954
Moore, Marianne, 1887-1972
Mumford, Lewis, 1895-1990
Neel, Alice, 1900-1984
New Society of Artists (New York, N.Y.)
Pittman, Hobson Lafayette, 1899 or 1900-1972
Porter, Fairfield
Rattner, Abraham
Schmidt, Katherine, 1898-1978
Schnakenberg, H. E. (Henry Ernest), 1892-1970

Soyer, Raphael, 1899-1987
Tooker, George
Van Veen, Stuyvesant
Vonnegut, Kurt
Watkins, Franklin Chenault, 1894-1972
Westcott, Glenway
Zorach, William, 1887-1966

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1943-1975

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scattered biographical material about Isabel Bishop includes two biographical summaries, one from the book *Outstanding Women Artists of America*, published in 1975, and awards, including one from the National Institute of Arts & Letters. Also found are Bishop's studio guest book signed by visitors and file of material regarding her participation in art juries. This art jury file includes photographs of jury members, news clippings about the events, and one letter regarding her participation.

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Summaries, circa 1957, 1975 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 2	Awards, 1943-1944, 1954 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 3	Isabel Bishop Studio Guest Book, 1961 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 4	Art Jury Participation File, 1948-1956 Image(s)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1939-1983

0.6 Linear feet (Box 1)

Isabel Bishop's correspondence spans over forty years, with the bulk of it dating between 1960 and 1973. Letters found here are both personal and professional. There are separate files of correspondence with artists Warren Chappell, R. B. Kitaj, and Edward Laning, poet John Canaday and his wife Katherine, and physicist John M. Frankland. Over half of the letters to Bishop from Warren Chappell are illustrated.

Bishop's chronological general correspondence primarily consists of incoming letters, with a few outgoing letters. Bishop was friends with many artists and cultural figures and her correspondence includes letters to and from artists such as John Taylor Arms, Peggy Bacon, Peter Blume, Warren Chappell, Sidney Delevante, Edwin Dickinson, Philip Evergood, John Folinsbee, Malvina Hoffman, Jo Hopper, James Kearns, Leon Kroll, Clare Leighton, Jack Levine, Alice Neel, Hobson Pittman, Fairfield Porter, Abraham Rattner, Katherine Schmidt, Henry Schnakenberg, Raphael Soyer, George Tooker, Stuyvesant Van Veen, Franklin Watkins, Mahonri Young, and William Zorach. Bishop also corresponded with poets, authors, historians, and dancers, such as Van Wyck Brooks, John Ciardi, Merce Cunningham, Babette Deutsch, Edna Ferber, Richmond Lattimore, Marianne Moore, Lewis Mumford, Kurt Vonnegut, and Glenway Westcott. There are also letters from many galleries, museums, and schools which exhibited or purchased her work, including Juliana Force and Una Johnson, and art organizations.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 9	Undated Correspondence with Warren Chappell, circa 1966-1983 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence with John & Katherine Canaday, 1964-1980 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 6-8	Correspondence with Warren Chappell, 1941-1949, 1966-1983 (3 folders) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence with John M. Frankland, 1976-1980 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence with R. B. Kitaj, 1974-1984 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence with Edward Laning, 1943-1980 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 13-25	General Correspondence, 1939-1983 (13 folders) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)

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Box 1, Folder 26

Undated General Correspondence, circa 1939-1983

[Image\(s\)](#)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Organization Files, 1924-1937, 1951-1952

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

This series contains files or records of arts organizations in which Bishop participated, including the American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers and the New Society of Artists. The files contain a variety of materials, such as a constitution, lists of members, various receipts and bills, a dues ledger, and price lists. Note that her role as an officer in the National Institute of Arts and Letters is not documented here. Bishop's file on UNESCO includes documents regarding her participation in the 1952 International Conference of Artists and contains agendas, reports, notes on panels, and other documents.

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1	American Society of Painters, Sculptors, and Gravers
Box 1, Folder 27	Administrative, Membership & Financial Records, 1930-1935 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 28	Membership Ledger, 1930-1937 Image(s)
Box 1	New Society of Artists
Box 1, Folder 29	Membership Records, 1928-1930 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 30	Price List, 1930 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 31	Financial Documents, 1924-1930 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 32	Accounts Ledger, 1924-1931 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 33	Deposits Ledger, 1926-1929 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 34	UNESCO, Conference Materials, 1951-1952 Image(s)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Writings & Notes, 1937-1960s

4 Folders (Box 1)

This series contains Isabel Bishop's scattered writings and notes. Included are two essays she wrote about her friend and artist Reginald Marsh as well as her research notes for a post office mural, commissioned by New Lexington, Kentucky. Other miscellaneous writings include a brief essay about artist Warren Chappell, notes for lectures on art, and various writing fragments and notes. Also found is an essay on religion by Bishop's mother.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 35	Writings about Reginald Marsh, 1950s, 1956 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 36	Research Notes for Post Office Mural, New Lexington, Kentucky, 1937 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 37	Miscellaneous Writings & Notes, circa 1940s-1960s Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 38	Essay by Anna Newbold Bishop (Isabel Bishop's mother), undated Image(s)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, 1930-1979

0.6 Linear feet (Box 2)

Found here are exhibition catalogs and announcements for Bishop's solo and group shows, including a typescript of a catalog for a Russian exhibition, "Representations of America." News clippings, magazines, and journals contain articles about Bishop, her artwork, exhibitions and other art events. A few of these articles were written by Bishop. Also found is a design by G. Alan Chidsey for the book, *Isabel Bishop*, which contains excerpts from articles and reproductions of her artwork.

Items within each folder are arranged chronologically.

The bulk of this series has been scanned.

Box 2, Folder 1-6	Exhibition Catalogs, 1936-1976 (6 folders) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 7	Exhibition Catalog, "Representations of America", (Typescript), 1978 (Not scanned)
Box 2, Folder 8	Exhibition Announcements, 1942-1974 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 9	News Clippings, 1933-1976 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 10-14	Magazines & Journals, 1930-1977 (5 folders) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s) Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 15	Booklets, 1973-1979 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 16	Book Design for <i>Isabel Bishop</i> , circa 1940 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 17	Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1951-1975 Image(s)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Photographs, 1914, circa 1920s-1975

0.2 Linear feet (Box 2, OV 5)

This series contains photographs of Isabel Bishop and her artwork. Included is circa 1943 photograph of Bishop with husband Harold Wolff and son Remsen, as well as several photographs of her painting in her studio and one photograph of her with Homer Saint-Gaudens, director of the art museum of the Carnegie Institute. Also found are three photographs of Harold Wolff and a photographs of Bishop's friend Reginald Marsh, including a photograph of him with his wife Felicia, in his studio, and receiving an award from Isabel Bishop at the American Academy of Arts & Letters. This series also contains many photographs of Bishop's artwork. Most of the photographs of artwork are annotated on the back with provenance information.

Most of the photographs of artwork have not been scanned.

Box 2, Folder 18	Photographs of Isabel Bishop and Harold Wolff, 1914, circa 1920s, 1943, 1953 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 19	Photographs of Isabel Bishop in Her Studio, circa 1957, 1975 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 20	Photograph of Isabel Bishop and Homer Saint-Gaudens, 1950s Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 21	Photographs of Reginald Marsh, circa 1934, 1950, 1954 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 22-24	Photographs of Artwork, circa 1950s-1960s (3 folders; not scanned; see also OV 5)
Box OV 5	Oversize Photographs of Artwork, circa 1950s-1960s (Not scanned; See also box 2, folders 22-24)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Artwork, circa 1940s-1970s

0.4 Linear feet (Box 2-4, OV 5)

Studies and sketches by Isabel Bishop include several intaglio prints of figures walking on the street, numerous small pen sketches for the painting *Subway Scene*, loose sketches of figures, and eight small sketchbooks containing pen and pencil drawings of people and places. Also found is a watercolor sketch of a figure painted on a small gessoed board. At some point a watercolor sketch on paper of a different figure was wrapped around this board; for preservation, these have been separated. The collection also contains a watercolor sketch portrait of a woman on a gessoed board and a "study for nude" watercolor sketch on canvas. This painting has many large tears in the canvas and it was possibly destroyed by Bishop at some point after she painted it. Also found is a pencil drawing of Isabel Bishop by Aaron Bohrod, signed, "To Isabel Bishop with apologies of Aaron Bohrod."

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| Box 2, Folder 25 | Intaglio Prints, circa 1970s
(See Box 4)
Image(s) |
| Box 2, Folder 26 | Watercolor Sketch on Gessoed Board (Small), undated
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 1 | Watercolor Sketch on Paper (originally wrapped around board), undated
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 2 | Watercolor Sketch on Gessoed Board (Large), undated
(See Box 4)
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 3 | Watercolor Sketch on Gessoed Canvas (Damaged), undated
(See Box 4)
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 4 | Sketches for "Gum Machine" in the Finished Painting <i>Subway Scene</i> , circa 1956
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 5 | Loose Sketches, circa 1940s-1950s
(See also OV 5)
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder
6-8 | Sketchbooks, circa 1950s
(3 folders)
Image(s)
Image(s)
Image(s) |
| Box 3 (pam), Folder 9 | Drawing of Isabel Bishop by Aaron Bohrod, circa 1950s
Image(s) |
| Box 4 (sol) | Oversize Intaglio Prints, circa 1970s
(See also box 2, folder 25) |
| Box 4 (sol) | Oversize Watercolor Sketch on Gessoed Board (Large), undated |

(See also box 3, folder 2)

Box 4 (sol) Oversize Watercolor Sketch on Gessoed Canvas (Damaged), undated
(See also box 3, folder 3)

Box OV 5 Oversize Loose Sketches, circa 1940s-1950s
(See also box 3, folder 5)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)