



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears Papers, 1920-1991, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears papers
Date:	1920-1991
Identifier:	AAA.blackath
Creator:	Blackshear, Kathleen, 1897-1988 Spears, Ethel, 1903-1974
Extent:	9.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of educators and painters Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears measure 9.2 linear feet and date from 1920 to 1991. The papers focus primarily on Blackshear's career but also document the career of Blackshear's partner Ethel Spears, and the involvement of both women in the Chicago, Illinois art scene. Papers include biographical material, correspondence, handmade holiday and greeting cards, artist files, research and subject files, and printed material.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears papers were donated in 1990 by William Terrell, Blackshear's nephew and executor.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2021.

Preferred Citation

Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears papers, 1920-1991. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Kathleen Blackshear (1897-1998) was a painter, writer, and educator. Ethel Spears (1903-1974) was a painter and educator. Blackshear and Spears were longtime partners and both were active in Chicago, Illinois.

Kathleen Blackshear was born in Navasota, Texas in 1897. She attended Baylor University and the Art Students League before settling at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she took graduate classes and served as a teaching assistant under Helen Gardner. She succeeded Gardner as teacher and subsequently held that position for thirty-five years, expanding Gardner's legacy of introducing students to the history of art by placing a special emphasis on artistic traditions outside of Western Europe. The importance and influence of Blackshear's teaching focus is reflected in several subsequent generations of students, including Whitney Halstead and the Chicago Imagists group. Blackshear also lectured at other institutions.

In addition to teaching, Blackshear contributed analytical drawings for Helen Gardner's publications, painted two cycloramas for the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-1934, and exhibited her prints and paintings. As a painter, Blackshear was known for her depictions of African Americans.

Ethel Spears was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1903. She attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and studied under Alexander Archipenko at the Art Students League in New York City before returning to the School of the Art Institute to teach. Spears was known for her paintings of urban scenes.

It is likely that Blackshear and Spears met while teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. They lived together in Chicago and moved to Navasota, Texas upon retiring. They remained together until Spears's death in 1974. Blackshear died in 1988.

Scope and Contents

The papers of educators and painters Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears measure 9.2 linear feet and date from 1920 to 1991. The papers focus primarily on Blackshear's career but also document the career of Blackshear's partner Ethel Spears, and the involvement of both women in the Chicago, Illinois art scene. Papers include biographical material, correspondence, handmade holiday and greeting cards, artist files, research and subject files, and printed material.

Biographical materials include address books, sketches, teaching records, personal business records of both Blackshear and Spears, and photographs of the two women. Correspondence is scattered but comments on Spears's participation with the Works Progress Administration. Handmade holiday cards are from friends, colleagues, students, and fellow artists, and were sent to Blackshear and Spears throughout their decades-long partnership. The bulk of the papers consist of files kept by Blackshear on artists and various art-related subjects.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1920-1967 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1925-1986 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Handmade Holiday Cards, circa 1920-circa 1960 (2.8 linear feet; Boxes 1-4)
- Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1920-1950s (0.7 linear feet; Boxes 4-5)
- Series 5: Artist Files, 1922-1981 (0.9 linear feet; Box 5)
- Series 6: Research and Subject Files, circa 1920s-circa 1960s (Boxes 6-9; 4.0 linear feet)
- Series 7: Printed Material, 1925-1991 (0.2 linear feet; Box 10)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Women artists
- Women educators
- Women painters

Types of Materials:

- Diaries
- Sketchbooks

Names:

- Art Institute of Chicago
- Art Institute of Chicago. School
- Gardner, Helen, d. 1946

Occupations:

- Educators -- Illinois -- Chicago
- Painters -- Illinois -- Chicago

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1920-1967

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Series includes scattered biographical materials for Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears. Of note are personal business records kept by Spears of her time with the Works Progress Administration. Also found is a sketchbook from 1920 kept by Blackshear during a trip to Europe. Teaching files consist of copies of Blackshear's given exams at the Art Institute of Chicago, memoranda, and a file of "blunders" which contain quotes from student papers she found humorous. Two photographs depict Blackshear and Spears and slides are of works of art by Blackshear.

Box 1, Folder 1-4	Address Books, 1940s-1960s
Box 1, Folder 5-6	Biographical Sketches, Curriculum Vitae, Resumes, 1935-1950s
Box 1, Folder 7-9	Personal Business Records, 1933-1953
Box 1, Folder 10-11	Photographs and Slides, 1950s-1967
Box 1, Folder 12-13	Sketches and Sketchbooks, 1920-circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 14-18	Teaching Records, 1932-1965

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1925-1986

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Kathleen Blackshear's correspondence includes condolence letters sent after the death of her parents and from institutions and museums such as the Southern States Art League and the Art Institute of Chicago. Also found are letters written by Ethel Spears to Kathleen Blackshear throughout their relationship. Ethel Spears's correspondence includes letters from Florence Arquin, Fred Biesel, Daniel Cotton Rich, Increase Robinson, and Ed Rowan. Many of the letters relate to her participation in the Works Progress Administration.

Arrangement: Researchers should note that additional correspondence may be found in Series 3 and Series 4.

Box 1, Folder 19	General, Kathleen Blackshear, 1925-1986
Box 1, Folder 20-21	From Ethel Spears to Kathleen Blackshear, 1939-1956
Box 1, Folder 22	General, Ethel Spears, 1935-1967
Box 1, Folder 23	Works Progress Administration, Ethel Spears, 1935-1943

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Series 3: Handmade Holiday Cards, circa 1920-circa 1960

2.8 Linear feet (Boxes 1-4)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of handmade holiday and greeting cards sent to Blackshear and Spears throughout their long partnership and before, although the majority of the cards are undated. Many of the cards were made and sent by fellow Chicago artists, students, and friends. Some handmade greeting cards contain personal messages. Notable people represented include Emil Armin, Carl Hoeckner, Rockwell Kent, Increase Robinson, Nelli and Paul Weigardt, and Rudolph Weisinborn.

Arrangement: Following Blackshear's and Spears's cards, cards are arranged alphabetically by sender, with circa dates provided as many are undated. Miscellaneous and commercial cards are housed at the end of the series.

Box 1, Folder 24	Kathleen Blackshear's and Ethel Spear's Holiday Cards, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 25	A, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 26	Aubin, Barbara, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 27	B, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 28	Baker, Anna, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 29	Balzer-Canteini, Margaret, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 30	Baum, Alice and Don, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 31	Bennett, Eugene, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 32	Berdich, Vera, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 33	Biesel, Frances and Fred, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 34	Brincka, Bill, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 1	Bucci, Andrew, circa 1920-circa 1961
Box 2, Folder 2	C, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 3	Chassaing, Maxine, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 4	Coursey, Faye, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 5	Cowan, Gwen and Lloyd, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 6	Craft, Betty and Doug, circa 1920-circa 1960

Box 2, Folder 7	D, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 8	E, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 9	Ede, Arlis, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 10	Emerson, Alyce and John, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 11	F, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 12	Felsenthal, Francine, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 13	Foy-Dalstrom, Frances and Gustaf, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 14	Frederick, William, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 15	Frederickson, Carlis, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 16	Fry, Rowena and Natalie Henry, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 17	G, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 18	Giese, Alberta and Clarence, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 19	Ginzel, Ronald, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 20	Goy, Marvin, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 21	Graf, Herman, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 22	Grill, A.H., circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 23	H, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 24	Hahn, Walter, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 25	Hall, Lill, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 26	Halstead, Whitney, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 27	Hannell, Hazel and Vin, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 28	Hartmann, Marjorie, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 29	Harvey, James, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 30	Hinz, Bill, circa 1920-circa 1960

Box 2, Folder 31	Howlett, Carolyn and James, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 32	I, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 33	J, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 34	Jacobson, Emmanuel, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 35	Jogalsky, Daniel, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 36	Johnson, Edwin Boyd, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 37	Johnstone, Ralph, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 38	K, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 39	Kaar, Virginia, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 40	Kapsalis, Tom, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 41	Kauffman, A., circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 42	Kensler, Barbara and Gordon, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 43	Kent, Rockwell, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 44	L, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 45	Lagerstrom, Gertrude, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 46	Larsen, Melvin, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 47	LaSalle, Janet, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 48	Levy, Beatrice, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 49	Lukens, Petronel, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 50	M, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 51	MacKenzie, Warren, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 1	Markov, John and Mary, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 2	Martin, Keith, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 3	Mayers, Leo and Vivian, circa 1920-circa 1960

Box 3, Folder 4	McWhinnie, Harold, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 5	Mendenhall, Kveta and George, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 6	Mettinet-Moulis, Ardith, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 7	Muehlmeier, Ruth, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 8	Mueller, Henriette, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 9	N, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 10	O, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 11	P & Q, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 12	Pantilla, P.E., circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 13	Philbrick, Allen, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 14	R, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 15	Raymer, Lester, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 16	Reeves, Ruth, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 17	Reid, Jane, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 18	Renald, Holly, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 19	Rice, Jean and Norman, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 20-21	S, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 22	Salwonchick, Marie, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 23	Sato-Chiko, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 24	Schofield, F., circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 25	Scott, Diane, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 26-27	Sisters, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 28	Stein, Lischa, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 29	T, circa 1920-circa 1960

Box 3, Folder 30	Tolozco, Raymond, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 31	Tyler, Quinn, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 32	U & V, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 33	Ulreich, Buk-Nura, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 34	W, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 35	Walch, John and James Colgnon, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 36	Wallace, Ginger Elis, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 37	Waltrip, Mildred, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 38	Weighardt, Paul and Nelli, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 39	Willever, Don, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 40	Witt, M., circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 41	Wondriska, William, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 1	Yates, Jean, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 2	Yoshida, Raymond, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 3	Zeller, Jos, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 4-9	Miscellaneous, circa 1920-circa 1960
Box 4, Folder 10-12	Commercial Christmas Cards, circa 1920-circa 1960

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Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1920-1950s

0.7 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)

Scope and Contents: Writings on art are by Kathleen Blackshear and Helen Gardner, including Blackshear's thesis written in 1940. Also found are travel diaries Blackshear kept during trips to Europe in the 1920s through the 1950s, and general notes.

Box 4, Folder 13	Studies of Negros from 1924 to 1940, by Kathleen Blackshear, 1940
Box 4, Folder 14-20	Art Through the Ages, by Helen Gardner, Proof, 1946
Box 4, Folder 21-23	Survey of Art, by Kathleen Blackshear, 1926 June
Box 4, Folder 24-26	Travel Diaries, 1920-circa 1950
Box 4, Folder 27-29	Notes, General, 1940s-1950s
Box 5, Folder 1-2	Notes, General, 1940s-1950s

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Series 5: Artist Files, 1922-1981

0.9 Linear feet (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: Artist files were kept by Blackshear on friends, colleagues, and other artists, and may include scattered correspondence, printed material such as clippings and exhibition material, and notes.

Box 5, Folder 3	Abercrombie, Gertrude, 1953
Box 5, Folder 4	Angel, Rifka, 1936-1961
Box 5, Folder 5	Archipenko, Alexander, 1937-1956
Box 5, Folder 6	Arquin, Florence, 1928-1966
Box 5, Folder 7	Bahnc, Salcia, 1927-1952
Box 5, Folder 8	Baker, Anna, 1967
Box 5, Folder 9	Bennett, Eugene, 1950-1968
Box 5, Folder 10	Berdich, Vera, 1954-1964
Box 5, Folder 11	Biddle, George, 1944-1945
Box 5, Folder 12	Britton, Edgar, 1940s
Box 5, Folder 13	Brod, Fritzi, circa 1950
Box 5, Folder 14	Bucci, Andrew, 1956-1967
Box 5, Folder 15	Copeland, Charles, 1940-1945
Box 5, Folder 16	Coursey, circa 1940
Box 5, Folder 17	Dalstrom, Gustaf and Frances Foy, 1943-1954
Box 5, Folder 18	Dieringer, Ernest, 1955-1956
Box 5, Folder 19	Donaldson, Elsie, 1960-1965
Box 5, Folder 20	Durzynski, Florian, 1944
Box 5, Folder 21	Felsenthal, Francine, circa 1930s-1950s
Box 5, Folder 22	French, Beales and Myrtle, 1959-1965
Box 5, Folder 23-25	Gardner, Helen, 1922-1950

Box 5, Folder 26-27	Halstead, Whitney, 1949-1967
Box 5, Folder 28	Hurley, Doran and John, 1939-1944
Box 5, Folder 29	Jacobs, Madge and Frank, 1950s
Box 5, Folder 30	Jacobson, Emanuel, circa 1940s
Box 5, Folder 31	Kuh, Katherine, 1963
Box 5, Folder 32	Kapsalis, Tom, 1954-1963
Box 5, Folder 33	Kauffman, Andrene, 1960
Box 5, Folder 34	Lea, Tom, 1961
Box 5, Folder 35	Mayers, Vivian, 1962-1966
Box 5, Folder 36	Mackenger, Warren, 1945
Box 5, Folder 37	Nura, Florence, 1934-1937
Box 5, Folder 38	Plunkett, Ed, 1962-1963
Box 5, Folder 39	Rice, Norman, 1933-1956
Box 5, Folder 40	Sayers, Lionel, 1962-1963
Box 5, Folder 41	Sisters of St. Helena, 1946-1951
Box 5, Folder 42	Sister Thomasita, 1950-1966
Box 5, Folder 43	Stillman, Alexander, 1962
Box 5, Folder 44	Statsinger, Evelyn, 1949-1964
Box 5, Folder 45	Tolczko, Ray, 1951-1981
Box 5, Folder 46	Yoshida, Ray, 1955-1963
Box 5, Folder 48	Waltrip, Mildred, 1933
Box 5, Folder 47	Wilson, Douglas, 1942

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Series 6: Research and Subject Files, circa 1920s-circa 1960s

4 Linear feet (Boxes 6-9)

Scope and Contents: Files consist of Blackshear's research and notes on art movements, places, and techniques. It is likely they were used to prepare for lectures at the School of the Institute of Chicago and other schools and institutions at which she was invited to speak. Files may contain handwritten notes taken from dismantled binders and printed material.

Arrangement: Researchers should note that many of the titles were transcribed from dismantled binders.

Box 6, Folder 1-6	19th and 20th Century Painting, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 7	3-Dimensional Art, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 8-13	Architecture, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 14	Art Institute of Chicago, Summer School, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 15-16	Books and Magazines, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 17	Byzantine, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 18-21	Ceramics, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 22-24	Cezanne, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 25	Christian Symbolism, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 6, Folder 26	Color, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 1	Composition Criticism, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 2	Cubists, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 3-5	Dada and Surrealism, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 6	Design, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 7-9	Europe, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 10	Expressionists, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 11	France, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 12	Frescos, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 13	Futurists and Fauves, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 14	Gauguin, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 7, Folder 15	Germany, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 16	Gothic, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 17	Goya, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 18	Hinduism, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 19	India, China, Japan, Persia, Mexico, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 20-21	Italian Renaissance, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 22	Italy, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 23-26	Japan, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 7, Folder 27-28	Lectures, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 1-3	Lectures, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 4	Line, circa 1930s-1940s
Box 8, Folder 5	Lithography, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 6	Map and Slide List, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 7	Medieval Europe and Near East, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 8-13	Modern-- Architecture, Artists, Painting, Sculpture, circa 1930s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 14	Mohammedan Period, circa 1940
Box 8, Folder 15	Non-Objective Art, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 16-17	Painting, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 18	Persia, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 19-22	Picasso, Cubism, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 8, Folder 23	Prehistoric, Ancient Art, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 9, Folder 1-9	Primitive, Africa, American Indian, Australia, General, Melanesia, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 9, Folder 10	Romanesque, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 9, Folder 11	Russia, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 12-13 School of the Art Institute of Chicago, circa 1920s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 14 Slide Lists, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 15 Spain, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 16-17 Survey of Art, I & II, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 18 Texture, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 19-22 United States, Painting to Modern, circa 1940s-1960s

Box 9, Folder 23 Van Gogh, circa 1940s-1960s

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Series 7: Printed Material, 1925-1991

0.2 Linear feet (Box 10)

Scope and Contents: Printed materials include clippings, exhibition material, and publications kept by and about Kathleen Blackshear and Ethel Spears.

Box 10, Folder 1-2 Clippings, 1928-1991

Box 10, Folder 3-4 Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1929-1991

Box 10, Folder 5 Magazines, 1925-1936

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