



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Nell Blaine Papers, 1879, 1940-1985, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson and Stephanie Ashley

Processing of this collection received Federal support from the Collections Care Initiative Fund, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative and the National Collections Program. Funding for the digitization of this collection was provided in part by the Terra Foundation for American Art and The Walton Family Foundation.

2020/08/17

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## Collection Overview

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| <b>Repository:</b> | Archives of American Art   |
| <b>Title:</b>      | Nell Blaine papers   |
| <b>Date:</b>       | 1879<br>1940-1985  |
| <b>Identifier:</b> | AAA.blainell   |
| <b>Creator:</b>    | Blaine, Nell, 1922-1996  |
| <b>Extent:</b>     | 2.7 Linear feet  |
| <b>Language:</b>   | English .  |
| <b>Summary:</b>    | The papers of New York painter, illustrator, and printmaker Nell Blaine measure 2.7 linear feet and date from 1879 (a single publication), and 1940-1985. The collection provides scattered documentation of Blaine's life and career through biographical material, correspondence, writings, business records, printed material, scattered artwork, and photographs. Also included in the collection are papers relating to the estate of Blaine's friend, Howard Griffin. |

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Nell Blaine loaned a portion of her papers for microfilming on reel D311. She later donated her papers to the Archives of American Art in 1980 and 1985. The Howard Griffin papers included in the collection were received by Blaine as executrix of Griffin's estate.

### Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of scrapbooks loaned for microfilming on reel D311. Loaned materials were returned to the donor and are not described in the collection container inventory.

### Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art are an interview of Nell Blaine conducted 1967 June 15, by Dorothy Seckler, and the Nell Blaine letters to Robert A. Wilson, 1963-1995.

Additional papers of Nell Blaine are also held by Harvard University.

### Available Formats

The bulk of the collection was digitized in 2023 and is available on the Archives of American Art website. Papers not digitized include duplicates, blank versos of photographs, material with privacy concerns, and complete catalogs and publications for which only covers and relevant pages have been digitized.

## Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2020 with funding from the Collections Care Initiative Fund, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative and the National Collections Program. The collection was further processed and the finding aid was updated by Stephanie Ashley in 2023 and was digitized in 2023 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art and The Walton Family Foundation.

## Preferred Citation

Nell Blaine papers, 1879, 1940-1985. 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

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## Biographical / Historical

Nell Blaine (1922-1996) was a painter, printmaker, and illustrator from Richmond, Virginia, who was active in New York City, New York, and Gloucester Massachusetts. Blaine's early work was abstract, and later evolved to figurative and landscape painting.

Blaine was born in 1922 with severe visual impairments. She received corrective surgery as a child and quickly found a desire to draw and paint what she was finally able to see. Her art education began at the Richmond School of Art and later moved to New York City where she studied under Hans Hofmann. By 1943 Blaine had joined the American Abstract Artists group as the group's youngest member at the age of 21. This association led to her first solo exhibition at Jane Street Gallery, an early artists' cooperative, in 1945. Blaine was a founding member of the Greenwich Village gallery, and her circle of friends included New York artists and poets such as John Ashbery, Leland Bell, Rudy Burckhardt, Willem de Kooning, Robert De Niro Sr., Jane Freilicher, Kenneth Koch, Lee Krasner, Frank O'Hara, and Louisa Matthiasdottir. From 1943-1949 Blaine was married to musician Bob Bass. Blaine exhibited solo at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1953 and was represented by the Poindexter Gallery and the Fischbach Gallery.

In the 1950s, Blaine moved to Paris where she lived with friends including Larry Rivers. She was also a close friend of poet and art writer Howard Griffin, and illustrated a limited edition of his *Four Poems* and served as executrix of his estate.

In 1959, Blaine contracted polio while traveling in Greece. She used a wheelchair for the rest of her life but was able to resume painting after intense rehabilitation to regain the use of her hands.

By the mid-1970s Blaine had moved to Gloucester, Massachusetts where she maintained a summer home for the rest of her life, while also sharing an apartment and studio in New York with artist Carolyn Harris, who was her partner for over thirty years.

Nell Blaine died in 1996 in New York City.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of New York painter, illustrator, and printmaker Nell Blaine measure 2.7 linear feet and date from 1879 (a single publication), and 1940-1985. The collection provides scattered documentation of Blaine's life, career, and relationships within the art world through biographical material, correspondence, writings, business records, printed material, scattered artwork, and photographs depicting Blaine's exhibitions, friends, homes, studios, and artwork. Also included in the collection are papers relating to the estate of Blaine's friend, Howard Griffin. A large proportion of the collection consists of photocopies of original papers and is annotated with Blaine's notes explaining the context and significance of many of the papers.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1950s-1985 (0.3 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1879, 1940-1985 (0.9 linear feet; Boxes 1-2)
- Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1940s-1980s (0.1; Box 2)
- Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1949-1983 (0.4 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1940s-1980s (0.5 linear feet; Boxes 2-3, OV 5)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1950s-1984 (0.1 Linear feet; Box 3, OV 5)
- Series 7: Photographs, 1940s-1980s (0.4 Linear feet; Boxes 3-4)

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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:

Scrapbooks  
Women artists  
Women painters  
Women printmakers

### Names:

Griffin, Howard, 1915-1975  
Harris, Carolyn, 1937-

### Occupations:

Illustrators -- Massachusetts -- Gloucester  
Illustrators -- New York (State) -- New York  
Painters -- Massachusetts -- Gloucester  
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York  
Printmakers -- Massachusetts -- Gloucester  
Printmakers -- New York (State) -- New York

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical Material, 1950s-1985

#### 0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)

**Scope and Contents:** Series includes awards, resumes, family history records, and subject files kept by Blaine on her friends, artists Beatrice Gazzolo and Carolyn Harri, and dancer Midi Garth, and the Yaddo artists' community and retreat. Subject files include printed material, Blaine's notes, and photographs.

**Available Formats:** Series is digitized in entirety.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | <a href="#">Awards, 1973, 1985</a>   |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | <a href="#">Biographical Sketches and Resumes, 1971-1985</a>               |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | <a href="#">Family Histories and Genealogy, circa 1970s</a>                |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | <a href="#">Subject File, on Midi Garth, 1960s</a>                         |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | <a href="#">Subject File, on Beatrice Gazzolo, circa 1940s-circa 1950s</a> |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | <a href="#">Subject File, on Carolyn Harris, 1954-1985</a>                 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | <a href="#">Subject File, on Yaddo Estate, 1920s-1977</a>                  |

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## Series 2: Correspondence, 1879, 1940-1985

### 0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

**Scope and Contents:** Correspondence is with artists, collectors, critics, family, friends, dealers, journalists, institutions, writers, and others. Notable correspondents include Kit Barker, Arthur Cohen, Irene Fisdell, Peggy Guggenheim, Midi Garth, Beatrice Gazzolo, Carolyn Harris, Galway Kinnell, Larry Rivers, John Von Wicht, Olga von Flotow, and others. Also found are illustrated letters by Lilian Kiesler, Richard leBland, and Nina Talbot.

**Arrangement:** This series maintains Nell Blaine's original arrangement by type of correspondent for which Blaine provided annotations and additional information on noted correspondents.

**Available Formats:** Researchers should note that many of the letters are photocopies. This series has been digitized in entirety.

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 8  | <a href="#">Artists and Writers, circa 1940s-1980s</a>              |
| Box 1, Folder 9  | <a href="#">Artists and Writers, 1944-1985</a>                      |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | <a href="#">Writers, 1948-1984</a>                                  |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | <a href="#">Artists and Writers, 1970-1979</a>                      |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | <a href="#">Artists and Writers, 1980-1982</a>                      |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | <a href="#">Artists and Writers, 1983-1985</a>                      |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | <a href="#">Art Institutions and Related Individuals, 1955-1985</a> |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | <a href="#">Collectors, circa 1959-1981</a>                         |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | <a href="#">Collectors, 1982-1985</a>                               |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | <a href="#">Critics and Journalists, circa 1961-1984</a>            |
| Box 1, Folder 18 | <a href="#">Family, 1967-1985</a>                                   |
| Box 1, Folder 19 | <a href="#">Friends, No Names/First Names and A-P, undated</a>      |
| Box 1, Folder 20 | <a href="#">Friends, 1961-1979 May</a>                              |
| Box 1, Folder 21 | <a href="#">Friends, 1979 July-1981 July</a>                        |
| Box 1, Folder 22 | <a href="#">Friends, 1981 August-1985</a>                           |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | <a href="#">Galleries and Dealers, 1955-1984</a>                    |
| Box 1, Folder 24 | <a href="#">General, First Names Only, 1979, undated</a>            |

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 25 | <a href="#">General, A-W, undated</a>   |
| Box 1, Folder 26 | <a href="#">General, 1879, 1940-1971</a><br>Notes: 1879 item is a copy of <i>Scribner's Monthly</i> ; connection to Blaine material is unknown. |
| Box 1, Folder 27 | <a href="#">General, 1972-1976</a>  |
| Box 1, Folder 28 | <a href="#">General, 1977-1978</a>  |
| Box 2, Folder 1  | <a href="#">General, 1979</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 2  | <a href="#">General, 1980-1985</a>  |
| Box 2, Folder 3  | <a href="#">Greeting and Holiday Cards, 1980s</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 4  | <a href="#">Illustrated Letters, 1981-1983</a>  |
| Box 2, Folder 5  | <a href="#">Outgoing Letters, from Nell Blaine, 1967-1984, undated</a>  |

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## Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1940s-1980s

### 0.1 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Writings by Nell Blaine include a copy of a short typed 1977 memoir by Blaine about her life from birth through the 1950s, notes related to a trip to California in 1972, directions to a destination in Patterson, New York, and notes written on an article about Monhegan Island, Maine. Also found are photocopies of questionnaires on six works of art completed by Blaine.

Writings by others include copies of 5 essays about Blaine by Ruth Gilbert Bass, Edward Bryant, Lawrence Campbell, Thorpe Feidt, and Howard Griffin.

Available Formats: Series is digitized in entirety.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 2, Folder 6 | <a href="#">Completed Questionnaires on Artwork by Blaine, 1980s</a> |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | <a href="#">Writings and Notes by Blaine, 1970s</a>                  |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | <a href="#">Writings About Blaine by Others, 1970s</a>               |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | <a href="#">Miscellaneous, circa 1940s-circa 1970s</a>               |

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## Series 4: Personal Business Records and Howard Griffin Estate Files, 1949-1983

### 0.4 Linear feet (Box 2)

**Scope and Contents:** Found are scattered business records including a gallery file and a sales receipt. Proposals are for books written by Daisy Alden and Robert Wilson to include illustrations by Blaine.

Files originating from the estate of Howard Griffin include the following: research material on Joseph Cornell gathered by Griffin including 2 photographs of a Cornell artwork from Stable Gallery files and 3 items of printed material; Kit Barker material including postcards, sketches, handmade cards, and a price list of works of art at Waddington Galleries; letters to Griffin from W. H. Auden, Kit Barker, Jean Garrigue, Clarence John Laughlin, Marianne Moore, Frank O'Hara, Mark Tobey, Clifford Wright (over 100), and others; and 3 etchings with transmittal notes from Alvin Ross and photocopies of letters from Ross to Griffin. Publications and writings from the Griffin estate includes two books by Griffin, *Overseen Objects and Other Fears* (1972: The Druck Press) which is dedicated to Blaine, and *Howard Griffin: Four Poems* (1976: Eudora Press) with illustrations by Blaine; and copies of notes for Griffin's article on Blaine's 1959 Greek pictures.

**Available Formats:** Many of the letters in the Howard Griffin Estate files are photocopies. The bulk of this series has been digitized. Letters from Clifford Wright to Howard Griffin have not been digitized due to privacy concerns.

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Box 2, Folder 10 | <a href="#">Gallery File, Jane Street Gallery, 1983</a>                                      |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | <a href="#">Howard Griffin Estate, Alvin Ross Etchings and Letters, 1965-1972</a>            |
| Box 2, Folder 12 | Howard Griffin Estate, Clifford Wright Letters to Howard Griffin, 1952-1974                  |
| Box 2, Folder 13 | <a href="#">Howard Griffin Estate, Joseph Cornell Material, circa 1940s-circa 1950s</a>      |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | <a href="#">Howard Griffin Estate, Kit Barker Material, circa 1951-circa 1969</a>            |
| Box 2, Folder 15 | <a href="#">Howard Griffin Estate, Other Letters and Miscellaneous Material, 1940s-1970s</a> |
| Box 2, Folder 16 | <a href="#">Howard Griffin Estate, Publications and Writings by Griffin, 1972-1979</a>       |
| Box 2, Folder 17 | <a href="#">Proposal for Book, "Breakthrough" by Daisy Alden, 1969-1970</a>                  |
| Box 2, Folder 18 | <a href="#">Proposal for Book, "Modern Book Collecting" by Robert Wilson, 1979-1980</a>      |
| Box 2, Folder 19 | <a href="#">Records of Sales, Loans, and Invoices, 1953-1980</a>                             |

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## Series 5: Printed Material, 1940s-1980s

### 0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-3, OV 5)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes a book by Jean Garrigue with a Blaine illustration, clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and reproductions of works of art such as postcards and brochures with Blaine's work.

Available Formats: Series has been partially digitized. For catalogs and publications only covers and relevant pages have been digitized.

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Box 2, Folder 20     | <a href="#">Book--Love's Aspects by Jean Garrigue, 1975</a>  |
| Box 2, Folder 21     | <a href="#">Clippings, circa 1938-1979</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 22     | <a href="#">Clippings, 1980-1985</a>   |
| Oversize 5, Folder 1 | <a href="#">Clippings, Oversized, 1977</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 23     | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine, circa 1968-1983</a>  |
| Box 2, Folder 24     | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Others, circa 1940s-circa 1980s</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 25     | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine and Others, circa 1944-1979</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 26     | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine and Others, circa 1945-1977</a>   |
| Box 2, Folder 27     | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine and Others, circa 1983-1985</a><br><a href="#">Image(s): Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine</a> |
| Box 3, Folder 1      | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Nell Blaine, circa 1983-1985</a>  |
| Box 3, Folder 2      | <a href="#">Exhibition Announcements, Catalogs, and Miscellaneous, Nell Blaine and Others, circa 1970-1980</a>   |
| Box 3, Folder 3      | <a href="#">Reproductions of Works of Art by Blaine, circa 1950s-circa 1979</a>  |
| Oversize 5, Folder 2 | <a href="#">Reproductions of Works of Art, Calendar, 1977</a>  |

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## Series 6: Artwork, circa 1950s-1984

### 0.1 Linear feet (Box 3, OV 5)

**Scope and Contents:** Artwork by Blaine includes original cartoons for a book; an original lithograph on a metal plate and a sketch made on the same type of plate; original designs, colored sketches, and layouts for exhibition catalogs; photocopies of sketches by Blaine; and a photocopied sketchbook. Also found are photocopies of artwork by others including a woodcut by Erich Heckel, one sketch and a block print by Larry Rivers, and one sketch by Tom O'Hara.

**Available Formats:** Series has been digitized in entirety.

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Oversize 5, Folder 3 | <a href="#">Original Cartoons for a Book by Ruth Anderson, undated</a>                   |
| Box 3, Folder 4      | <a href="#">Original Designs/Layouts and Sketches for Exhibition Catalogs, 1968-1979</a> |
| Oversize 5, Folder 4 | <a href="#">Original Lithograph and Sketch, circa 1961-circa 1968</a>                    |
| Box 3, Folder 5      | <a href="#">Photocopies of Blaine Sketches and Sketchbook, 1950s-1980s</a>               |
| Box 3, Folder 6      | <a href="#">Photocopies of Works of Art by Others, circa 1950s-circa 1984</a>            |

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## Series 7: Photographs, 1940s-1980s

### 0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4)

**Scope and Contents:** Found here are portraits and snapshots of Nell Blaine, as well as images of Blaine with her art, Blaine's homes, studios, and gardens, Blaine with friends and others, and Blaine at exhibition openings, primarily at Poindexter Gallery. Friends and others include individuals such as E. Astor, Leland Bell, Rudolph Burckhardt, Patricia H. Cooper, Robert De Niro Sr., Dilys Evans, Olga von Flotow, Jane Freilicher, Midi Garth, Howard Griffin, Margaret Harmsworth, Carolyn Harris, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Jason, Denise Levertov, Louisa Matthiasdottir, Larry Rivers, Constance Smith, Jane Watrous, and Gayle Young.

Also found here are photographs of drawings and paintings by Blaine. Photographs of works of art may include annotations by Blaine such as titles, sales, dimensions, and buyers.

**Arrangement:** Photographs are arranged by subject and chronologically within folders where possible. Photographs of works of art are arranged by photographer and number when available; unnumbered photos are arranged at the beginning of folders.

**Available Formats:** Series has been digitized in entirety.

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Box 3, Folder 7  | <a href="#">Photographs of Nell Blaine, 1942-1980s</a>  |
| Box 3, Folder 8  | <a href="#">Photographs of Nell Blaine and Friends/Others, 1940s-1970s</a>                      |
| Box 3, Folder 9  | <a href="#">Photographs of Nell Blaine and Friends/Others at Exhibition Openings, 1968-1973</a> |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | <a href="#">Photographs of Nell Blaine Exhibition Installations, circa 1960s-1970s</a>          |
| Box 3, Folder 11 | <a href="#">Photographs of Homes and Gardens, 1977-1978</a>                                     |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | <a href="#">Photographs of Howard Griffin and Ulli Mudi (Lothar Müller), circa 1950s-1970s</a>  |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | <a href="#">Photographs of Studio and Artwork in Homes, circa 1944-1977</a>                     |
| Box 3, Folder 14 | <a href="#">Photographs of Works of Art, Drawings, 1940s-1970s</a>                              |
| Box 4, Folder 1  | <a href="#">Photographs of Works of Art, Drawings and Paintings, 1940s-1970s</a>                |
| Box 4, Folder 2  | <a href="#">Photographs of Works of Art, Drawings and Paintings, 1940s-1970s</a>                |
| Box 4, Folder 3  | <a href="#">Photographs of Works of Art, Drawings and Paintings, 1940s-1970s</a>                |
| Box 4, Folder 4  | <a href="#">Photographs of Works of Art, Drawings and Paintings, 1940s-1970s</a>                |

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