



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Rudi Blesh Papers, circa
1900-1983, in the Archives of American Art

Sarah Mundy

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Rudi Blesh papers
Identifier:	AAA.blesrudi
Date:	circa 1900-1983
Extent:	2.1 Linear feet
Creator:	Blesh, Rudi, 1899-1985
Language:	English
Summary:	The papers of writer, critic, and architectural designer Rudi Blesh measure 2.1 linear feet and date from circa 1900 to 1983. The collection includes correspondence, documentation on writing projects and notes, printed materials, and photographic materials. Much of the material concerns his collaboration with Harriet Janis on the book <i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were donated by Rudi Blesh in 1981 and in 1993 by longtime friend Ethel Baziotas, who received the papers from Blesh before his death.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35mm microfilm reels 3991-3994 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2019.

Preferred Citation

Rudi Blesh papers, circa 1900-1983. 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

Rudi Blesh (1899-1985) was a writer, critic, and architectural designer in New York, N.Y.

Blesh was born in Guthrie, Oklahoma. He was known as a jazz critic but had a career as an interior designer before he began writing about jazz and art. Blesh attended Dartmouth College where he first encountered jazz music. He became a jazz critic for *The San Francisco Chronicle* and *The New York Herald Tribune* after relocating to New York in 1944.

Blesh partnered with Harriet "Hansi" Janis to co-author *They All Played Ragtime* and *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques*, a book about the development of collage and its use by artists such as Kurt Schwitters, Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Burri, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and other notable artists.

Later in life, Blesh taught at New York University and Queens College while continuing to write about jazz. He died in 1985 in New Hampshire.

Scope and Contents

The papers of writer, critic, and architectural designer Rudi Blesh measure 2.1 linear feet and date from circa 1900 to 1983. The collection includes correspondence, documentation on writing projects and notes, printed materials, and photographic materials. Much of the material concerns his collaboration with Harriet Janis on the book *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques*. Of note is correspondence with Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Sonia Delaunay, and Aaron Siskind; notes on Robert Motherwell, Stuart Davis, Man Ray, Hans Richter, and others; and photographs of Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jackson Pollock.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as four series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1909-1979 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Writing Projects and Notes, circa 1945-1967 (0.8 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Printed Materials, 1939-1983 (0.3 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 4: Photographic Materials, circa 1900-circa 1969 (0.8 linear feet; Box 2, OV 3)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Abstract expressionism
Collage

Names:

Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964
Duchamp, Marcel, 1887-1968
Janis, Harriet Grossman
Motherwell, Robert
Schwitters, Kurt, 1887-1948

Occupations:

Art critics -- New York (State) -- New York
Authors -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1909-1979

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Correspondence from 1946 to 1969 consists primarily of letters to Harriet "Hansi" Janis regarding her and Blesh's book *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques* (1967). Other correspondence is with artists Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Sonia Delaunay, Aaron Siskind, and others. The earliest correspondence includes letters from Blesh to his mother and other personal letters.

Box 1, Folder 1	General, 1909-1937
Box 1, Folder 2	General, 1946-1959
Box 1, Folder 3-5	General, 1960-1961
Box 1, Folder 6	General, 1964-1979
Box 1, Folder 7	General, undated

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Series 2: Writing Projects and Notes, circa 1945-1967

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1)

The series contains drafts, notes, and research material that includes photographs, correspondence, and printed material for projects on Alberto Burri, Hans Richter, Kurt Schwitters, Man Ray, Robert Motherwell, Stuart Davis, and the book *Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques*. Also included are five notebooks and loose notes on art nouveau, modern art, narcissism, Yves Klein, Picasso, and on interviews with Marcel Duchamp and critic Henry McBride.

Box 1, Folder 8	Alberto Burri, Research Material, 1959-1960
Box 1, Folder 9	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Draft - Introduction, circa 1965
Box 1, Folder 10-12	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Drafts, circa 1965
Box 1, Folder 13	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Draft - "Cubism", circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 14	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Exhibition Lists, 1958-1962
Box 1, Folder 15-17	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Galley, 1967
Box 1, Folder 18	<i>Collage: Personalities, Concepts, Techniques</i> , Notebook, 1959-1961
Box 1, Folder 19	Hans Richter, Research, 1960-1961
Box 1, Folder 20	Kurt Schwitters, Research, 1947-1961
Box 1, Folder 21	Man Ray, Research, 1945-1961
Box 1, Folder 22	"Negro Sculpture," Drafts and Research, circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 23	Robert Motherwell, Notebook of Blesh and Harriet Janis, circa 1961
Box 1, Folder 24-25	Robert Motherwell, Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1961
Box 1, Folder 26	Stuart Davis, Draft, circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 27	Stuart Davis, Galley and Research, circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 28	Stuart Davis, Image Content, circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 29	Stuart Davis, Notebook, circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 30	Stuart Davis, Research, circa 1955

Box 1, Folder 31-33 Notebooks, circa 1945-circa 1957
3 notebooks

Box 1, Folder 34 Notes, circa 1960s

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Series 3: Printed Materials, 1939-1983

0.3 Linear feet (Box 2)

Printed material includes magazine and newsletter articles by Blesh, the book *De Kooning* by Blesh and Harriet Janis, and material regarding Scott Joplin, along with clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and one art reproduction.

Box 2, Folder 1	Art Reproduction, circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 2	Book, <i>De Kooning</i> by Blesh and Harriet Janis, 1960
Box 2, Folder 3	Clippings, 1939-1976
Box 2, Folder 4	Envelope and Postage Stamp of Scott Joplin, 1983
Box 2, Folder 5	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1941-1966
Box 2, Folder 6	Magazine, <i>American Heritage</i> - "Scott Joplin: America's All-Time Ragtime King" by Blesh, 1975
Box 2, Folder 7	Music Book, <i>The Ragtime Current: Piano Solos by a Mainstream of Today's Ragtime Composers</i> - Intro by Blesh, 1976
Box 2, Folder 8	Newsletter, Article About Scott Joplin by Blesh, 1977

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Series 4: Photographic Materials, circa 1900-circa 1969

0.8 Linear feet (Box 2, OV 3)

Photographs and transparencies are of Blesh, his house and furniture designs, travel landscapes, family, works of art, and friends including Harriet "Hansi" Janis, Ethel Baziotes, and Douglas MacAgy. Also found are photographs of artists, including Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko by Henry Elkan, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg by W. Silver, Robert Motherwell, and Jackson Pollock by Hans Namuth.

Box 2, Folder 9	Portraits of Blesh, 1923-1962
Box 2, Folder 10	Blesh House, circa 1930
Box 2, Folder 11	Family, circa 1900-circa 1962
Box 2, Folder 12	Friends, circa 1943-circa 1962
Box 2, Folder 13	Furniture Designs by Blesh, 1938-1941
Box 2, Folder 14	Landscapes from Travel, 1941-1962
Box 2, Folder 15	Portraits of Artists, circa 1920-1966
Oversize 3	Portraits of Artists, 1950
Box 2, Folder 16	Photographs of Text and City Scenes, circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 17	Works of Art, Color Transparencies, circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 18	Works of Art, "Environments", circa 1961
Box 2, Folder 19-29	Works of Art, Photographs, circa 1960-circa 1980

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