



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Carl Bohnen Papers, 1888-1977, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

Glass plate negatives in this collection were digitized in 2019
with funding provided by the Smithsonian Women's Committee.

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Carl Bohnen papers
Identifier:	AAA.bohncarl
Date:	1888-1977
Creator:	Bohnen, Carl A., 1872-1951
Extent:	3.7 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of portrait painter Carl Bohnen date from 1888-1977, and measure 3.7 linear feet. Found within the papers are biographical materials; correspondence among family, clients, and colleagues; scattered business records; a sketchbook and loose sketches; miscellaneous notes and writings; three scrapbooks of clippings and additional printed materials. Photographs are of Bohnen, family members, colleagues, views of Paris in the late 1920s, Native American models, portrait clients, and artwork.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Carl Bohnen papers were donated in 1978 by the artist's daughter-in-law, Dorothy Clark Bohnen, and his granddaughter, Blythe Bohnen.

Processing Information

The Carl Bohnen papers were processed in January 2008 by Jean Fitzgerald. Glass plate negatives were re-housed in 2015 with a grant provided by the Smithsonian Collections Care and Preservation Fund.

Preferred Citation

Carl Bohnen papers, 1888-1977. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment. Glass plate negatives are housed separately and closed to researchers.

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Biographical Note

Charles "Carl" Bohnen was born in October 1872 (according to the U.S. Census) in Erie, Pennsylvania, to Nicholas and Marie Jochin Bohnen, who had emigrated from Germany. The family moved to Meyer's Grove, Minnesota in the following year.

Carl Bohnen graduated from St. John's University at Collegeville, Minnesota in 1892, earning a diploma in "Bookkeeping and Penmanship." Soon afterwards, he met Jake Hohman who employed him in a business involving drawing portraits from photographs. In 1896, Bohnen established a studio in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he continued creating portraits from photographs. During this time, he met Charlotte Johnson, whom he married in 1898.

Bohnen moved his studio in 1902 and began painting portraits from life. Paul Manship's family were neighbors of the Bohnens at Bald Eagle Lake near St. Paul, Minnesota. Bohnen studied at the Minnesota School of Fine Arts in exchange for cleaning up the classrooms. He later made space available to Manship in his studio.

In 1904, Bohnen completed studies at the St. Paul Art Institute. He also did commercial work, including doing portraits of sports figures for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch*. Through his newspaper connections, he did portraits of many other celebrities, later selling reproductions of these artworks. Eventually, he was hired as a portrait painter by a variety of prominent sitters, including R. A. Jackson, a railroad executive in St. Paul. An exhibition of Bohnen's portraits organized by Jackson resulted in additional commissions.

Through R. A. Jackson, several lumber millionaires helped finance a European trip for the Bohnen family in 1914. Bohnen studied at the Koenigliche Kunst Akademie in Munich under Carl Von Marr and Angelo Jank, and established a studio in that city. Travel constraints resulting from the onset of World War I caused the family to remain in Munich for three years. During this time, Bohnen was a member of the American Artist Club that included E. Martin Hennings, Louis Grell, and Emil Frei.

Bohnen and his family returned to St. Paul, Minnesota in May 1918, where he established a studio. He moved to Chicago in the following year, opening a studio in the Fine Arts building where he remained until the 1930s. Bohnen created thousands of portraits primarily of notable people including Edward the Prince of Wales, Ethel Barrymore, Enrico Caruso, Helen Hayes, Charles Lindbergh, Douglas MacArthur, John McCormack, Cardinal Mundelein, and Lawrence Tibbett.

In 1928, Bohnen established a studio in Paris and worked there sporadically through 1933. In 1933, he returned to St. Paul, Minnesota, setting up his studio in the Ryan Hotel. In 1944, he retired to live in Los Angeles, California, with his son, actor Roman Bohnen. After his son's sudden death in 1949, Bohnen lived with his other son, Arthur, in Chicago.

Carl Bohnen died on December 31, 1951 in Willmette, Illinois.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of portrait painter Carl Bohnen date from 1888-1977, and measure 3.7 linear feet. Found within the papers are biographical materials; correspondence among family, clients, and colleagues; scattered business records; a sketchbook and loose sketches; miscellaneous notes and writings; three scrapbooks of clippings and additional printed materials. Photographs are of Bohnen, family members, colleagues, views of Paris in the late 1920s, Native American models, portrait clients, and artwork.

Biographical material includes miscellaneous Bohnen family histories and chronologies of Bohnen's career, Bohnen's marriage certificate, school transcripts, and copies of his burial certificate.

Family correspondence consists of letters exchanged between Bohnen, his wife, siblings, and children. General correspondence is with colleagues including Carl Von Marr, and portrait clients including Constance Collier, John Erskine, Edna Ferber, and Frank B. Kellogg. The letters are often emotional and illustrate

occasionally volatile relationships between Bohnen, his clients, and his children. Also included are condolence letters received by the family following Bohnen's death.

Business records include a contract for financial backing of artistic activities, insurance records, miscellaneous receipts, and a file concerning the elderly Bohnen's injuries on an American Airlines flight bringing him from California to live with his son in Chicago.

Artwork found within the papers consists of a sketchbook, miscellaneous sketches, hand-lettered signs for Bohnen's portrait business, etchings by Bohnen and others, a bronze plaque displaying a self-portrait of Bohnen, and etching plates. Scattered notes and writings include typescripts of speeches, plays, and poems.

Three scrapbooks of clippings and additional printed material consisting of loose clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and reproductions of artwork offer a good overview of Bohnen's career.

Photographs are primarily of Bohnen's artwork and portrait clients. Two photograph albums contain scattered photographs of Bohnen, family members, colleagues, and artwork. Other photographs are of Bohnen at his easel, family members, colleagues including sculptor Paul Dubois working in his studio, artist Grace Neal, and views of Paris. There are also photographs of Native American models in ceremonial headdresses. Photographs of clients include Sarah Bernhardt, William Jennings Bryan, Enrico Caruso, Fritz Feld, Mary Garden, and Helen Hayes, among others.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 8 series. Each series is arranged chronologically, with the exception of Series 8: Photographs. Glass plate negatives are housed separately and closed to researchers.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1898-1952 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1892-1977 (Box 1; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 3: Business Records, 1914-1952 (Box 1; 10 folders)
- Series 4: Artwork, 1900-1935 (Box 1; 8 folders)
- Series 5: Notes and Writings, 1917-1974 (Box 1; 8 folders)
- Series 6: Scrapbooks, 1904-1962 (Boxes 1-2, OV 5; 15 folders)
- Series 7: Printed Material, 1907-1977 (Boxes 2, 4; 19 folders)
- Series 8: Photographs, 1888-1951 (Boxes 2-4, 6; 1.5 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Works of art

Types of Materials:

Etchings
Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks
Sketches
Writings

Names:

Bernhardt, Sarah, 1844-1923

Bryan, William Jennings, 1860-1925
Caruso, Enrico, 1873-1921
Collier, Constance, 1878-1955
DuBois, Paul
Erskine, John, 1879-1951
Feld, Fritz, 1900-1993
Ferber, Edna, 1887-1968
Garden, Mary, 1874-1967
Hayes, Helen, 1900-1993
Kellogg, Frank B. (Frank Billings), 1856-1937
Marr, Carl von, 1858-1936
Neal, Grace, 1917-

Occupations:

Portrait painters -- Minnesota

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1898-1952

2 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes miscellaneous Bohnen family histories and chronologies, Bohnen's marriage certificate, school transcripts, and a copy of his burial certificate.

Box 1, Folder 1 Bohnen Family Histories and Chronologies, undated

Box 1, Folder 2 Calling Card, Marriage Certificate, School Transcripts, and Burial Certificate, 1898-1952, undated

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1892-1977

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Family correspondence consists of letters exchanged between Bohnen, his wife, siblings, and children. Also included are condolence letters received by the family following Bohnen's death. General correspondence is with colleagues including Carl Von Marr, and portrait clients including Constance Collier, John Erskine, Edna Ferber, and Frank B. Kellogg.

Arrangement: Family correspondence is filed chronologically before General correspondence, which is also chronological. Undated letters are filed by surname.

Box 1, Folder 3	Family Correspondence, undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Family Correspondence, 1892
Box 1, Folder 5-6	Family Correspondence, 1893 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 7	Family Correspondence, 1894-1897
Box 1, Folder 8	Family Correspondence, 1899
Box 1, Folder 9	Family Correspondence, 1902-1919
Box 1, Folder 10	Family Correspondence, 1923-1924
Box 1, Folder 11-12	Family Correspondence, 1928 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 13	Family Correspondence, 1930
Box 1, Folder 14-15	Family Correspondence, 1931 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 16	Family Correspondence, 1932
Box 1, Folder 17-18	Family Correspondence, 1934 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 19	Family Correspondence, 1935
Box 1, Folder 20-21	Family Correspondence, 1936 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 22-23	Family Correspondence, 1937 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 24-25	Family Correspondence, 1938

(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 26-27	Family Correspondence, 1939 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 28	Family Correspondence, 1940
Box 1, Folder 29	Family Correspondence, 1941
Box 1, Folder 30	Family Correspondence, 1944
Box 1, Folder 31	Family Correspondence, 1945
Box 1, Folder 32	Family Correspondence, 1947-1948
Box 1, Folder 33	Family Correspondence, 1951
Box 1, Folder 34	Undated General Correspondence from Individuals with Unknown Surnames, undated
Box 1, Folder 35	Undated General Correspondence from Individuals with Surnames "A"- "C", undated
Box 1, Folder 36	Undated General Correspondence from Individuals with Surnames "D"- "Z", undated
Box 1, Folder 37	General Correspondence, 1892-1898
Box 1, Folder 38	General Correspondence, 1910-1911
Box 1, Folder 39	General Correspondence, 1912-1919
Box 1, Folder 40	General Correspondence, 1922-1923
Box 1, Folder 41	General Correspondence, 1924
Box 1, Folder 42	General Correspondence, 1925-1926
Box 1, Folder 43	General Correspondence, 1927
Box 1, Folder 44	General Correspondence, 1928
Box 1, Folder 45	General Correspondence, 1929
Box 1, Folder 46	General Correspondence, 1930
Box 1, Folder 47-48	General Correspondence, 1931

	(2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 49-51	General Correspondence, 1932 (3 folders)
Box 1, Folder 52	General Correspondence, 1933
Box 1, Folder 53	General Correspondence, 1934
Box 1, Folder 54-56	General Correspondence, 1935 (3 folders)
Box 1, Folder 57	General Correspondence, 1936
Box 1, Folder 58	General Correspondence, 1937
Box 1, Folder 59	General Correspondence, 1938-1939
Box 1, Folder 60	General Correspondence, 1940-1951
Box 1, Folder 61-63	General Correspondence, 1952 (3 folders)
Box 1, Folder 64	General Correspondence, 1970
Box 1, Folder 65	General Correspondence, 1971-1977

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Series 3: Business Records, 1914-1952

10 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Business records include a contract for financing backing of artistic activities, insurance records, miscellaneous receipts, and a file concerning Bohnen's injuries on an American Airlines flight.

Box 1, Folder 66 Contract for Financing Artistic Activities, 1935

Box 1, Folder 67-70 Insurance Records, 1933-1939
(4 folders)

Box 1, Folder 71-72 File Concerning Bohnen's Accident on American Airlines, 1951-1952
(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 73-74 Miscellaneous Medical Records, 1951-1952
(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 75 Miscellaneous Receipts, 1914-1935

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Series 4: Artwork, 1900-1935

8 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Artwork consists of a sketchbook, miscellaneous sketches, hand-lettered signs for Bohnen's portrait business, etchings by Bohnen and others, a bronze plaque displaying a self-portrait of Bohnen, and etching plates.

Box 1, Folder 76	Sketchbook, circa 1900
Box 1, Folder 77	Miscellaneous Sketches, undated
Box 1, Folder 78	Hand-Lettered Signs, 1927, undated
Box 1, Folder 79	Etchings by Bohnen and Others, 1935, undated
Box 1, Folder 80	Bronze Plaque Portrait of Bohnen, 1916
Box 1, Folder 81	Zinc Etching Plate, undated
Box 1, Folder 82-83	Copper Etching Plates, undated (2 folders)

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Series 5: Notes and Writings, 1917-1974

8 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes miscellaneous notes, typescripts of speeches, plays, and poems, and miscellaneous writings.

Box 1, Folder 84-85	Miscellaneous Notes, 1928-1974 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 86	Typescript of Speech about Dr. Ridlon, undated
Box 1, Folder 87	Typescript of Speech "The Statesmen of Europe Will Be Forced to Make Peace,", 1917
Box 1, Folder 88	Typescripts of Plays, circa 1935
Box 1, Folder 89	Miscellaneous Poems, undated
Box 1, Folder 90	Copy of Chapter 13 of Book The Last Round Up by Harry Johnston, undated
Box 1, Folder 91	Miscellaneous Writings by Others, undated

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Series 6: Scrapbooks, 1904-1962

15 Folders (Boxes 1-2, OV 5)

Scope and Contents: Three dismantled scrapbooks of clippings document events in Bohnen's career as a portrait painter.

Box 1, Folder 92-102	Scrapbook 1, 1904-1962 (11 folders)
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Box 2, Folder 1-2	Scrapbook 2, 1913-1928 (2 folders; see also OV 5)
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Box 2, Folder 3	Scrapbook 3, 1914-1952
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Box OV 5	Oversized Pages of Scrapbook 2, 1913-1928
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Series 7: Printed Material, 1907-1977

19 Folders (Boxes 2, 4)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, reproductions of artwork, and miscellaneous printed material.

Box 2, Folder 4	Clippings, undated
Box 2, Folder 5	Clippings, 1907-1917
Box 2, Folder 6	Clippings, 1920-1921
Box 2, Folder 7	Clippings, 1925-1926
Box 2, Folder 8	Clippings, 1927-1929
Box 2, Folder 9	Clippings, 1930-1931
Box 2, Folder 10	Clippings, 1933-1939
Box 2, Folder 11	Clippings, 1940-1947
Box 2, Folder 12	Clippings, 1952-1977
Box 2, Folder 13	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1921-1928, undated
Box 2, Folder 14-16	Reproductions of Artwork by Bohnen, undated (3 folders; see also Box 4)
Box 2, Folder 17	Reproductions of Artwork by Others, 1932, undated
Box 2, Folder 18	Programs, 1936, undated
Box 2, Folder 19	Booklets, 1942, undated
Box 2, Folder 20	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1943, undated
Box 4	Oversized Reproductions of Portraits by Bohnen, undated (2 folders)

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Series 8: Photographs, 1888-1951

1.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-4, 6)

Scope and Contents: Photo Album 1 contains photographs of Bohnen, family members, colleagues, and scattered printed material. Photo Album 2 contains photographs of artwork. Other photographs are of Bohnen at his easel, family members, colleagues including sculptor Paul Dubois in his studio, artist Grace Neal, and views of Paris including street scenes, café scenes, and the funeral procession of General Foch. There are also photographs of Native American models in ceremonial headdresses, photographs of clients including Sarah Bernhardt, William Jennings Bryan, Enrico Caruso, Fritz Feld, Mary Garden, and Helen Hayes, and photographs of artwork. Glass plate negatives are housed separately and closed to researchers.

Arrangement: Photographs of Clients and the Photographs of Portraits of Clients, are arranged alphabetically.

Available Formats: Glass plate negatives have been digitized.

Box 2, Folder 21-25	Photograph Album 1, 1888-1951 (5 folders)
Box 2, Folder 26-28	Photograph Album 2, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 29-31	Photographs of Carl, Bohnen, 1940, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 32	Photographs of Family Members, Colleagues, and Unidentified Individuals, 1925-1936, undated
Box 2, Folder 33-36	Photographs of Miscellaneous Views of Paris, 1929-1933, undated (4 folders)
Box 2, Folder 37	Photographs of Native American Models, undated (see also Box 3, F21)
Box 2, Folder 38-40	Photographs of Unidentified Female Clients, 1936, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 41-43	Photographs of Unidentified Male Clients, undated (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 44	Photographs of Clients Miss Alexander and Mrs. Alfring, undated
Box 2, Folder 45	Photographs of Clients Vicki Baum and John Golden, 1933
Box 2, Folder 46	Photograph of Client Sarah Bernhardt, undated
Box 2, Folder 47	Photographs of Client William Jennings Bryan, undated

Box 2, Folder 48	Photograph of Client Pierce Butler, undated
Box 2, Folder 49	Photographs of Client Enrico Caruso, 1921, undated
Box 2, Folder 50	Photographs of Clients Mrs. Clark, Dr. Cook, and William Cosgrave, undated
Box 2, Folder 51	Photographs of Clients Mrs. Cunningham and Her Daughter, undated
Box 2, Folder 52	Photographs of Client Fritz Feld, 1926, undated
Box 2, Folder 53	Photographs of Clients Miner Gallup and Mary Garden, 1912-1924 (see also Box 4)
Box 2, Folder 54	Photographs of Client Helen Hayes, undated
Box 2, Folder 55	Photographs of Client Miss Hope, 1937
Box 2, Folder 56	Photographs of Clients Ferdinand Inetz, Isabel Irving, and Edward Johnson, 1913, undated
Box 2, Folder 57	Photographs of Client Frank B. Kellogg, undated
Box 2, Folder 58	Photographs of Client Mrs. Kenney, undated
Box 2, Folder 59-62	Photographs of Clients the S. F. King Family, 1937, undated (4 folders)
Box 2, Folder 63	Photographs of Clients Andrews Lang and Anton Lang, 1922, undated
Box 2, Folder 64	Photographs of Clients Mr. and Mrs. Little, undated
Box 2, Folder 65	Photographs of Clients Mr. Miranda, Miss Marlow, Riccardo Martin, Mr. Mather, John McCutcheon, Frank McNally, and Cardinal Mundelein, 1911, undated
Box 2, Folder 66	Photographs of Client Governor Floyd Olson, 1930-1933
Box 2, Folder 67	Photographs of Clients Mrs. Mulroony Olson and L. P. Ordway, undated
Box 2, Folder 68	Photographs of Clients Mildred Potter, Francis Reitz, and Mr. and Miss Shimoneck, undated
Box 2, Folder 69	Photographs of Client Ernestine Schumann-Heink, undated
Box 2, Folder 70	Photographs of Clients Dr. Wieland, Benno Ziegler, and L. Ziegler, 1923, undated
Box 2, Folder 71	Photographs of Miscellaneous Portraits, undated

Box 2, Folder 72-76	Photographs of Portraits of Unidentified Women, undated (5 folders; see also Box 3, F22)
Box 2, Folder 77-81	Photographs of Portraits of Unidentified Men, undated (5 folders; see also Box 3, F23)
Box 2, Folder 82	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "A," undated
Box 2, Folder 83	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "B," undated
Box 2, Folder 84	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "C," undated
Box 2, Folder 85	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "D," undated
Box 2, Folder 86	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "E," undated (see also Box 4)
Box 2, Folder 87	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "F," undated
Box 2, Folder 88-89	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "G," 1912, undated (2 folders)
Box 2, Folder 90-91	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "H," 1942, undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 1	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "I"- "J," undated
Box 3, Folder 2-3	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "K," 1937, undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 4-5	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "L," undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 6-7	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "M," undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 8	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "N," undated
Box 3, Folder 9	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "O," undated
Box 3, Folder 10	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "P," undated
Box 3, Folder 11	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "R," undated
Box 3, Folder 12-13	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "S," undated (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 14	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "T," undated

Box 3, Folder 15	Photographs of Portraits with Client Surnames "W,", undated
Box 3, Folder 16-20	Photographs of Miscellaneous Artwork, undated (5 folders; see also Box 3, F24)
Box 6	Glass Plate Negatives , undated 27 Glass negatives Notes: Includes Native American models, portraits of unidentified men and women, and artwork.
Box 4	Oversized Photographs of Mary Garden and of Edward, Prince of Wales, 1924, undated

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