



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Adelyn Dohme Breeskin Papers, circa 1934-1986, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

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

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Adelyne Dohme Breeskin papers
Date:	circa 1934-1986
Identifier:	AAA.breeadel
Creator:	Breeskin, Adelyn Dohme, 1896-1986
Extent:	2.5 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington D.C. art historian and museum curator Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, measure 2.5 linear feet and date from circa 1934-1986. The papers provide scattered documentation of Breeskin's career, focusing on writings and lectures delivered in the United States and abroad, and briefly documenting her work as an art exhibition juror, as a consultant, and as a teacher of a community art course. The collection also includes papers documenting some of Breeskin's research on Loren MacIver, Mary Cassatt, and others, and is comprised of biographical material, personal and professional correspondence with artists, friends, and colleagues, manuscript and lecture notes and drafts, professional files, sound recordings, and a few photographs.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Portions of the collection were donated to the Archives of American Art in a series of gifts from Adelyn Breeskin, 1979-1985. Material relating to Loren MacIver was donated 1979-1987 by Breeskin and Robert Frash, who had possession of Breeskin's research materials on MacIver for an exhibition on MacIver he curated in California. Letters from Georgia O'Keeffe, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and Lawrence Calcagno, an exhibition catalog for Calcagno, and the file on Milton Avery, were donated by the National Museum of American Art on January 28, 1981. The birthday book was a gift from Breeskin's daughter, Gloria Breeskin Peck, in 2015. The sound recordings were transferred from the National Museum of American Art, circa 1984.

Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds oral history interviews with Adelyn Breeskin conducted by Paul Cummings in 1974, and Julie Haifley in 1979.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35mm microfilm reels 2227 and 2787 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.

The sound recording of the lecture "Artists I Have Known," has been copied for research access and digital copies are available in the Archives of American Art offices.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Stephanie Ashley in 2019.

Preferred Citation

Adelyn Dohme Breeskin papers, circa 1934-1986. 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.

Researchers interested in accessing audiovisual recordings in this collection must use access copies. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

Adelyn Dohme Breeskin (1896-1986) was an art historian and museum curator in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. She was the first woman to be named director of a major American museum, the Baltimore Museum of Art.

Adelyn Dohme took her first museum job in the print department of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she worked with Kathryn B. Child under the supervision of William Mills Ivins. She left the museum in 1920 to marry violinist Elias Breeskin, and the couple had three children before divorcing in 1930.

Following her divorce, Breeskin returned to her native Baltimore and took a position as a curator with the Baltimore Museum of Art. In 1942 she was appointed director of the museum and remained in that position until 1962. As director she gave Milton Avery and Mary Cassatt's graphics their first museum shows.

Breeskin served as commissioner for the American contingent of the Venice Biennale in 1960 and was director of the Washington Gallery of Modern Art from 1962-1964. She then became a special consultant in twentieth-century art for the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fine Art and served as the museum's curator of contemporary painting and sculpture from 1968 to 1974.

Breeskin authored two catalogue raisonnés of Mary Cassatt's work, and conducted extensive research for a monograph on Loren MacIver, although the monograph was ultimately not published. In 1985 Breeskin received the Smithsonian Institution's highest award, the Gold Medal for Exceptional Service, and at the time of her death in 1986, was senior curatorial adviser.

Scope and Contents

The papers of Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington D.C. art historian and museum curator Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, measure 2.5 linear feet and date from circa 1934-1986. The papers provide scattered documentation of Breeskin's career, focusing on writings and lectures delivered in the United States and

abroad, and briefly documenting her work as an art exhibition juror, as a consultant, and as a teacher of a community art course. The collection also includes papers documenting some of Breeskin's research on Loren Maclver, Mary Cassatt, and others, and is comprised of biographical material, personal and professional correspondence with artists, friends, and colleagues, manuscript and lecture notes and drafts, professional files, sound recordings, and a few photographs.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as four series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1938-1986 (0.6 linear feet; Box 1, OVs 4-6)
 - Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-1970 (0.5 linear feet; Box 1)
 - Series 3: Writings and Lectures, circa 1934-1981 (1 linear foot; Boxes 1-2)
 - Series 4: Professional Files, 1945-1984 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 2-3)
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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:

Women art historians
Women museum curators

Types of Materials:

Sound recordings

Names:

Avery, Milton, 1885-1965
Cassatt, Mary, 1844-1926
Maclver, Loren, 1909-
National Collection of Fine Arts (U.S.)
National Museum of American Art (U.S.)

Occupations:

Art historians -- Maryland -- Baltimore
Art museum curators -- Maryland -- Baltimore
Art museum directors -- Maryland -- Baltimore

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1938-1986

0.6 Linear feet (Box 1, OVs 4-6)

Scope and Contents: Found in this series is a "birthday book" of letters, cards, and artwork given to Breeskin on the occasion of her 90th birthday, with illustrated greetings from artists including Grace Hartigan and Jacob Kainen; family estate papers; news clippings about Breeskin; and resumes and employment related documents including a federal employment application and correspondence related to the professional opportunities Breeskin was exploring in preparation for resigning her position at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1962.

Photographs include a studio portrait of Breeskin by Leonard L. Greif taken just prior to her retirement from the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1962, and photographs of Breeskin with others including with Betty Parsons in March 1973; with Edwin A. Daniels, Raphael Soyer, William Finn, and Joseph Hirshhorn after receiving an honorary degree at the Maryland Art Institute in 1975; and with Charles C. Cunningham, Tatayana Grossman, and Clyfford Still at an unidentified event, circa 1970s. Also found is a sound recording of a farewell dinner held for Breeskin at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1962, and a sound recording of a 1969 interview with Sally Avery.

Box 1, Folder 1	Dohme Estate Papers, 1938-circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 2	News Clippings on Breeskin, 1948-1962
Oversize 6	News Clippings on Breeskin, 1978
Box 1, Folder 3	Photographs, Breeskin and Others, 1970s
Box 1, Folder 4	Photographs, Studio Portraits of Breeskin, 1962
Box 1, Folder 5	Resumes and Employment-Related, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 6	Sound Recording of Breeskin's Baltimore Museum of Art Farewell Dinner, 1962 April 16 1 Sound tape reel
Box 1, Folder 7	Sound Recording of Interview with Sally Avery by Adelyn Breeskin, 1969, December 10 1 Sound tape reel
Box 1, Folder 8	Sound Recording of Interview with Sally Avery by Adelyn Breeskin, Duplicates, 1969 December 10 3 Sound cassettes

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-1970

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is personal and professional and includes correspondence with friends and artists such as Joseph Albers, Milton Avery, Lawrence Calcagno, Georgia O'Keeffe, Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and Yulla and Jacques Lipchitz; correspondence with museums, art societies, and arts administrators such as the Baltimore Museum of Art, Currier Gallery of Art, R. Sturgis Ingersoll, the National Society of Arts and Letters, the Royal Society of Arts, the Toledo Museum of Art, and many others. Also found are letters related to Breeskin's Stuart Alumnae Association scholarship to attend Katherine B. Child's school in Italy with nine negatives labeled "Dorothy Breeskin and friends," and correspondence with Marian King related to a proposed book on art by King.

Arrangement: Records are arranged alphabetically by correspondent, followed by congratulatory letters and a small amount of correspondence related to Breeskin's membership in societies and on committees.

Box 1, Folder 9	Correspondence, A, 1950-1970
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence, B, 1949-1957
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence, C, 1944-1966
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence, D-E, 1940-1961
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence, F-G, 1947-1961
Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence, H-J, 1946-1962
Box 1, Folder 15	Correspondence, K, 1950-1956
Box 1, Folder 16	Correspondence, King, Marian, 1956-1961
Box 1, Folder 17	Correspondence, L-M, 1944-1960
Box 1, Folder 18	Correspondence, N-P, 1949-1965
Box 1, Folder 19	Correspondence, R, 1946-1961
Box 1, Folder 20	Correspondence, S, 1944-1961
Box 1, Folder 21	Correspondence, T-Z, 1947-1961
Box 1, Folder 22	Congratulations for Appointment as Director of Baltimore Museum of Art, 1947
Box 1, Folder 23	Congratulations for Appointment as Director Baltimore Museum of Art, 1947-1948
Box 1, Folder 24	Membership, Offices, 1960-1961

Box 1, Folder 25

Tributes to Breeskin, 1945-1962

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Series 3: Writings and Lectures, circa 1934-1981

1 Linear foot (Boxes 1-2)

Arrangement: This series is arranged as two subseries.

- 3.1: Writing Projects, circa 1934-circa 1975
- 3.2: General Writings and Lectures, 1941-1981

3.1: Writing Projects, circa 1934-circa 1970

Scope and Contents: This series documents three of Breeskin's writing projects. There are drafts of, and notes related to, a catalog and a brief guide prepared by Breeskin at the request of Maryland's Governor Ritchie for visitors to the State House in Annapolis, following the 1933 restoration of some of the paintings in the State House.

Records relating to Breeskin's unpublished monograph on Loren MacIver include correspondence between Breeskin and MacIver (primarily copies); correspondence with Breeskin's publisher, the Pierre Matisse Gallery, and others primarily regarding reproductions for the book; research files containing photocopies of correspondence and records related to MacIver's work for the WPA; photocopies of the Museum of Modern Art's file on MacIver's mural done on the SS Argentina; 13 poems, many concerning works by MacIver written by her husband, Lloyd Frankenberg; and manuscript drafts, including a chronology and lists of art works.

Material relating to Mary Cassatt includes copies and typescripts of letters written by Cassatt to Mathilda Brownell, Adaline Havemeyer, Julie Manet, and others, presumably used by Breeskin in her research on Mary Cassatt.

Box 1, Folder 26	Catalogs of Paintings in the State House, Annapolis, MD, circa 1934, 1962, 1975
Monograph (Unpublished) on Loren MacIver	
Box 1, Folder 27	Correspondence, 1969-1970
Box 1, Folder 28	Copies, 1969-1970
Box 1, Folder 29	Manuscript Draft, Chronology and List of Illustrations, circa 1970
Box 1, Folder 30	Manuscript Draft, Text, circa 1970
Box 1, Folder 31	Manuscript Draft, Text, circa 1970
Box 1, Folder 32	Museum of Modern Art Material on MacIver's Mural on the SS Argentina, 1958-1969
Box 1, Folder 33	Poems by Lloyd MacIver, circa 1970
Box 1, Folder 34	WPA Material, 1936-1969
Research on Mary Cassatt	

Box 1, Folder 35 Julie Manet Letters, 1970s

Box 1, Folder 36 Mr. Whittemore Letters, 1970s

Box 1, Folder 37 Other Letters, 1970s

3.2: General Writings and Lectures, 1941-1981

Scope and Contents: This series includes handwritten drafts and typescript drafts of manuscripts and lectures by Breeskin, as well as correspondence related to the lectures such as travel arrangements and other details.

Also found is a sound recording of a 1981 lecture delivered by Breeskin at the National Museum of American Art, entitled "Artists I have Known." The sound recording has been digitized for research access.

Item IM100RC.053 Sound Recording of Lecture "Artists I Have Known", 1981 March 8
1 Sound cassette (Original sound cassette is stored offsite.)
Notes: Researchers may access digitized audiovisual materials in the Archives' Washington, D.C. or New York, N.Y. Research Centers by appointment.

Box 1, Folder 38 Writings and Lectures, circa 1940s-circa 1960s

Box 1, Folder 39 Writings and Lectures, 1941

Box 1, Folder 40 Writings and Lectures, 1942-1944

Box 1, Folder 41 Writings and Lectures, 1945

Box 1, Folder 42 Writings and Lectures, 1946

Box 1, Folder 43 Writings and Lectures, 1947

Box 2, Folder 1 Writings and Lectures, 1947

Box 2, Folder 2 Writings and Lectures, 1948

Box 2, Folder 3 Writings and Lectures, 1948

Box 2, Folder 4 Writings and Lectures, 1949 January-June

Box 2, Folder 5 Writings and Lectures, 1949 July-December

Box 2, Folder 6 Writings and Lectures, 1950

Box 2, Folder 7 Writings and Lectures, 1950

Box 2, Folder 8 Writings and Lectures, 1951

Box 2, Folder 9	Writings and Lectures, 1951
Box 2, Folder 10	Writings and Lectures, 1952
Box 2, Folder 11	Writings and Lectures, 1952
Box 2, Folder 12	Writings and Lectures, 1952
Box 2, Folder 13	Writings and Lectures, 1952
Box 2, Folder 14	Writings and Lectures, 1953
Box 2, Folder 15	Writings and Lectures, 1953
Box 2, Folder 16	Writings and Lectures, 1954
Box 2, Folder 17	Writings and Lectures, 1955
Box 2, Folder 18	Writings and Lectures, 1956
Box 2, Folder 19	Writings and Lectures, 1956
Box 2, Folder 20	Writings and Lectures, 1957
Box 2, Folder 21	Writings and Lectures, 1958
Box 2, Folder 22	Writings and Lectures, 1959
Box 2, Folder 23	Writings and Lectures, 1959
Box 2, Folder 24	Writings and Lectures, 1960
Box 2, Folder 25	Writings and Lectures, 1960
Box 2, Folder 26	Writings and Lectures, 1960-1961
Box 2, Folder 27	Writings and Lectures, 1961
Box 2, Folder 28	Writings and Lectures, 1962
Box 2, Folder 29	Writings and Lectures, 1968

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Series 4: Professional Files, 1945-1984

0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Professional files provide scattered documentation of Breeskin's career as a director, consultant, and teacher. They include notes, correspondence, and reports relating to Breeskin's work as a consultant to the National Collection of Fine Arts (later the National Museum of American Art); a letter, a memorandum, and a transcript of a news clipping briefly summarizing Breeskin's work as Commissioner of the American Pavilion at the 1960 Venice Biennale; correspondence, notes, and course outlines for an art appreciation course Breeskin taught at Johns Hopkins University in the late 1940s; a sound recording of a lecture delivered by Ilya Bolotowsky and introduced by Breeskin at the National Museum of American Art; and correspondence and other documentation relating to arrangements for travel by Breeskin in the USA and abroad, generally related to speaking engagements and participation in art juries.

Box 2, Folder 30	Consultant to National Collection of Fine Arts, 1964-1971
Box 2, Folder 31	Consultant to National Collection of Fine Arts, 1964-1971
Box 2, Folder 32	Commissioner of American Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1960, 1984
Box 2, Folder 33	Johns Hopkins University Art Courses, 1945-1947
Box 2, Folder 34	Johns Hopkins University Art Courses, 1947-1948
Box 2, Folder 35	Johns Hopkins University Art Courses, 1949-1950
Box 2, Folder 36	Johns Hopkins University Art Courses, 1952
Box 2, Folder 37	Jurying and Committees, 1949-1953
Box 3, Folder 1	Sound Recording of Ilya Bolotowsky Lecture at National Museum of American Art, 1975 January 15 1 Sound cassette
Box 3, Folder 2	Travel Abroad, 1955-1958
Box 3, Folder 3	Travel USA, Speaking Engagements and Juryin, A-B, 1960-1962
Box 3, Folder 4	Travel USA, Speaking Engagements and Juryin, C-D, 1959-1962
Box 3, Folder 5	Travel USA, Speaking Engagements and Jurying, E-M, 1960-1961
Box 3, Folder 6	Travel USA, Speaking Engagements and Jurying, N-W, 1957-1962

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