



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Romaine Brooks Papers, 1910-1973, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Hanson

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Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Romaine Brooks papers
Identifier:	AAA.brooroma
Date:	1910-1973
Creator:	Brooks, Romaine
Extent:	3 Linear feet
Language:	Most of the collection is in English and French; some materials are in Italian.
Summary:	The papers of painter Romaine Brooks measure 3 linear feet and date from 1910 to 1973. Found are biographical sketches, correspondence, seven journals, writings and notes, printed materials, a scrapbook, and photographs. Most of the materials focus on Brooks' later life while living in Paris and Nice, France and Fiesole, Italy and make little reference to her paintings and portraits.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Romaine Brooks papers were donated by Meryle Secrest, Brooks's biographer, in 1999. Secrest received the letters and notebooks directly from Brooks's estate and compiled the remainder. Additional papers were transferred from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art via the Smithsonian Institution Archives in 1986.

Available Formats

The bulk of the collection was digitized in 2012 and is available via the Archives of American Art's website. Duplicates and photographs of works of art have not been scanned. Only the covers, title pages, and relevant pages have been scanned for some printed materials.

Processing Information

The Romaine Brooks papers were previously cataloged as two individual collections and merged upon processing by Jayna Hanson in 2011. The papers were digitized in 2011 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Romaine Brooks papers, 1910-1973. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Romaine Brooks (1874-1970) was a wealthy portrait painter who lived abroad for most of her life in Paris, and Nice, France, and Fiesole, Italy.

Beatrice Romaine Goddard was born in Rome, Italy on May 1, 1874 to Ella Waterman and Major Henry Goddard. Although born into wealth and privilege, Romaine did not have a happy childhood. Her mother was abusive to her, but doted on her mentally ill brother. Brooks' mother arranged for her to live with a poor family in a New York City tenement in exchange for meager payments, which were later stopped, while her brother and sister stayed with their mother. Later, she was sent to boarding school.

Eventually, Brooks left for Europe and took voice lessons and studied art in France and Italy. Her brother died in 1901 and her mother became physically ill. Brooks returned to the United States to tend to her mother who died less than a year after her son's death. Upon her mother's death, Brooks and her sister became heiress' to their grandfather, Issac S. Waterman Jr's substantial fortune. Brooks then began to lead a life of wealth and travel.

In 1903, Brooks married a friend, John Ellingham Brooks who was a homosexual. Brooks was bisexual, although according to her biographer Meryl Secrest she may have just enjoyed the companionship of living with someone. They lived together for a year until she left when he disapproved of her public androgynous style of dress.

Romaine first traveled to London and then returned to Paris, where she lived in the 16th arrondissement. She engaged in an elite social life and painted many of the friends in her circle. Brooks chose to paint portraits in a gray color palette, depicting many women in male dress. The somber nearly colorless palette and cross-dress of the sitter gave the paintings an androgynous look. One of her most notable paintings was her own self-portrait that represented this style. Inspired by James McNeill Whistler, Romaine largely ignored the Cubist and Fauvist movements.

In 1909, she met Gabriele D'Annunzio and engaged in a love affair. Among her other lovers are Ida Rubinstein, the Princess de Polignac, and the American writer, Natalie Barney. Natalie and Romaine were involved for fifty years, despite Barney's various affairs and other lovers. They shared a home with two separate wings, which allowed Brooks to be by herself while Barney entertained friends.

In the 1930s, Brooks abandoned painting and created line drawings, which were featured in *Bizarre* magazine. After 1935, however, Brooks largely stopped being an active artist. She wrote her autobiography in the 1930s, *No Pleasant Memories*, as well as an account of her time spent in Italy.

During World War II, Brooks and Barney fled to Italy, where Brooks remained after the war ended. Her later life was marked with self-imposed isolation, even refusing to see Barney during her visits. Romaine Brooks died in 1970 in Nice, France.

After her death, Adelyn Breeskin curated an exhibit of her works at the National Collection of Fine Arts (1971) in Washington, D.C., and at the Whitney Museum of American Art (1971).

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Romaine Brooks measure 3 linear feet and date from 1910 to 1973. Found are biographical sketches, correspondence, seven journals, writings and notes, printed materials, a scrapbook, and photographs. Most of the materials focus on Brooks' later life while living in Paris and Nice, France and Fiesole, Italy and make little reference to her paintings and portraits.

Biographical information includes biographical sketches and a sound recording of an interview of Brooks.

Personal business records consists of one receipt, in French, for an item purchased by Brooks.

Correspondence is scattered and the bulk of it dates from 1950-1969. About half of the correspondence is in French and includes only a few of Romaine's replies. Notable correspondents include Harold Acten, Laura Barney, Yvon Bizardel, Adelyn Breeskin, Jean-Pierre Castelneau, Louis Gauthier-Villars, Janine Lahovary, Edouard MacAvoy, Nicky Mariano, Donald McClelland, Charles de Noailles, David Scott, Alan Searle, and Uberto Strozzi. Letters make little reference to Brooks's paintings, however some discuss her health and relationship with Natalie Barney. Also found is a small amount of Natalie Barney's personal correspondence dating from 1924-1968.

Writings and notes includes seven handwritten journal notebooks which contain Romaine's thoughts, quotes from poetry and literature, references to museums and works of art throughout Europe, and drafts of letters. Also found is a manuscript of *No Pleasant Memories*, Brooks's autobiography, and *A War Interlude*, a book she wrote describing her life in Italy during World War II.

Printed material includes a copy of Natalie Barney's poetry, a poem by Brooks, a large-format copy of Gabriele D'Annunzio's poem *Sur Une Image de la France Croissee Piente Par Romaine Brooks*; magazines and exhibition catalogs concerning Brooks' art; clippings; and a nameplate for Eyre de Lanux, one of Barney's lovers.

There is one scrapbook which includes newsclippings, the majority of which are in French, concerning Brooks and her artwork from 1910 to 1931.

Photographs are of Brooks, of Brooks in her studio surrounded by her art; prints of photos of Brooks's mother and family; photographs of works of art including a photo of Brooks's portrait on John Cocteau hanging in the Louvre. Notable photographers include Carl Van Vecten and Perou.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Information, circa 1967-1968 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 2: Personal Business Records, 1967 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 3: Correspondence, 1924-1969, bulk 1950-1969 (Boxes 1-3; 0.8 linear feet)
- Series 4: Writings and Notes, circa 1930s-1959 (Boxes 3-4; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1910-1973 (Boxes 4-6; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 6: Scrapbook, 1910-1931 (Box 6; 1 folder)
- Series 7: Photographs, circa 1910-1970s (Box 5-6, OV7-8; 0.3 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Artists' studios -- Photographs
Portrait painting
Women artists
Women painters
World War, 1939-1945

Types of Materials:

Diaries

Interviews
Manuscripts
Notes
Photographs
Poems
Scrapbooks
Sound recordings

Names:

Acten, Harold
Barney, Natalie Clifford
Bizardel, Yvon
Breeskin, Adelyn Dohme, 1896-1986
Brooks, Romaine
Castelnou, Jean-Pierre
Dreyfus-Barney, Laura
Gauthier-Villars, Louis
Lahovary, Janine
Mac'Avoy, Edouard, 1905-
Mariano, Nicky
McClelland, Donald
Noailles, Charles, vicomte de
Strozzi, Uberto
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

Occupations:

Portrait painters -- France

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Information, circa 1967-1968

2 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains chronologies and a recorded interview.

Available: This series has been partially scanned.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 1 [Chronologies, circa 1967](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 Interview of Brooks, circa 1968

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Series 2: Personal Business Records, 1967

1 Folder (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains one receipt for an item purchased by Brooks.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 3 [Receipt, 1967](#)

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Series 3: Correspondence, 1924-1969 (bulk 1950-1969)

0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is scattered and the bulk of it dates from 1950-1969. Notable correspondents include Harold Acton, Laura Barney, Yvon Bizardel, Adelyn Breeskin, Jean-Pierre Castelnaud, Louis Gauthier-Villars, Janine Lahovary, Edouard MacAvoy, Nicky Mariano, Donald McClelland, Charles de Noailles, David Scott, Alan Searle, and Uberto Strozzi. Letters from Breeskin, Scott, and McClelland concern Brooks's relationship with the National Collection of Fine Arts. Also found is a small amount of Natalie Barney's personal correspondence dating from 1924-1968.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by correspondent. Illegible letters and Natalie Barney's correspondence are arranged chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 4	Acton, Harold, 1960-1962
Box 1, Folder 5	Acton, Hortense, 1960-circa 1962
Box 1, Folder 6	Barney, Laura (Dreyfus), 1955-1966
Box 1, Folder 7	Berthe, Mme., 1965-1968
Box 1, Folder 8	Bizardel, Yvon, 1963-1965
Box 1, Folder 9	Bizardel, Yvon, 1966
Box 1, Folder 10	Bizardel, Yvon, 1967-1969
Box 1, Folder 11	Bizardel, Yvon, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 12	Breeskin, Adelyn D., 1968
Box 1, Folder 13	Canart (?), Louise, 1956
Box 1, Folder 14	Cassou (?), Jean, 1968
Box 1, Folder 15	Castelnaud, Jean-Pierre, 1967
Box 1, Folder 16	Cholon, Jean, 1965
Box 1, Folder 17	DesGruezes, Michel, 1966-1967
Box 1, Folder 18	Ellas (?), 1957
Box 1, Folder 19	Gailly de Tourines, Jean, 1966-1969
Box 1, Folder 20	Gallup, Donald, 1965

Box 1, Folder 21	Gaubier-Viginen, Louis, 1964-1968
Box 1, Folder 22	Gugenot, Pierre, 1960
Box 1, Folder 23	Hennessy, Aileen, circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 24	Huisman, Ph., 1956-1958
Box 1, Folder 25	Lahouary, Mme. Nicholas (Janine), 1956-1967
Box 1, Folder 26	Lot, Guraime, 1962
Box 1, Folder 27	Luciano, Josephine, 1957-1958
Box 2, Folder 1	MacAvoy, Edouard, 1957-1963
Box 2, Folder 2	MacAvoy, Edouard, 1964-1966
Box 2, Folder 3	MacAvoy, Edouard, 1967-1969
Box 2, Folder 4	MacAvoy, Edouard, circa 1960s
Box 2, Folder 5	Marino, Nicky, 1964-1968
Box 2, Folder 6	McClelland, Donald R., 1964
Box 2, Folder 7	de Noailles, Charles, 1957-1958
Box 2, Folder 8	Olds, Alys, circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 9	Rosenberg, Paul, 1954-1955
Box 2, Folder 10	Scott, David W., 1966-1968
Box 2, Folder 11	Searle, Alan, 1958
Box 2, Folder 12	Strozzi, Uberto, 1951-1955
Box 2, Folder 13	Strozzi, Uberto, 1956-1959
Box 2, Folder 14	Strozzi, Uberto, 1960-1965
Box 2, Folder 15	Strozzi, Uberto, 1966-1967
Box 2, Folder 16	Strozzi, Uberto, circa 1950s-1960s
Box 2, Folder 17	Strozzi, Uberto, 1951-1967 Notes: Envelopes

Box 2, Folder 18	Taurines, J., 1964-1968
Box 2, Folder 19	Winwar, Frances, 1955-1956
Box 2, Folder 20	Wunder, Richard P., 1967-1968
Box 3, Folder 1	Miscellaneous, 1940-1968, undated Notes: unsigned, illegible
Box 3, Folder 2	Natalie Barney's Correspondence, 1955-1968, 1924-1925

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Series 4: Writings and Notes, circa 1930s-1959

0.3 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4)

Scope and Contents: Writings and notes includes seven handwritten journal notebooks that contain Romaine's thoughts, quotes from poetry and literature, references to museums and works of art throughout Europe, and drafts of letters. Also found is a manuscript of *No Pleasant Memories*, Brooks's autobiography, and of *A War Interlude*, a book she wrote describing her life in Italy during World War II.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 3, Folder 3	Journal Notebook, 1954-1956 Notes: contains lists and Romaine's thoughts
Box 3, Folder 4	Journal Notebook, 1958 Notes: contains thoughts and quotes
Box 3, Folder 5	Journal Notebook, 1959 Notes: contains copies of letters
Box 3, Folder 6	Journal Notebook, circa 1930s Notes: contains references to museums and works of art throughout Europe; mythology writings
Box 3, Folder 7	Journal Notebook, circa 1950s Notes: contains thoughts and quotes
Box 3, Folder 8	Journal Notebook, circa 1950s Notes: contains letters to a professor concerning a book
Box 3, Folder 9	Journal Notebook, circa 1950s Notes: contains quotes from poetry and literature
Box 3, Folder 10	Original Folder that Housed Journal Notebooks, circa 1950s
Box 3, Folder 11	Manuscript, No Pleasant Memories, circa 1930s
Box 3, Folder 12	Manuscript, No Pleasant Memories, circa 1930s
Box 4, Folder 1	Manuscript, No Pleasant Memories, circa 1930s
Box 4, Folder 2	Manuscript, A War Interlude, circa 1940s

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1910-1973

0.3 Linear feet (Boxes 4-6)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes published works by Barney and Brooks, magazines and clippings concerning Brooks and her artwork, and exhibition catalogs from Brooks' solo shows. This series includes a copy of Natalie Barney's *Poems and Poemes Autres Alliances*, published in 1920, which includes a poem by Brooks. Also found is a large-format copy of Gabriele D'Anunzio's poem *Sur Une Image de la France Croisee Piente Par Romaine Brooks*. A copy of *Life and Letters To-Day* features an excerpt from Brooks's autobiography. There is also a nameplate of Eyre de Lanux, one of Barney's lovers.

Available Formats: This series has been partially scanned. Only relevant pages of published materials have been scanned.

Box 4, Folder 3	Poems and Poemes Autres Alliances, by Natalie Barney, 1920
Box 4, Folder 4	Sur Une Image de la France Croisee Piente Par Romaine Brooks, by Gabriele d' Anunzio, circa 1920 Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 6
Box 4, Folder 5	L'Art et Les Artistes, 1923 May
Box 4, Folder 6	International Studio, 1926 February
Box 4, Folder 7	Life and Letters To-Day, 1938 Summer
Box 4, Folder 8	Bizarre, 1968 March
Exhibition Catalogs	
Box 4, Folder 9	Tableaux par Romaine Brooks, 1910 May
Box 5, Folder 1	Romain Brooks Solo Shows, 1926-1971
Box 5, Folder 2	Romaine Brooks Solo Shows, Duplicates, 1926-1971
Box 5, Folder 3	Other Artists, 1973
Box 5, Folder 4	Clippings, 1925-1968
Box 5, Folder 5	Eyre (Elizabeth) de Lanux Nameplate, circa 1950
Box 6, Folder 1	Oversized Work by Gabriele D'Anunzio, circa 1914 Notes: Oversized material scanned with Box 4, F4

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Series 6: Scrapbook, 1910-1931

1 Folder (Box 6)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of one scrapbook containing news clippings concerning Romaine Brooks's artwork and exhibitions dating from 1910-1931. Many of the clippings are in French.

Available: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Formats:

Box 6, Folder 3 [Scrapbook, 1910-1931](#)

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Series 7: Photographs, circa 1910-1970s

0.3 Linear feet (Boxes 5-6, OV 7-8)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Brooks, of Brooks in her studio with artworks, prints of photos of Brooks's family, and photographs of works of art. Notable photographs include portraits of Brooks by Carl Van Vecten and Perou and a photo of Brooks's portrait of John Cocteau hanging in The Louvre.

Available Formats: The bulk of this series has been scanned. Photographs of works of art and duplicates have not been scanned.

Box 5, Folder 6	Photographs of Romaine Brooks, circa 1930s-1970s Notes: Includes photos by Carl Van Vecten and Perou. Oversized material housed in Box 6 and OV 8
Box 5, Folder 7	Family Portraits, circa 1910 Notes: prints from 1874 photographs
Box 5, Folder 8	Photographs of Works of Art by Romaine Brooks, In Situ, circa 1920 Notes: Portrait of John Cocteau hanging in Pavillon de Marsan, Louvre
Box 5, Folder 9	Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1920s Notes: Oversized material housed in OV7
Box 5, Folder 10	Photographs of Works of Art, 1920 Notes: Oversized material housed in OV7
Box 5, Folder 11	Duplicates, circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 2	Oversized Photographs of Romaine Brooks with her Artwork, circa 1950s Notes: Oversized material scanned with Box 5, F6
Box OV 7	Oversized Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1920s Notes: Oversized material from Box 5, F9-10
Box OV 8	Oversized Portrait of Brooks by Van Vecten, circa 1935 Notes: Oversized material scanned with Box 5, F6

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