



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Calvin Burnett Papers, 1920-1979, bulk 1960s-1970s, in the Archives of American Art

Rayna Andrews

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was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Calvin Burnett papers
Date:	1920-1979 (bulk 1960s-1970s)
Identifier:	AAA.burncalv
Creator:	Burnett, Calvin, 1921-2007
Extent:	6.1 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of African American graphic artist and arts educator Calvin Burnett measure 6.1 linear feet and date from 1920 to 1979, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1960s to the 1970s. The papers contain biographical material, correspondence, writings, material related to his education and professional activities, personal business records, printed material, a scrapbook, and a small amount of photographs and artwork.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by Calvin Burnett in 1990.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview with Calvin Burnett conducted by Robert Brown, June 13, 1980-January 6, 1981.

Processing Information

This collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Rayna Andrews in 2017 with funding provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Calvin Burnett papers, 1920-1979, bulk 1960s-1970s. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center.

Conditions Governing Use

Authorization to publish, quote or reproduce requires written permission from Calvin Burnett or his heirs. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

Calvin Burnett (1921-2007) was an African American graphic artist, illustrator, and arts educator. He graduated from the Massachusetts School of Art (also known as MassArt; now the Massachusetts College of Art and Design) in 1942, and earned his MFA from Boston University in 1960. He later received another degree in arts education. Burnett taught at a number of institutions in the Northeast, including the DeCordova Museum and the Massachusetts School of Art, where he was the first African American to be appointed to the faculty, and where he taught for 33 years.

While on the faculty at the Massachusetts School of Art, Burnett was involved with the Black Artists Union, the Committee on Urban Education, and the Committee on Minority Affairs. Among their many functions, these groups advocated for more diverse representation in faculty and more funding for minority and disadvantaged students.

In 1966, Burnett published the book, *Objective Drawing*, about perspective. His interest in the subject and the idea for the book grew out of his teaching the perspective course at the Massachusetts School of Art (Oral history interview with Calvin Burnett, 1980 June 13-1981 January 6. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Transcript p.41).

Scope and Contents

The papers of graphic artist and arts educator Calvin Burnett measure 6.1 linear feet and date from 1920 to 1979, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1960s to the 1970s. The papers contain biographical material, correspondence, writings, material related to his education and professional activities, personal business records, printed material, a scrapbook, and a small amount of photographs and artwork.

Biographical material consists of resumes, biographical notes/drafts, certificates from volunteer organizations, an interview transcript, and personal calendars.

Correspondence consists of letters and drafts of letters to and from Burnett. Some partial fragments of letters are housed with the undated correspondence.

Writings consist of two subseries and includes both materials related to Burnett's book, *Objective Drawing*, as well as notes, notecards, poetry, and some class assignments.

Education and professional activities also includes two subseries. Teaching and education files consist of materials related to Burnett's time as both a student and an instructor. These include class notes, assignments, course materials, correspondence, etc. Black Artists Union, committee work, and related materials include materials related to the Black Artists Union (BAU), the Committee on Urban Education (CUE), and the Committee on Minority Affairs, and their work. These items include memos, printed materials, reports, and other documentation.

Personal business records consist of correspondence, financial documents, printed material, and notes related to commercial art jobs, consultations, sales, loans, and exhibitions.

Photographs are of Burnett, other individuals, and works of art. Not all of the works of art appear to be by Burnett.

Artwork includes drawings and three small sketchbooks.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as nine series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1947-1979 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1941-1979 (Box 1; 0.4 linear feet)
 - Series 3: Writings, 1950s-1970s (Boxes 1-2; 0.9 linear feet, OV 7)
 - Series 4: Education and Professional Activities, 1920-1970s (Boxes 2-5; 2.5 linear feet)
 - Series 5: Personal Business Records, 1947-1979 (Box 5; 0.3 linear feet)
 - Series 6: Printed Material, 1938-1979 (Boxes 5-6; 0.5 linear feet, OV 7)
 - Series 7: Scrapbook, 1937-1951 (Box 6; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 8: Photographs, 1946-1972 (Box 6; 1 folder)
 - Series 9: Artwork, 1941-1942 (Box 6; 2 folders)
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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:

African American artists
African American educators
Art -- Study and teaching

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks

Occupations:

Educators -- Massachusetts
Graphic artists -- Massachusetts
Illustrators -- Massachusetts

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1947-1979

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes resumes, biographical notes and short biographies, certificates from volunteer organizations, and an interview transcript. This series also includes an extensive run of personal calendars, as well as handwritten calendars/notes of personal activities.

Box 1, Folder 1 Biographical notes and short biographies, 1960s-1970s

Box 1, Folder 2 Resumes, 1960s-1970s

Box 1, Folder 3 Certificates from volunteer organizations, undated

Box 1, Folder 4 Framingham Union Hospital, 1976

Box 1, Folder 5-10 Calendars, 1947-1951, 1954-1956, 1958-1960, 1976-1979

Box 1, Folder 11 Handwritten calendar of events and activities, 1959-1977

Box 1, Folder 12 Interview transcript - "Jazz Album", 1949

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1941-1979

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The correspondence series consists of letters both to, and from Burnett, and also includes drafts of letters. Correspondence is primarily to and from other artists, galleries, curators, etc. and is related to Burnett's artwork. There is additional correspondence that relates to his teaching responsibilities, as well as some letters from family and friends, including cartoonist Art Wood. This series is arranged chronologically, with the undated correspondence at the end. Some fragments of letters were included with the undated correspondence. When possible, these fragments have been identified and filed appropriately. Remaining fragments are in the first (circa 1950s) undated folder.

Box 1, Folder 13-23	Correspondence, 1941-1979
Box 1, Folder 24	Fragments and undated, circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 25-26	Undated correspondence, circa 1940s-1970s

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Series 3: Writings, 1950s-1970s

0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OV 7)

Scope and Contents: This series includes material related to Burnett's book, *Objective Drawing*, as well as other writing such as class notes, notecards, and poetry.

3.1: *Objective Drawing* Book Project, 1958-1969

Scope and Contents: This series includes a galley proof of the book, *Objective Drawing*, as well as correspondence, drafts, financial papers, notes, and permissions related to its production and publication.

Box 1, Folder 27	Correspondence and notes, 1963-1968
Box 1, Folder 28-29	Correspondence and other documents, 1958-1969
Box 1, Folder 30	Correspondence and notes related to promotion, sales, and expenses, 1966
Box 1, Folder 31	Invoices and receipts, 1963-1966
Box 1, Folder 32	Notes and drafts, 1950s-1960s
Box 1, Folder 33	Notes for an appendix, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 34	Notes labeled "Add & re do", 1960s
Box 1, Folder 35	Notes labeled "Hold revisions", 1960s
Box 2, Folder 1	Quotations and outline, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 2	Letters and forms seeking permission to reproduce illustrations, 1964-1965
Box 2, Folder 3	Permissions granted to reproduce illustrations, 1965
Box 2, Folder 4	Permissions obtained for a fee to reproduce illustrations, 1965-1966
Box 2, Folder 5	Permissions not used in the book, 1965-1967
Box OV 7	<i>Objective Drawing</i> galley proof, 1966

3.2: Other Writings, 1948-1970s

Scope and Contents: Other writings include class notes and assignments, notecards with research and bibliographic notes, and poetry. Researchers should note that additional class notes and assignments can be found in the teaching and education subseries of Series 4.

Box 1, Folder 6 Paper, A proper relationship between extracurricular art activities and the curriculum is essential to the total education of the art school teacher education student, 1951

Box 2, Folder 7	Class notes, assignments, and exercises, 1967-1968
Box 2, Folder 8	Paper, Development and management of an audiovisual center at the Massachusetts College of Art, 1967
Box 2, Folder 9	Paper, New facilities for instrumental and perspective drawing at the college level, 1968
Box 2, Folder 10-11	School reports and assignments, 1967-1969
Box 2, Folder 12	Notecards: Black art history notes, 1960s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 13	Notecards: Black studies bibliography, 1962-1972
Box 2, Folder 14	Notecards: Creative bibliography, 1950s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 15	Notecards: General etching notes from books, miscellaneous papers, 1963-1966
Box 2, Folder 16	Notecards: Miscellaneous notes, 1962-1967
Box 2, Folder 17-18	Notecards: Notes on plates, stones, and wood, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 19	Notecards: Own stones at Lockwood's, 1962-1966
Box 2, Folder 20	Notecards: Own stones test stones, 1962-1965
Box 2, Folder 21	Notecards: Printmaking bibliography, 1962-1965
Box 2, Folder 22-24	Notecards: Untitled bibliography, 1950s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 25	Notecards: Untitled notecards, 1961-1966
Box 2, Folder 26	Notecards: Untitled notes, includes publisher addresses, undated
Box 2, Folder 27	Assorted notes and poetry, 1948-1954
Box 2, Folder 28	Notebook, undated

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Series 4: Education and Professional Activities, 1920-1970s

2.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-5)

4.1: Teaching and Education Files, 1920-1978

1.4 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: Teaching and education files include correspondence, notes, course materials, assignments, printed materials, and other related materials from Burnett's time as both a student, and an instructor. Burnett was already teaching when he went back to school to earn his degree in arts education. His student and teaching files are therefore intermingled. Researchers should note that additional materials related to Burnett's studies may be found in the Other Writing subseries (3.2).

Box 2, Folder 29	Elementary and high school report cards, 1927-1938
Box 2, Folder 30	Notes and printed material, 1967
Box 2, Folder 31	Notes and papers written for classes, 1968
Box 3, Folder 1	Notes, assignments, course materials, printed materials, 1968-1969
Box 3, Folder 2	Class notes and assignments, 1969
Box 3, Folder 3	Notes, 1969
Box 3, Folder 4-5	Notes, assignments, and other course materials, 1969
Box 3, Folder 6	Research notes and pull slips, 1969
Box 3, Folder 7-20	Class notes, assignments, and other course materials, 1960s
Box 3, Folder 21	Notes, assignments, and course materials, 1970
Box 3, Folder 22	Assignments and course materials, undated
Box 3, Folder 23	Teaching notes, course materials, sketches, and printed material, 1920, 1959-1966
Box 3, Folder 24	Teaching notes, course materials, material related to committee work, notes and assignments completed as a student, 1955-1974
Box 3, Folder 25-26	Notecards on student work, 1962-1967
Box 3, Folder 27	Materials related to AV services and teacher aids, 1964-1968
Box 3, Folder 28	Teaching notes and course materials, 1965-1969
Box 4, Folder 1	Teaching, class note, and printed material, 1968-1969

Box 4, Folder 2	Teaching notes and student grades, 1970-1972
Box 4, Folder 3	Reference and instructor course evaluations, 1970-1978
Box 4, Folder 4	Class and teaching notes and printed materials, 1971-1972
Box 4, Folder 5-6	Notes and materials related to committee work and library and AV resources, 1960s
Box 4, Folder 7	Assignments, notes, course materials, and material related to committee work, 1960s-1970s
Box 4, Folder 8	Teaching notes, committee materials, printed material, 1970s

4.2: Black Artists Union, Committee Work, and Related Materials, 1960s-1970s

1.1 *Linear feet*

Scope and Contents: This subseries consists of correspondence, memos, notes, proposals, reports, printed material, and other materials related to the interests of Black students on the MassArt campus. Burnett was involved with the Black Artists Union (BAU), the Committee on Urban Education (CUE), and the Committee on Minority Affairs, and this subseries includes materials regarding these committees and their interaction with the school community and administration.

Box 4, Folder 9	Laboratory seminar in the education of urban teachers, 1964-1966
Box 4, Folder 10-12	Notes, memos, reports, printed material, and related materials, 1965-1970
Box 4, Folder 13-14	Notes, memos, meeting minutes, and reports, 1968-1976
Box 4, Folder 15-16	Correspondence, memos, notes, proposals, and printed material, 1969-1973
Box 4, Folder 17	Memos, meetings, reports, and printed material, 1969-1974
Box 4, Folder 18-19	Correspondence, memos, notes, proposals, reports, and printed material, 1970-1972
Box 4, Folder 20	Tutorial program proposal revisions, 1972
Box 4, Folder 21-24	Notes, memos, reports, proposals, and printed materials, 1972-1976
Box 4, Folder 25-26	Notes, printed material, reports, CUE questionnaire on minority matters, and related material, 1974-1976
Box 5, Folder 1-7	Correspondence, notes, memos, proposals, reports, and printed material, 1960s-1970s

Box 5, Folder 8-13

Correspondence, memos, notes, program proposals, and other related materials, 1970s

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Series 5: Personal Business Records, 1947-1979

0.3 Linear feet (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: Personal business records include materials related to commercial art jobs; invitations to exhibit; materials related to the sale, loan, and exhibition of works of art; notes about teaching, meetings, and exhibitions; miscellaneous items and ephemera related to Burnett's career as an artist; and a ledger of his expenses. This series also includes materials related to work Burnett did as a consultant on an MIT project to develop concepts to report the appearance of the surface of Mars.

Box 5, Folder 14	Invitations to exhibit for non-profit groups, 1953-1972
Box 5, Folder 15-16	Materials related to commercial art jobs, 1967-1969, undated
Box 5, Folder 17-20	Materials related to the sale, loan, exhibition, receipt, etc. of works of art, 1947-1979
Box 5, Folder 21	Notes about teaching, meetings, and exhibitions, 1973-1978
Box 5, Folder 22-24	Materials related to consultation services for a Mars rover project, 1961-1969
Box 5, Folder 25	Items related to personal business and art career, 1947-1975
Box 5, Folder 26	Ledger of expenses, 1955-1961

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1938-1979

0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 5-6, OV 7)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes music recital programs, newsletters, and bulletins, as well as assorted printed materials and a combination of materials related a specific topic - i.e. Black affairs, or the Army Combat Arts program. This series also includes exhibition announcements, exhibition catalogs, exhibition posters, and clippings.

Box 5, Folder 27	Music recital programs, 1938-1939, undated
Box 5, Folder 28	Boston Printmakers newsletter, 1955-1965
Box 5, Folder 29	Army Combat Art Program - clippings, pamphlets, periodicals, 1964-1966
Box 5, Folder 30	Clippings and printed material related to black affairs, 1966-1978
Box 5, Folder 31	Graphic arts aids - printed material and notes, 1960s
Box 6, Folder 1	Massachusetts College of Art bulletin, 1972
Box 6, Folder 2-9	Assorted printed material, 1938-1977, undated
Box 6, Folder 10-13	Exhibition announcements, 1942-1978, undated
Box 6, Folder 14-18	Exhibition catalogs, 1940-1979, undated
Box 6, Folder 19-22	Clippings, 1942-1951, 1955-1977, undated
Box OV 7	Oversized exhibition posters, 1964, 1972

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Series 7: Scrapbook, 1937-1951

0.5 Linear feet

Scope and Contents: The scrapbook in this collection has been disbound, but the original cover appear at the beginning of the series. The contents have remained in the order in which they were received. The scrapbook primarily contains correspondence, notes, sketches, and printed material.

Box 6, Folder 23	Scrapbook cover, undated
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Box 6, Folder 24-29	Scrapbook, 1937-1951
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Series 8: Photographs, 1946-1972

1 Folder (Box 6)

Scope and Contents: The collection includes a small number of photographs of both individuals and works of art. Not all of the works of art represented in the photographs were produced by Burnett.

Box 6, Folder 30 Photographs of individuals and works of art, 1946-1972

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Series 9: Artwork, 1941-1942

2 Folders

Scope and Contents: The artwork series consists of a number of small drawings and illustrated cards or poems, as well as three small sketchbooks.

Box 6, Folder 31 Drawings, 1941-1942

Box 6, Folder 32 Sketchbooks, undated

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