



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Letterio Calapai
Papers, 1858, 1870, 1900-1993(bulk
1920s-1993), in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Letterio Calapai papers |
| Date: | 1858, 1870, 1900-1993 (bulk 1920-1993) |
| Identifier: | AAA.calalett |
| Creator: | Calapai, Letterio, 1902-1993 |
| Extent: | 3.4 Linear feet |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | The papers of Italian-American painter, engraver, and printmaker Letterio Calapai measure 3.4 linear feet and date from 1858 through 1993 (bulk 1920s-1993). Found are correspondence, teaching and project files, writings and notes, printed materials, photographs, and sketchbooks, including one with scenes of Rockwell Kent's dairy farm in upstate New York. |

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Letterio Calapai papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by the artist in 1992.

Processing Information

The Letterio Calapai papers were processed by Rosa Fernández in March 2003.

Preferred Citation

Letterio Calapai papers, 1858, 1870, 1900-1993 (bulk 1920s-1993). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment and is limited to the Washington, D.C. research facility.

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Biographical Note

Italian-American painter, engraver, and printmaker Letterio Calapai was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1903. His parents emigrated from Sicily and encouraged his participation in the arts at an early age. Calapai studied at the Massachusetts School of Art, the Beaux Arts Institute of Design, under artist Robert Laurent at the Art Students League, and at the American Artists School under Ben Shahn.

While in New York, Calapai worked as a lithographer in a commercial printing shop but eventually abandoned this to pursue his own printmaking and painting full time, an endeavor made possible with the financial help of his former professor, Charles Hopkins. In 1933, Calapai received his first exhibition, a one man show of his oil paintings, at the Art Center in New York City.

In the 1940s, Calapai became William Hayter's personal assistant at the Atelier 17 printmaking workshop and began to focus much of his work on this medium. He created a hugely successful portfolio of wood engravings inspired by the Thomas Wolfe play *Look Homeward Angel*. New York's George Binet Gallery hosted an exhibition of these prints the same year, a show that resulted in purchases of the portfolio by the libraries of Harvard University, Princeton, and the Boston and New York Public Libraries. Calapai also created book illustrations for a number of manuscript projects including 45 wood engravings for *How God Fixed Jonah* (1946), a West African adaptation of Old and New Testaments accounts in the Bible.

Calapai founded and chaired the Graphic Arts Department of the Albright Art School in Buffalo from 1949-1955 and taught at various universities and colleges, including the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine, the New School for Social Research, and New York University. He also established the Intaglio Workshop for Advanced Printmaking in Greenwich Village. He later left New York to teach at the University of Illinois, where he established a training studio and gallery.

Letterio Calapai died in Glencoe, Illinois in 1993.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Italian-American painter, engraver, and printmaker Letterio Calapai measure 3.4 linear feet and date from 1858 through 1993 (bulk 1920s-1993). Found are correspondence, teaching and project files, writings and notes, printed materials, photographs, and sketchbooks, including one with scenes of Rockwell Kent's dairy farm in upstate New York. Calapai's teaching career is documented through correspondence, writings and notes, as well as files concerning his position at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine. Projects files are found for Calapai's reprint of an 1845 engraving of *The Capture of Major Andre* by Asher B. Durand for the Historical Society of the Tarrytowns, New York, reprints of print originals by Thomas Bewick, the *Look Homeward Angel* engravings, and a possible exhibition and book about British engraver William Hogarth.

Arrangement

The Letterio Calapai papers are arranged into eleven series based primarily on type of material. Documents within individual folders are arranged chronologically by year.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1928, 1948-1993, undated (Box 1; 6 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1858, 1870, 1934-1992, undated (Boxes 1-2; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 3: Printed Material, 1925-1991, undated (Box 2; 12 folders)
- Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1921, 1941-1992, undated (Boxes 2-3; 6 folders)
- Series 5: The Historical Society of the Tarrytowns, New York, Project File, 1966, 1970-1980, undated
- Series 6: Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, Teaching Files, 1965-1981, undated (Box 3; 5 folders)

- Series 7: Thomas Bewick Project Files, 1938-1988, undated (Box 3; 4 folders)
 - Series 8: Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel* Portfolio Project Files, 1929-1990, undated (Box 3; 7 folders)
 - Series 9: William Hogarth Engravings Project Files, undated
 - Series 10: Photographs, 1900-1990, undated
 - Series 11: Artwork and Sketchbooks, 1960-1988, undated
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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:

Art -- Study and teaching
Printmakers -- Illinois
Printmakers -- New York (State) -- New York
Prints -- 20th century

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Sketchbooks
Sketches

Names:

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts -- Faculty

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1928, 1948-1993, undated

(Box 1; 6 folders)

Scope and Contents: Found are resumes, certificates, awards, copies of letters of recommendation written in support of Calapai for fellowships or staff positions, exhibition files, and miscellaneous financial material. The exhibition files include various entry forms for juried exhibitions that were of interest to the artist as well as entry forms for art fellowships and contests. Financial material consists of payment stubs, receipts, scattered correspondence and invoices for art supply purchases, shipping costs and miscellaneous expenses.

Box 1, Folder 1 Awards, Curriculum Vitae, Resumes, 1928, 1948-1993, undated

Box 1, Folder 2-3 Exhibition Files, 1949-1990, undated

Box 1, Folder 4 Financial Material, 1937-1981

Box 1, Folder 5 Letters of Recommendation, 1955-1959

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1858, 1870, 1934-1992, undated

(Boxes 1-2; 0.6 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence concerning Calapai's fifty-year retrospective exhibition in Rome in 1986, book projects, upcoming shows, and other career-related matters. Correspondents include Kendall College (includes audio reel), the New School for Social Research, the Society of Graphic Artists (SAGA), and others. Also found are letters from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) concerning Calapai's mural *Historical Development of Military Signal Communication*, undertaken for the Brooklyn Firemen's Association in 1939. There is one folder of correspondence with the Rockwell Kent Legacies concerning the posthumous printing of Rockwell Kent's engravings and other matters. General correspondence concerns a broader spectrum of career-related matters such as upcoming exhibitions and Calapai's printing workshop. Personal correspondence relates to sales and exhibition of prints discussed with friends and fellow artists, progress on current art projects, the health of Calapai's parents, and additional personal matters. Also found is a folder of letters addressed to his first wife, Delia Calapai, as well as copies of letters of recommendation written by Calapai in support of students for fellowship applications.

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| Box 1, Folder 6 | Calapai, Delia, 1947-1989, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 7-8 | Personal, 1934-1992, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 9-18 | General, 1942-1992, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 1-2 | Kendall College, Evanston, Ill, 1965-1969, n.d |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | Letters of Recommendation for Students, 1962-1992, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Retrospective Exhibition in Rome, Italy, 1980-1986 |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | Rockwell Kent Legacies, 1977-1991, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Society of Graphic Artists (SAGA), 1960-1991, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | United Methodist Church, Madison, NJ, 1858, 1870, 1960-1987 |
| Box 2, Folder 8 | Work Progress Administration, 1939-1988 |

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Series 3: Printed Material, 1925-1991, undated

(Box 2; 12 folders)

Scope and Contents: Found are exhibition announcements and catalogs, exhibition reviews published in newspaper and magazines, press releases, art journals and publications, and miscellaneous printed material.

Box 2, Folder 9 Exhibition Announcements, 1948-1991, undated

Box 2, Folder 10-12 Exhibition Catalogs, 1933-1990, undated

Box 2, Folder 13-14 Newspaper Clippings, 1941-1991, undated

Box 2, Folder 15 Newspapers, 1960-1986, undated

Box 2, Folder 16-18 Newsletters, Bulletins, Journals, 1925, 1952-1991, undated

Box 2, Folder 19 Press Releases, 1948-1990, undated

Box 2, Folder 20 Miscellaneous Printed Material, undated

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Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1921, 1941-1992, undated

(Boxes 2-3; 6 folders)

Scope and Contents: Found are Calapai's writings and notes on the printmaking process, descriptive information on several of Calapai's prints, lists regarding prints and exhibitions, and writings by others about printmaking.

Box 2, Folder 21 Information on Prints, 1965, 1976, undated

Box 2, Folder 22 Lecture Notes and Outlines, 1952-1992

Box 3, Folder 1 Lecture Notes and Outlines, undated

Box 3, Folder 2 Lists Regarding Prints and Exhibitions, 1961-1984

Box 3, Folder 3 Writings by Calapai, 1921, 1948, 1960-1989, undated

Box 3, Folder 4 Writings by Others, 1941, 1946, 1960, 1977, undated

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Series 5: The Historical Society of the Tarrytowns, New York Project File, 1966, 1970-1980, undated

(Box 3; 1 folder)

Scope and Contents: In the early 1970s, Calapai collaborated with New York's Historical Society of the Tarrytowns to reprint an 1845 etching of the oil painting, *The Capture of Major Andre*, by Asher B. Durand. One folder of correspondence relates to details associated with the enterprise.

Box 3, Folder 5

Historical Society of the Tarrytowns Project File, 1966, 1970-1980, undated

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Series 6: Haystack Mountain School of Crafts Teaching Files, 1965-1981, undated

(Box 3; 5 folders)

Scope and Contents: Files relating to Calapai's teaching position at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine, as well as his involvement in this small community where he and his second wife Jean kept a summer home.

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| Box 3, Folder 6 | Correspondence, 1976-1980 |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Lists, 1976-1980 |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Notes, 1977-1979, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Photographs, 1965, 1979, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | Printed Material, 1978-1981 |

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Series 7: Thomas Bewick Prints Project Files, 1938-1988, undated

(Box 3; 4 folders)

Scope and Contents: Files concerning a series of prints done by Calapai of 19th century printmaker Thomas Bewick's original wood block series based on the Aesop's Fables. Calapai published the prints in 1969 jointly with R. Hunter Middleton, director of the Ludlow Typography Company.

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| Box 3, Folder 11 | Correspondence, 1968-1988, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | Printed Material, 1938, 1946, 1969-1987 |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | Notes, 1969, 1973, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 14 | Writings, 1985, undated |

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Series 8: Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward Angel* Portfolio Project Files, 1929-1990, undated

(Box 3; 7 folders)

Scope and Contents: This series documents a portfolio of engravings Calapai created and published in 1949 based on the classic novel, *Look Homeward Angel*, by Thomas Wolfe. Found here are correspondence, printed materials, writings on Thomas Wolfe by Calapai and others, mailing lists, and proofs for the book jacket. Letters Returned to Sender refer to inquiry letters Calapai mailed in 1958 to collectors and potential buyers in hopes of generating further interest in the *Look Homeward Angel* portfolio. Correspondence from the 1980s documents a second attempt to republish the prints.

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| Box 3, Folder 15 | Correspondence, 1929-1988, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 16 | Early Proofs, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 17 | Letters Returned to Sender, 1958 |
| Box 3, Folder 18 | Mailing Lists, 1957, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 19-20 | Printed Material, 1939, 1948-1956, 1977-1990, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 21 | Writings, 1938, 1977, 1979, 1989, undated |

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Series 9: William Hogarth Engravings Exhibition Project File, undated

(Box 3; 1 folder)

Scope and Contents: One folder concerning a possible exhibition of the 19th century British engraver William Hogarth and the publication of an accompanying exhibition catalog or book. Found are photograph contact sheets, typewritten notes, and layout designs.

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| Box 3, Folder 22 | Photographs and Notes, undated |
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Series 10: Photographs, 1900-1990, undated

(Box 3; 6 folders)

Scope and Contents: Color and black and white images of Calapai at work in his studio and of his students. Also included are photographs of family members from Sicily including Calapai's parents, Emmanuela and Rosario Calapai, and photographs of Calapai's artwork.

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|---------------------|--|
| Box 3, Folder 23-24 | Artwork, 1925-1989, n,d |
| Box 3, Folder 25 | Family Members, 1900-1939, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 26-27 | Letterio Calapi and Others, 1957-1990, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 28 | Negatives and Proofs, undated |

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Series 11: Artwork and Sketchbooks, 1960-1988, undated

(Box 4; 6 folders)

Scope and Contents: Sketchbooks in graphite, pen and ink, and watercolor of landscape scenes, people, and other subjects. Places depicted include Kenya, Italy, New York City and Rockwell Kent's dairy farm, Asgaard, located in Au Sable Forks, New York. Also found are loose examples of artwork and original prints.

Box 4, Folder 1 Artwork, 1960-1988, undated

Box 4, Folder 2 Sketchbooks, 1962, 1965, 1971

Box 4, Folder 3 Sketchbook (single), 1974-1985

Box 4, Folder 4 Sketchbooks, 1978-1984

Box 4, Folder 5-6 Sketchbooks, undated

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