



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Mel Casas Papers, 1963-1998, in the Archives of American Art

Sarah Mundy and Stephanie Ashley

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Mel Casas papers
Date:	1963-1998
Identifier:	AAA.casamel
Creator:	Casas, Mel, 1929-2014
Extent:	1 Linear foot
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of San Antonio painter and educator Mel Casas measure 1 linear foot and date from 1963 to 1998. The collection is comprised of biographical material including files on the art collective Con Safo, correspondence regarding business and exhibitions, writings by Casas on Chicano art, printed materials documenting Casas's career and Con Safo events, and photographic materials, including photos and slides of Casas and others, his artwork, and an exhibition.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Mel Casas papers were donated by Mel Casas in 1981 and microfilmed as part of the Archives of American Art's Texas project. Additional papers were donated by Casas in 1999.

Related Materials

Also at the Archives of American Art is an interview of Mel Casas conducted August 14-16, 1996 by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art.

Available Formats

The collection was digitized in 2020 and is available on the Archives of American Art website.

A portion of the collection was microfilmed on reels 3316-3317 as part of the Archives of American Art's Texas project. The microfilm is only available for interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of material described in this finding aid does not reflect the order of the material on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2018.

The collection was further processed for digitization and the finding aid updated by Stephanie Ashley in 2020.

Preferred Citation

Mel Casas papers, 1963-1998. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Mel Casas (1929-2014) was a painter and educator in San Antonio, Texas.

Casas was born in El Paso in the historic El Segundo Barrio. After graduating from El Paso High School, he worked odd jobs before serving in the United States Army during the Korean War. Casas was wounded by a landmine in Korea and ultimately awarded the Purple Heart. After returning home he attended the University of Texas at El Paso and graduated in 1956. He subsequently earned a Master of Fine Art in 1958 from the University of the Americas in Mexico City.

Casas began his teaching career at Jefferson High School in El Paso where one of his students was artist Gaspar Enriquez. He went on to teach at San Antonio College and was chair of the art department there until his retirement in 1990.

Casas was a founder of the Chicano art movement and a key member of the art collective Con Safo with other founding members Felipe Reyes, Jose Esquivel, Rudy Treviño, and Roberto Ríos. Originally named El Grupo, the group's mission was to empower Chicano artists who were largely overlooked in the mainstream art world. In 1968 Casas penned the "Brown Paper Report," a manifesto explaining the meaning of Con Safo, Chicano, the "Brown Vision of America," and the group's use of the symbol "C/S." The report helped to define Con Safo as an organization and remains a fundamental document in the history of the Chicano art movement.

Casas is well-known for his series *Humanscapes* that includes 150 large-scale paintings produced between 1965 and 1989. This series, along with smaller works, has been exhibited throughout the United States and Mexico. Casas's work can be found in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and other collections worldwide.

Casas died in San Antonio, Texas, in 2014.

Scope and Contents

The papers of San Antonio painter and educator Mel Casas measure 1 linear foot and date from 1963 to 1998. The collection is comprised of biographical material including files on the art collective Con Safo, correspondence regarding business and exhibitions, writings by Casas on Chicano art, printed materials documenting Casas's career and Con Safo events, and photographic materials, including photos and slides of Casas and others, his artwork, and an exhibition.

Of particular note are the files on Con Safo, including meeting minutes for two 1975 meetings, and copies of *La Movida Con Safo* numbers 1 and 2, which include records of the founding of the group and copies of defining documents of the Chicano art movement. Casas's writings, which express his ideas on Chicano art in diagrammatic form, are also of particular note.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as five series.

- Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1975-1996 (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1975-1993 (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 3: Writings, 1973-1993 (Box 1; 0.9 folders)
- Series 4: Printed Materials, 1963-1998 (Box 1-2, OVs 3-4; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographic Materials, circa 1977 (Box 2; 2 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Chicano art movement
Chicano artists
Latino and Latin American artists
Mexican American art
Mexican American artists

Names:

Con Safo (Group)

Occupations:

Art teachers -- Texas -- San Antonio
Painters--Texas--San Antonio

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Materials, circa 1968-1996

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical materials are comprised of Casas's certificate of appointment to the San Antonio Fine Arts Commission, and curriculum vitae and resumes, including a copy of a completed 1990 application for a listing in *Who's Who Among Hispanic Americans*. Also of significance are two files for the art collective Con Safo, which include minutes for the group's 1975 meetings on July 7 and August 4, lists of members and officers, and copies of *La Movida Con Safo 1* and *La Movida Con Safo 2*, which document Con Safo's founding philosophies, principles, policies, and strategies.

Box 1, Folder 1 [Certificate, Fine Arts Commission, City of San Antonio, 1988](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 [Con Safo, La Movida, Numbers 1-2, circa 1974-circa 1976](#)

Box 1, Folder 3 [Con Safo, Minutes of Meetings, circa 1975-1976](#)

Box 1, Folder 4 [Curriculum Vitae and Resumés, circa 1968-1996](#)

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1975-1993

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Four folders of correspondence primarily document exhibitions and other events Casas participated in. Correspondence related to his participation in symposia and other programs includes Arte-Arts regarding a 1984 symposium "Images for the '90s," San Antonio radio station KURU 89.1 FM, the San Antonio Art League, the San Antonio Women's Caucus for the Arts, and INTAR Gallery, where Casas served as a guest panelist for a 1986 symposium on Chicano/Mexican-American Art.

There are two letters from Shifra M. Goldman, one of which expresses her interest in writing about Casas, and correspondence from San Antonio College, including material related to Casas's receipt of an award at the Seventh Annual Tribute to the Chicano Arts recognizing "outstanding achievements of contemporary Hispanic artists."

Correspondence with galleries and museums relates to exhibitions with Aspen Art Museum, ¡Mira! Canadian Club Hispanic Art Tour, and Frito-Lay, Inc. Also found are correspondence, check lists, loan agreements, and material relating to the exhibition catalog essay, for Casas's retrospective at the Laguna Gloria Art Museum. Additional printed material for exhibitions can be found in Series 4: Printed Material.

Box 1, Folder 5	General Correspondence, circa 1975-1984
Box 1, Folder 6	General Correspondence, 1985-1987
Box 1, Folder 7	General Correspondence, 1988
Box 1, Folder 8	General Correspondence, 1989-1993

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Series 3: Writings, 1973-1993

9 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Writings by Casas include five diagrammatic presentations on Chicano art, at least one of which was presented at a 1976 "Humanities on the Border" conference at the University of Texas at El Paso. Also found are descriptions of individual paintings, 63-69, 71, and 73, from Casas's *Humanscape* series, and a few brief notes by Casas on a "Contemporary Art Month" calendar.

Writings by others include a student paper on Casas and the manuscript "Mexican and Chicano Workers in Visual Arts" by Shifra M. Goldman.

Box 1, Folder 9	By Casas, Annotated Calendar, 1993
Box 1, Folder 10	By Casas, "Art of the Southwest....Art on the Border", 1976
Box 1, Folder 11	By Casas, "Art on the Border", 1976
Box 1, Folder 12	By Casas, "Art Statement", circa 1973-circa 1976
Box 1, Folder 13	By Casas, "Chicano Art: A Saccadic Scanning", 1973
Box 1, Folder 14	By Casas, Diagrammatic Text on Chicano Art, circa 1973-circa 1976
Box 1, Folder 15	By Casas, Humanscape Series Descriptions, circa 1974
Box 1, Folder 16	By Others, "Mel Casas: Painting as Idea" by Carey Clements, 1975
Box 1, Folder 17	By Others, "Mexican and Chicano Workers in Visual Arts" by Shifra M. Goldman, 1982

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Series 4: Printed Materials, 1963-1998

0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OVs 3-4)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes brochures, newspaper and magazine clippings, event programs, exhibition announcements and catalogs, invitations, and posters relating to Casas, his artwork, and exhibitions.

Clippings provide coverage of some of the main highlights of Casas's career from the 1960s to the 1990s. The history of Con Safo is also documented in clippings, announcements, and catalogs including a 1972 brochure for a group exhibition at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, which includes the first appearance of *Con Safo (C/S) Artists: A Contingency Factor*.

There are posters for exhibitions including *Humanscapes* (1979) at San Antonio College Department of Art; *Mel Casas: 22 Paintings* at Texas Lutheran College, circa 1967; and a solo exhibition at Boehm Gallery, Palomar College (1973).

Also found is a press kit for the influential exhibition *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970*; Casas was invited to lecture as part of a special program developed to accompany this exhibition at the El Paso Museum of Art.

Arrangement: Records are arranged by material type and chronologically thereafter.

Box 1, Folder 18	Brochures and Programs, 1986-1990
Box 1, Folder 19	Clippings, circa 1970s-circa 1990s
Box 1, Folder 20	Clippings, 1967-1971
Box 1, Folder 21	Clippings, 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 22	Clippings, 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 23	Clippings, 1980-1987
Box 2, Folder 1	Clippings, 1988-1989
Box 2, Folder 2	Clippings, 1990-1996
Box OV 3, Folder 1	Clippings, 1966, 1971, 1977-1979
Box OV 3, Folder 2	Clippings, 1980-1981
Box OV 3, Folder 3	Clippings, 1987-1998
Box 2, Folder 3	Con Safo Announcements and Catalogs, 1972-1977
Box 2, Folder 4	Con Safo Announcements and Catalogs, 1977-1978
Box 2, Folder 5	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1963-1968
Box 2, Folder 6	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1971-1974

Box 2, Folder 7	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1975-1976
Box 2, Folder 8	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1977-1979
Box 2, Folder 9	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1982-1986
Box 2, Folder 10	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1988-1989
Box 2, Folder 11	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1990-1995
Box OV 3, Folder 4	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1979, 1993
Box 2, Folder 12	Invitations, circa 1986
Box 2, Folder 13	Press Kit, The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States 1920-1970 Exhibition, 1989
Box OV 4	Posters, circa 1967-1991

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Series 5: Photographic Materials, 1970s

2 Folders (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Color and black and white photographic materials consist of eight photos and two slides which are portraits and snapshots of Casas, and Casas with others, as well as four snapshots from an exhibition of *Humanscape 55* in Houston, Texas.

Box 2, Folder 14

[Photos of Exhibition Humanscape 55 in Houston, Texas, circa 1976](#)

Box 2, Folder 15

[Photos and Slides of Mel Casas, 1970s](#)

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