



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

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

Sarah Mundy

The processing of this collection received Federal support from the
Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

2018/10/04

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Mel Casas papers
Identifier:	AAA.casamel
Date:	1963-1998
Extent:	1 Linear Feet
Creator:	Casas, Mel, 1929-2014
Language:	English
Summary:	The papers of painter and educator Mel Casas measure 1.0 linear feet and date from 1963 to 1998. The collection is comprised of biographical materials that include files on the art collective Con Safo, correspondence regarding business and exhibitions, writings by Casas on Chicano art and by others, printed materials, and photographic materials containing photographs 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

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 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.

Preferred Citation

Mel Casas papers, 1963-1998. 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.

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, Casas worked a few odd jobs before serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He became wounded by a landmine and subsequently received a Purple Heart. After returning home from the war, he attended the University of Texas at El Paso graduating in 1956. He received a Master of Fine Art in 1958 from the University of the Americas in Mexico City. He began his teaching career at Jefferson High School in El Paso where one of his students was artist Gaspar Enriquez. Casas went on to teach at San Antonio College and was Chair of the Art Department until he retired in 1990.

Casas was a member of the art collective Con Safo. The group was founded by Felipe Reyes under the original name El Grupo. A few of the original members included Jose Esquivel, Rudy Treviño, and Roberto Ríos. The mission of the group was to empower Chicano artists who were largely overlooked in the mainstream art world. In 1968 Casas penned the "Brown Paper Report," a manifesto discussing the meaning of Con Safo, Chicano concepts, and the use of the symbol "C/S." The report helped 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 that were produced from 1965 to 1989. This series, along with smaller works, has been exhibited throughout the U.S. and Mexico. His work is also in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and other collections worldwide.

Casas died in 2014 in San Antonio, Texas.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter and educator Mel Casas measure 1.0 linear feet and date from 1963 to 1998. The collection is comprised of biographical materials that include files on the art collective Con Safo, correspondence regarding business and exhibitions, writings by Casas on Chicano art and by others, printed materials, and photographic materials containing photographs and slides of Casas and others, his artwork, and an exhibition.

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; 5 folders)
- Series 4: Printed Materials, 1963-1998 (Box 1-2, OV's 3-4; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographic Materials, circa 1977 (Box 2; 1 folder)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Cultures:

Con Safo (Group of artists)
Hispanic American artists
Mexican American art
Mexican American artists
Painting, Modern--20th century--History--Texas--San Antonio

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Occupations:

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

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1975-1996

4 folders (Box 1)

Biographical materials contain a certificate, curriculum vitae, and files for the art collective Con Safo.

Box 1, Folder 1	Certificate, San Antonio Fine Arts Commission, 1988
Box 1, Folder 2-3	Con Safo, 1975-1978 Includes meeting minutes, printed material, correspondence, writings regarding Chicano artists, and in a copy of <i>La Movida</i> .
Box 1, Folder 4	Curriculum Vitae, 1990-1996

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1975-1993

4 folders (Box 1)

Correspondence is mainly with galleries and universities regarding business matters and exhibitions.

Box 1, Folder 5 General, 1975-1984

Box 1, Folder 6 General, 1985-1987

Box 1, Folder 7 General, 1988

Box 1, Folder 8 General, 1989-1993

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Series 3: Writings, 1973-1993

5 folders (Box 1)

Writings by Casas are on Chicano art, descriptions of individual painting from the *Humanscape* series, and notes on contemporary art month. 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, On Chicano Art, 1973-1976 Includes five writings in diagram form regarding art on the border, Chicano murals, and a statement on art.
Box 1, Folder 10	By Casas, <i>Humanscape</i> Series Descriptions, circa 1974 Includes descriptions for <i>Humanscape</i> 63-69, 71, and 73.
Box 1, Folder 11	By Casas, Notes on Contemporary Art Month, 1993
Box 1, Folder 12	By Others, "Mel Casas: Painting as Idea" by Carey Clements, 1975
Box 1, Folder 13	By Others, "Mexican and Chicano Workers in Visual Arts" by Shifra M. Goldman, 1982

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Series 4: Printed Materials, 1963-1998

0.7 Linear Feet (Boxes 1-2, OVs 3-4)

Brochures, newspaper and magazine clippings, event programs, exhibition announcements and catalogs, invitations, periodicals, and posters relating to Casas, his artwork, and exhibitions, as well as a press kit for the influential exhibition *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* are in this series.

Box 1, Folder 14	Brochures, 1982-1991
Box 1, Folder 15-18	Clippings, 1966-1998
Oversize 3	Clippings, 1977-1981
Box 1, Folder 19	Event Programs, 1988-1990
Box 2, Folder 1-5	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1963-1995
Oversize 3	Exhibition Catalogs, 1979-1993
Box 2, Folder 6	Invitations, circa 1986
Box 2, Folder 7-8	Periodicals, 1967-1981
Oversize 3	Periodicals, 1980
Oversize 4	Posters, 1979-1983
Box 2, Folder 9	Press Kit, <i>The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States 1920-1970</i> Exhibition, 1989

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Series 5: Photographic Materials, circa 1977

1 folder (Box 2)

Photographic materials consist of portraits and snapshots of Casas, Casas with others, and an exhibition of *Humanscape 55* in Houston, Texas.

Box 2, Folder 10

Mel Casas, circa 1977

Box 2, Folder 11

Exhibition of *Humanscape 55* in Houston, Texas, circa 1976

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