



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Francis M. Celentano Papers, circa 1939-2020, bulk 1950-2016, in the Archives of American Art

Sabine Lipten

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	2
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-2020	4
Series 2: Correspondence, 1957-2007	5
Series 3: Writings, circa 1941-2016	6
Series 4: Project Files, circa 1973-2013	8
Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1964-2018	10
Series 6: Photographic Material, circa 1943-2016	11
Series 7: Artwork, circa 1970-2016	12

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Francis M. Celentano papers
Date:	circa 1939-2020 (bulk 1950-2016)
Identifier:	AAA.celefran
Creator:	Celentano, Francis, 1928-2016
Extent:	2.7 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Francis M. Celentano papers measure 2.7 linear feet and date from circa 1939-2020, with the bulk of the collection dating from 1950-2016. The collection documents Celentano's career as an Op painter and sculptor, as well as his time as a student at New York University and as a Fulbright scholar in Rome. Included is biographical material; correspondence; writings; and project files detailing several exhibitions and works of art that Celentano worked on and participated in throughout his career. Also found are printed materials that showcase numerous exhibitions Celentano was in; photographs and transparencies of the artists and his work; and pencil and digital sketches.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated in 2020 by Rebecca Celentano, Francis Celentano's widow.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Sabine Lipten in 2022.

Preferred Citation

Francis M. Celentano papers, circa 1939-2020. 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

Francis Celentano (1928-2016) was an art professor and one of the original New York Op artists. Born in the Bronx in 1928, he studied both art and art history as an undergraduate and graduate student at New York University. During his undergraduate program, Celentano took drawing classes with Philip Guston who influenced Celentano's interest in abstract expressionism, which eventually became the topic of his 1957 master's thesis, "The Origins and Development of Abstract Expressionism in the United States." His thesis supervisor was the art historian Horst W. Janson with whom he took several graduate and undergraduate courses. In 1957 after earning his art history master's degree Celentano received a Fulbright Scholarship to study painting in Rome. He returned to New York and continued to paint, and his abstract expressionist style transformed into Op art, a form that uses optical illusions.

Celentano continued living in New York until 1966 when he joined the faculty in the painting department of the School of Art at the University of Washington in Seattle. He taught in the department until retiring in 1993 to dedicate himself back to creating art full time. Over the course of his career Celentano exhibited work in numerous solo and group exhibitions across the country, with a heavy emphasis in New York, Washington, and Oregon. Exhibitions include the *Responsive Eye* (1965), the Museum of Modern Art; *Kinetic and Optical Art Today* (1965), Albright-Knox Gallery; a mural installation in the Seattle-Tacoma airport (1972); and *Francis Celentano: Form and Color a ten-year retrospective* (2010), Hallie Ford Museum of Art. Celentano's work is included in several museum collections such as the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo.

Scope and Contents

The papers of Op artist Francis M. Celentano measure 2.7 linear feet and date from circa 1939-2020, with bulk dates from 1950-2016. Included is biographical material is his birth and death certificates, as well as certificates for his first communion, a scholastic art award, his high school diploma and a resume; correspondence with Celentano's NYU thesis advisor H.W. Janson, and fellow artists Evelyn Hofer and Ivan Schwebel. Also found are letters from museums, galleries, and the Fulbright program. Writings include academic and professional writing projects by Celentano as well as extensive painting and sculpture notes, a diary, and some poetry. Academic writing consists of undergraduate and graduate term papers including a copy of his master's thesis "The Origins and Development of Abstract Expressionism in the United States" (New York University, 1957) and supporting research notes. Project files contain notes, photographic and video materials, proposals, planning documents, correspondence and installation instructions related to specific exhibitions, lectures and individual artworks that Celentano worked on throughout his career; printed material consisting of exhibition catalogs, flyers, announcements, and clippings; photographs are of Celentano with his artwork as well as with friends and family and transparencies of works of art; and artwork contains annotated preparatory pencil and digital sketches, and unannotated ink jet print outs of digital paintings.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Biographical Material, 1939-2020 (0.2 Linear feet Box 1)
- Correspondence, 1957-2007 (0.2 Linear feet Box 1)
- Writings, circa 1941-2016 (0.7 Linear feet Box 1-2)
- Project Files, circa 1973-2013 (0.6 Linear feet Box 2)
- Printed Material, circa 1964-2018 (0.5 Linear feet Box 2-3)

- Photographic Material, circa 1943-2016 (0.3 Linear feet Box 3, OV 5)
- Artwork, circa 1970-2016 (0.2 Linear feet Box 4)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Optical art

Types of Materials:

Diaries

Occupations:

Educators -- Washington (State) -- Seattle

Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Painters -- Washington (State) -- Seattle

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-2020

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes Celentano's birth and death certificates, as well as certificates for his first communion, a scholastic art award and his high school diploma. Also included is a resume.

Box 1, Folder 1 Birth and Death Certificates, 1957, 2016

Box 1, Folder 2 Resume, 2020

Box 1, Folder 3 First Communion Certificate, 1939

Box 1, Folder 4 High School Diploma, 1947

Box 1, Folder 5 Scholastic Art Award Certificate, 1947

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1957-2007

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically and consist of letters from Celentano's thesis advisor H.W. Janson, fellow artists Evelyn Hofer and Ivan Schwebel. Also found are letters from museums, galleries, and the Fulbright program.

Box 1, Folder 6	Albright Knox Art Gallery, 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 7	Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1965-1966
Box 1, Folder 8	Fullbright Grant Letters, 1957-1958
Box 1, Folder 9-10	Evelyn Hoffer, 1959-1962
Box 1, Folder 11	H.W. Janson, 1958
Box 1, Folder 12	Ivan Schwebel, 1961-1962
Box 1, Folder 13	Studio Vista Limited Publishers, 1971
Box 1, Folder 14	Howard Wise Gallery, 1966, 2007

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Writings, circa 1941-2016

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: The Writing series contains academic and professional writing projects by Celentano as well as extensive painting and sculpture notes, a diary, and some poetry. Academic writing includes undergraduate and graduate term papers as well as a copy of his master's thesis "The Origins and Development of Abstract Expressionism in the United States" (New York University, 1957) and supporting research notes. Professional writing projects include artist statements, descriptive lists of artworks, lecture notes, and painting and sculpture notes regarding both specific paintings and sculptures as well as broad techniques and components of his practice. His diary documents his time in Rome as a Fulbright scholar.

Box 1, Folder 15	Francis Celentano Artist Statements, circa 1954-2012
Box 1, Folder 16	Lists of Artwork, circa 2015
Box 1, Folder 17	Lecture Notes, circa 2000
Box 1, Folder 18	Rome Diary, circa 1958-1962
Box 1, Folder 19	Bound Collection of Undergraduate Term Papers, New York University, 1941-1951
Box 1, Folder 20	"Rubens and the School of Raphael" Graduate Seminar report, New York University, 1954
Box 1, Folder 21	"Drawings as a Correlate of Painting During the Impressionist Period" Graduate Term Paper, New York University, 1954
Box 1, Folder 22	"Early Phases of Classical and Expressionist Trends in Abstract Painting" Graduate Term Paper, New York University, 1954
Box 1, Folder 23	"Background and Early Trends in American Abstract Expressionism" (Presentation of Research Toward Completion of Masters Thesis Entitled "The Origins of Abstract Expressionism in the United States"), circa 1954-1957
Box 1, Folder 24	Master's Thesis Notes, 1954-1957
Box 1, Folder 25	"The Origins of Abstract Expressionism in the United States" Masters Thesis, New York University, 1957
	Painting and Sculpture Notes
Box 1, Folder 26	Helical Spectrum Chromatic Twist Columns, 1982-1995
Box 1, Folder 27	Flare Columns, Bases and Boxes, 1995-1996
Box 1, Folder 28	Three Color Overlay, 1987

Box 1, Folder 29	Pre Serpa Paper Paintings, 2001
Box 1, Folder 30	Photoshop, 2015-2016
Box 1, Folder 31	Triangular Overlays, 2014-2015
Box 1, Folder 32	Scotchcal 220 Vinyl Film Swatches, circa 2013-2015
Box 1, Folder 33	Plastic Modules, 1984
Box 1, Folder 34	Painting Notations, circa 1965-1975
Box 1, Folder 35	Serpa Paintings, 2001-2002
Box 1, Folder 36	Crazy Wave, 2012-2013
Box 1, Folder 37	Star Columns, circa 1998
Box 1, Folder 38	Loco Logos, 2007-2010
Box 2, Folder 1	Work Panel Layout, circa 1974-1975
Box 2, Folder 2	Poetry by Francis Celentano, circa 1962-2011
Box 2, Folder 3	Miscellaneous Notes, 1951-1952, circa 1989-2013

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Project Files, circa 1973-2013

0.6 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Project files contain notes, photographic material and video, proposals, planning documents, correspondence and installation instructions corresponding to specific exhibitions, lectures and individual artworks that Celentano worked on throughout his career.

Box 2, Folder 4	Iota Painting, 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 5	Seattle–Tacoma International Airport Mural, circa 1972
Box 2, Folder 6	Curve of Isis in Black and Red Sculpture, 1985
Box 2, Folder 7	Pendenza Painting, 1978-1980
Box 2, Folder 8	Diachroma Painting Series, circa 1986-1987
Box 2, Folder 9	Diamorphus Painting Series, circa 1976-1977
Box 2, Folder 10	Electra Painting Series (made using Targa file format), 1991-1992
Box 2, Folder 11	Exana Painting Series, 1992-1993
Box 2, Folder 12	Spira Paining Series, 1988-1989
Box 2, Folder 13	Trizazz Painting Series, 1989
Box 2, Folder 14	Zeta Painting, 1986
Box 2, Folder 15	Le Crique Painting Series, 2003-2004
Box 2, Folder 16	Star Sculpture Series, 2000-2003
Box 2, Folder 17	Xmas Tree Sculpture, 2008
Box 2, Folder 18	Gemini Painting Series, 2010-2013
Box 2, Folder 19	Francis Celentano: Form and Color Hallie Ford Museum Retrospective (Nov. 2010-Jan. 2011), Hallie Ford Museum of Art, 2010-2011 Includes 2 electronic disks (DVD)
Box 2, Folder 20	"Francis Celentano" Whatcom Museum of History and Art Documentary Video and Transcript, 1992 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 21	Francis Celentano Lecture, Highland Community College, 1999

1 Videocassettes (VHS)

Box 2, Folder 22

Francis Celentano Star Sculpture Lecture, 2005
1 Videocassettes (VHS)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1964-2018

0.5 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Printed material is primarily made up of exhibition catalogs, flyers and announcements documenting individual and group shows Celentano was a part of throughout his career. Also found are newspaper and magazine clippings, informational handouts about paint and a press packet for a group instillation Celentano participated in: *A Program to Encourage the Advancement of Environmental Art* (1974), at Lincoln Center in New York City.

Box 2, Folder 23-25 Exhibition Catalogs, 1964-1995, 2018

Box 2, Folder 26-27 Exhibition Announcements and Flyers, 1966-1998, 2015

Box 3, Folder 1 News and Magazine Clippings, 1968-2005, 2016

Box 3, Folder 2 A Program to Encourage the Advancement of Environmental Art (1974), Lincoln Center Instillation Press Package, 1974

Box 3, Folder 3 Golden brand Paint Informational Materials, circa 2004

Box 3, Folder 4 Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1969-1982

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Photographic Material, circa 1943-2016

0.3 Linear feet (Box 3, OV 5)

Scope and Contents: Photographic material contains black and white photographs of Celentano in different settings: with friends and family, working on and posing with his artwork. There are also selected transparencies of paintings that Celentano sent as part of his Fulbright application. Other photographic material includes photographs of his artwork and the artwork of others Celentano was using in his thesis research.

Box 3, Folder 5	Artwork, 1966, 1988
Box 3, Folder 6	Francis Celentano with Artwork, circa 1966-2007
Box 3, Folder 7	Francis Celentano Working, circa 1960s, 2003
Oversize 5, Folder 1	Francis Celentano Working, Oversized, circa 1960s, 2003
Box 3, Folder 8	Francis Celentano, Family and Friends, 1953-1998, 2016
Box 3, Folder 9	Other Artists' Artwork for Thesis Research, circa 1943-1952
Box 3, Folder 10-11	Transparencies of Paintings Submitted to the Fulbright Program's Grant Committee, 1954-1956

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Artwork, circa 1970-2016

0.2 Linear feet (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: The Artwork series contains annotated preparatory pencil and digital sketches and inkjet print outs of digital paintings.

Box 4, Folder 1	Epsilon, Theta, Omicron Painting Sketches, 1974-1976
Box 4, Folder 2	Le Cirque Painting Sketches, 2004-2005
Box 4, Folder 3	Preparatory Pencil Sketches, circa 1970-2011
Box 4, Folder 4-5	Preparatory Digital Sketches, circa 2011-2016
Box 4, Folder 6	Digital Paintings, 2007-2010

[Return to Table of Contents](#)