



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the William Conger Papers, circa
1940s-2018, in the Archives of American Art.

Ryan Evans

2021 May 11

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	William Conger papers
Date:	circa 1940s-2018
Identifier:	AAA.congwill
Creator:	Conger, William
Extent:	7.3 Linear feet 3.51 Gigabytes
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of painter and educator William Conger measure 7.3 linear feet and 3.51 gigabytes, and date from the 1940s to 2018. The collection documents Conger's career as a painter and details his business dealings and involvement with Chicago's art community through biographical material, personal and professional correspondence, writings including artmaking journals and notes, and personal business records documenting commissions and sales. Also found are exhibition and gallery records including video recordings, printed material on Conger's career and Chicago art history, photographic material picturing Conger and his artwork, and artwork including a sketchbook and preparatory sketches for paintings.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The William Conger papers were donated in 2007, 2015 and 2019 by William Conger.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview with William Conger in 2015, May 18-20.

William Conger papers relating to his years as a faculty member at Northwestern University are located at Northwestern University Archives.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid was prepared by Ryan Evans in 2021.

Preferred Citation

William Conger Papers, circa 1940s-2018. 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. Researchers interested in accessing born-digital

records or audiovisual recordings in this collection must use access copies. Contact References Services for more information.

Conditions Governing Use

Journals and Restricted Correspondence: Authorization to quote or reproduce for purposes of publication requires written permission from William Conger. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

William Conger, born 1937 in Dixon, Illinois, is an abstract painter and art educator living in Chicago.

From a young age Conger's interest in art making and a fascination with the masters was encouraged by his mother, an amateur painter who brought him on regular visits to exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago from their home in Evanston, Illinois. Conger received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of New Mexico where he studied with renowned abstract painters Elaine de Kooning and Raymond Johnson, and later received his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Chicago. Conger taught painting throughout the 1970s at DePaul University, then became Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Northwestern University from 1985 until he retired as Professor Emeritus in 2006. At Northwestern he taught alongside friend and colleague Ed Paschke. Conger has published writings on art on topics such as psychoanalysis and the masters, the Chicago art scene, and abstract art of the region.

Conger's mature style is an abstract style of painting largely informed by color and form, reminiscent of Wassily Kandinsky, often titled with musical and metaphorical references. He began exhibiting as early as his undergraduate years in the New Mexico Biennial and was included by professor Elaine de Kooning in a 1960 group exhibition at the Great Jones Gallery in New York City. In addition to showing at commercial art galleries Conger has completed a number of public artworks primarily in the Chicago area, including murals and painted sculptures. His work can be found in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and the Wichita Art Museum, as well as numerous university museums and corporate collections internationally.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter and educator William Conger measure 7.3 linear feet and 3.51 gigabytes, and date from the 1940s to 2018. The collection documents Conger's career as a painter and details his business dealings and involvement with Chicago's art community through biographical material, personal and professional correspondence, writings including artmaking journals and notes, and personal business records documenting commissions and sales. Also found are exhibition and gallery records including video recordings, printed material on Conger's career and Chicago art history, photographic material picturing Conger and his artwork, and artwork including a sketchbook and preparatory sketches for paintings.

Biographical material includes biographies and résumés, student awards, and student records. Correspondence is professional and personal in nature and includes letters from Elaine de Kooning, Robert Mallery, June Leaf, Miyoko Ito, James Valerio, Ed Paschke, Richard Loving, Vera Klement, and others. The writings series includes artmaking journals with extensive notes and sketches, as well as numerous articles and reviews by Conger, artists statements and comments on paintings, contributions to art criticism listservs and message boards, lectures, and writings on

Conger by others. Personal business records include artwork commissions and grants, artwork inventories and sales and consignment records, as well as information about an art supply company once part owned by Conger, Puresol, Inc..

Exhibition and gallery records include sales and consignment records organized by gallery, as well as exhibition files for select group and solo exhibitions at galleries and museums, as well as a sound recording regarding a 1967 group exhibition, and miscellaneous exhibition documents. Some of the exhibition files include digital video recordings, digital images, and documents. Printed materials include press and exhibition announcements as well as exhibition catalogs, printed material on the subject of Chicago art history, and a CD-ROM showcase of contemporary art featuring Congers' paintings. The photographic material series includes photographs of artwork, installations, and the artist in black and white and color prints, Polaroids, snapshots, slides, transparencies, negatives, and inkjet prints. The artwork series includes a sketchbook and signed mixed media works on paper, as well as loose drawings and preparatory sketches for paintings.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into eight series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1948-1999 (0.2 linear feet: Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1940s-2018 (2.5 linear feet: Boxes 1-3)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1970s-2014 (0.9 linear feet: Boxes 3-4)
- Series 4: Personal Business Records, circa 1960s-2016 (0.8 linear feet: Boxes 4-5)
- Series 5: Exhibition and Gallery Records, circa 1967-2017 (0.5 linear feet: Box 5; 2.54 gigabytes: ER01-ER03)
- Series 6: Printed Material, circa 1950s-2017 (0.9 linear feet: Boxes 5-6; 0.97 gigabytes: ER04)
- Series 7: Photographic Material, circa 1947-2012 (0.9 linear feet: Boxes 6-8)
- Series 8: Artwork, circa 1940s-2010 (0.7 linear feet: Boxes 7-8)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art, Abstract

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Sketchbooks
Video recordings

Names:

De Kooning, Elaine
Ito, Miyoko, 1918-1983
Klement, Vera, 1929-
Leaf, June, 1929-
Mallary, Robert, 1917-1997

Occupations:

Educators -- Illinois -- Chicago

Painters -- Illinois -- Chicago

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1948-1999

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes biographies and résumés, student awards, and student records.

Box 1, Folder 1	Student Records, circa 1948-1972
Box 1, Folder 2	Scholastic Art Awards, 1955, 1956
Box 1, Folder 3	CV and Résumé, circa 1960s-1990s

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1940s-2018

2.5 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Restrictions: Restricted Correspondence: Authorization to quote, publish or reproduce requires written permission from William Conger. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is professional and personal in nature and includes letters from Elaine de Kooning, Robert Mallary, June Leaf, Miyoko Ito, James Valerio, Ed Paschke, Richard Loving, Vera Klement, and others.

Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence, circa 1940s-1950s
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, circa 1960-1964
Box 1, Folder 6	Correspondence, circa 1965-1969
Box 1, Folder 7	Correspondence, circa 1970-1974
Box 1, Folder 8	Correspondence, circa 1975-1979
Box 1, Folder 9	Correspondence, circa 1980
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence, circa 1981
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence, circa 1982
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence, circa 1983
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence, circa 1984
Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence, circa 1985
Box 1, Folder 15	Correspondence, circa 1986
Box 1, Folder 16	Correspondence, circa 1987
Box 1, Folder 17	Correspondence, circa 1988
Box 1, Folder 18-19	Correspondence, circa 1989
Box 1, Folder 20	Correspondence, circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 21	Correspondence, circa 1991
Box 1, Folder 22	Correspondence, circa 1992
Box 2, Folder 1	Correspondence, circa 1993

Box 2, Folder 2	Correspondence, circa 1994
Box 2, Folder 3	Correspondence, circa 1995
Box 2, Folder 4	Correspondence, circa 1996
Box 2, Folder 5	Correspondence, circa 1997
Box 2, Folder 6	Correspondence - Publication Restricted, circa 1997 Notes: Authorization to quote, publish or reproduce requires written permission from William Conger. Contact Reference Services for more information.
Box 2, Folder 7	Correspondence, circa 1998
Box 2, Folder 8	Correspondence, circa 1999
Box 2, Folder 9	Correspondence, circa 2000
Box 2, Folder 10	Correspondence, circa 2001
Box 2, Folder 11	Correspondence, circa 2002
Box 2, Folder 12	Correspondence, circa 2003
Box 2, Folder 13	Correspondence, circa 2004
Box 2, Folder 14	Correspondence, circa 2005
Box 2, Folder 15	Correspondence, circa 2006
Box 2, Folder 16	Correspondence, circa 2007
Box 2, Folder 17	Correspondence, circa 2008
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Correspondence, circa 2009
Box 3, Folder 3	Correspondence, circa 2010
Box 3, Folder 4	Correspondence, circa 2011
Box 3, Folder 5-6	Correspondence, circa 2012
Box 3, Folder 7-8	Correspondence, circa 2013
Box 3, Folder 9	Correspondence, circa 2014

Box 3, Folder 10	Correspondence, circa 2015
Box 3, Folder 11	Correspondence, circa 2016
Box 3, Folder 12	Correspondence, circa 2017
Box 3, Folder 13	Correspondence, circa 2018

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Series 3: Writings, circa 1970s-2014

0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4)

Scope and Contents: The writings series includes artmaking journals with extensive notes and sketches, as well as numerous articles and reviews by Conger, artists statements and comments on paintings, contributions to art criticism listservs and message boards, lectures, and writings on Conger by others.

Arrangement: Writings are arranged as 2 subseries.

- 3.1: Journals on Artmaking, circa 1982-2009
- 3.2: Lectures, Articles, and Statements, circa 1970s-2014

Subseries 3.1: Journals on Artmaking, circa 1982-2009

Restrictions: Authorization to quote, publish or reproduce requires written permission from William Conger. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Box 3, Folder 14	Journal Volume 1, circa 1982-1984
Box 3, Folder 15	Journal Volume 2, circa 1984-1987
Box 3, Folder 16	Journal Volume 3, circa 1987-1991
Box 4, Folder 1	Journal Volume 4, circa 1992-2007 Includes entries from 1992-1994, with retrospective entries for 1994-1999 added in 2007.
Box 4, Folder 2	Journal Volume 5, circa 2007-2009

Subseries 3.2: Lectures, Articles, and Statements, circa 1970s-2014

Box 4, Folder 3-4	General, circa 1970s-2010
Box 4, Folder 5	Published Articles by W. Conger, circa 1980s-1990s
Box 4, Folder 6	Artist Statements and Comments on Paintings, circa 1970s-2010
Box 4, Folder 7	Lecture Notes and Outlines, circa 1970-1993
Box 4, Folder 8	W. Conger on the Masters (Lectures, Articles and Statements), circa 1985-1998
Box 4, Folder 9	"Something About Painting and Sculpture," Slide Lecture, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 10	Review of Laurie Wilson, Louise Nevelson: Iconography and Sources, 1981, circa 1981
Box 4, Folder 11	"On Abstract Painting in Chicago: Subjective Abstraction" by W. Conger (April, 1982), 1982

Box 4, Folder 12	Conger, Paschke, and Valerio (Feb. 18, 1986), circa 1986 1 Sound cassette
Box 4, Folder 13	"Seurat: Process and Psychology; Method as Reflection on State of Mind" (Jan. 1991), circa 1991
Box 4, Folder 14	"Abstract Painting and Integration Linguistics," Art Theory and Practice (May 2011), 2011
Box 4, Folder 15	"What is Painting?" by W. Conger (June 2014), 2014
Box 4, Folder 16	Art Criticism Discussion Forum and other Listservs, circa 1998-2010
Box 4, Folder 17	Ed Paschke Memorial Talk, 2005
Box 4, Folder 18	Letters to the Editor, 1982
Box 4, Folder 19	Writings on W. Conger by Others, circa 1980s

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Series 4: Personal Business Records, circa 1960s-2016

0.8 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)

Scope and Contents: Personal business records include artwork commissions and grants, artwork inventories and sales and consignment records, as well as information about an art supply company once part owned by Conger, Puresol, Inc..

Box 4, Folder 20-21	Commission, Edgewater Library (2015), circa 2013-2015
Box 4, Folder 22	Commission, Public Art Program Chicago Crossfire Cow, circa 1999
Box 4, Folder 23	Commission, Public Art Proposals, circa 2001-2015
Box 4, Folder 24	Donations, Appraisal, circa 2006-2016
Box 4, Folder 25	Donations, Colleges, circa 2015-2016
Box 4, Folder 26-27	Grants, General, circa 1983-2015
Box 4, Folder 28	Grants, Guggenheim Fellowship Applications, circa 1987-2005
Box 4, Folder 29	Grants, NEA Application, 1995
Box 5, Folder 1	Inventory, Paintings, 1957-2015, circa 2015
Box 5, Folder 2	Paystubs, circa 1960s-1970s
Box 5, Folder 3	Puresol, Inc., circa 1992-1993
Box 5, Folder 4-9	Sales and Consignment, circa 1973-2014

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Series 5: Exhibition and Gallery Records, circa 1967-2017

0.5 Linear feet (Box 5)

2.54 Gigabytes (ER01-ER03)

Scope and Contents: Exhibition and Gallery records include sales and consignment records organized by gallery, as well as exhibition files for select group and solo exhibitions at galleries and museums, as well as a sound recording regarding a 1967 group exhibition, and miscellaneous exhibition documents. Some of the exhibition files include digital video recordings, digital images, and documents.

Box 5, Folder 10-12	Various Exhibition Documents, circa 1970s-2017
Box 5, Folder 13	Bill Conger, D. Holes, and S. D. Bock on Exhibition (Jan. 1967), circa 1967
Box 5, Folder 14	William Conger Exhibitions 1971-1976, circa 1971-1976
Box 5, Folder 15	Robert Boyd Gallery (Disputed Consignment), circa 1987-1994
Box 5, Folder 16	Imago Gallery, Palm Springs, circa 1994
Box 5, Folder 17	Janus Gallery/Tadu Contemporary, Santa Fe, circa 1990-2006
Box 5, Folder 18	Cephalic Symbols: Visions of the Chicago Skull, Judy A. Saslow Gallery (Oct. 2005), circa 2005 Includes born-digital records, see ER01.
Folder ER01	Cephalic Symbols: Visions of the Chicago Skull, Judy A. Saslow Gallery (Oct. 2005), Digital Photographs and Documents, 2005 0.008 Gigabytes (One computer file)
Box 5, Folder 19	William Conger Paintings 1958-2008, Chicago Cultural Center (Jan. 2009), circa 2009 Includes born-digital content, see ER02.
Folder ER02	William Conger Paintings 1958-2008, Chicago Cultural Center (Jan. 2009), Digital Video Recording and Digital Photographs, 2009 1.9 Gigabytes (One computer file)
Box 5, Folder 20	William Conger: Narrative Abstraction, Chedarhurst Center for the Arts (Aug.-Oct. 2012), circa 2011-2012
Box 5, Folder 21	William Conger: Criss-Cross Series (Oct. 2013), circa 2013
Box 5, Folder 22	William Conger, Organized by Paul Saul Ostrow, Studio Vendome Projects (Sep.-Oct. 2014), circa 2014
Box 5, Folder 23	William Conger: Gouache Paintings on Paper Table Arts Center, Eastern Illinois University (Sep.-Oct. 2014), circa 2014

Box 5, Folder 24 La Palette: The Chicago Palette Organized by Stephen Sheldon, Ed Paschke Arts Center, (Sep. - Dec. 2015), circa 2015
Includes born-digital content, see ER03.

Folder ER03 La Palette: The Chicago Palette Organized by Stephen Sheldon, Ed Paschke Arts Center, (Sep. - Dec. 2015), Digital Photographs
0.627 Gigabytes (One computer file)

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Series 6: Printed Material, circa 1950s-2017

0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 5-6)

0.97 Gigabytes (ER04)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes press and exhibition announcements as well as exhibition catalogs, printed material on the subject of Chicago art history, and a CD-ROM showcase of contemporary art featuring Conger's paintings.

Box 5, Folder 25	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1950s
Box 5, Folder 26	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1960s
Box 5, Folder 27-28	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 1-2	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1980s
Box 6, Folder 3-4	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1990-1994
Box 6, Folder 5	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 1995-2000
Box 6, Folder 6	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 2000-2009
Box 6, Folder 7	Printed Material, Miscellaneous, circa 2010-2019
Box 6, Folder 8	Exhibition Catalogs, circa 1971-2014
Box 6, Folder 9	Press, circa 1960s-2005
Box 6, Folder 10	Chicago Art History, circa 1970s-1990s
Folder ER04	Art Look: The CD-ROM Showcase of Contemporary Fine Art, Vol. 1-2, Digital Photographs and Documents, circa 1996 0.97 Gigabytes (Two computer files)

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Series 7: Photographic Material, circa 1947-2012

.9 Linear feet (Boxes 6-8)

Scope and Contents: The photographic material series includes photographs of artwork, installations, and the artist in black and white and color prints, Polaroids, snapshots, slides, transparencies, negatives and inkjet prints.

Box 6, Folder 12	Photographs of William Conger, circa 1947-2010
Box 8, Folder 1	Photographs of William Conger, 1978-1989
Box 6, Folder 13	Photographs of Others, circa 1968-2005
Box 8, Folder 2	Photographs of Others, 1978
Box 6, Folder 14	Artwork Photographs, circa 1970s-2005
Box 6, Folder 15-16	Artwork Photographs, Black and White, circa 1972-1996
Box 6, Folder 17-18	Artwork Photographs, Black and White Negatives, circa 1975-1976, 1987
Box 6, Folder 19	Artwork Photographs, Slides, circa 1970-2007
Box 7, Folder 1	Studio Photographs, circa 1970s-2010
Box 7, Folder 2-3	Studio Photographs, Polaroids, circa 1980s-1990s
Box 7, Folder 4	Studio Photographs, Inkjet Prints, circa 1990s-2012
Box 7, Folder 5	Artwork Photographs, University of New Mexico, circa 1958-1960
Box 7, Folder 6	Installation Photographs, circa 1958-2010
Box 8, Folder 3	Installation Photographs, circa 1974
Box 7, Folder 7	Installation Photographs, Douglas Kenyon Gallery, Chicago (1976), circa 1976
Box 7, Folder 8	Photographs by Others, circa 1970s-1980s

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Series 8: Artwork, circa 1940s-2010

.6 Linear feet (Boxes 7-8)

Scope and Contents: The artwork series includes a sketchbook as well as signed mixed media works on paper, as well as loose drawings and preparatory sketches for paintings.

Box 8, Folder 4	Sketchbook, circa 1994-2000
Box 7, Folder 9	Mixed Media on Paper, circa 1980s-2010
Box 7, Folder 10	Drawings and Preparatory Sketches, circa 1960s-2010
Box 7, Folder 11	Drawings and Preparatory Sketches, circa 1960s-2010
Box 7, Folder 12	Drawings and Preparatory Sketches, circa 1960s-1980s
Box 7, Folder 13	William Conger Childhood Drawings, circa 1940s
Box 7, Folder 14	Cartoon Drawings by Robert Lewis (Childhood Friend), circa 1960s

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