



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Ruth Teschner Costantino papers and Connoisseur Inc. records, 1910s-1981, in the Archives of American Art

Christopher DeMairo

The processing of this collection received Federal support from the Smithsonian  
Collections Care and Preservation Fund, administered by the National  
Collections Program and the Smithsonian Collections Advisory Committee.

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Ruth Teschner Costantino papers and Connoisseur Inc. records
<b>Date:</b>	1910s-1981
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.conninc
<b>Creator:</b>	Connoisseur, Inc.
<b>Extent:</b>	1.6 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The Ruth Teschner Costantino papers and Connoisseur Inc. records measure 1.6 linear feet and date from the 1910s to 1981. The collection sheds light on the personal and professional life of fine art and antique dealer Ruth T. Costantino through correspondence, writings, printed material, and identification documents; and on her business Connoisseur Inc. through sales records, inventories, receipts, and scant correspondence.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The collection was donated in two installments by Helen Constantino Fioratti, Ruth Teschner Constantino's daughter. Ruth Costantino's personal and professional papers and several Connoisseur Inc. files were donated in 1983. The bulk of Connoisseur Inc. records were donated in 1984.

### Processing Information

Two accessions were merged, processed, and a finding aid prepared by Christopher DeMairo in 2021 with funding provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Collections Care and Preservation Fund. Preliminary processing of Ruth Costantino's personal and professional papers and several Connoisseur Inc. files were completed in 1989 by Alanna Heiss and in 2018 by Caroline Donadio.

### Citation

Ruth Teschner Costantino papers and Connoisseur Inc. records, 1910s-1981. 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

Ruth Teschner Costantino (1892-1981) was a fine art and antique dealer in New York City.

She began working for a specialist and dealer in Old Master wood engravings and original drawings and several years later founded her first gallery, Teschner Gallery. In 1922, Costantino assisted Carl Robert Lamm, owner of the Swedish castle Nasby Slott, selling an extensive collection of paintings, tapestries, rugs, fabrics, armor, and more. Costantino's work with the Lamm Collection helped establish herself as a highly regarded authority on European antique art and furniture. In 1935, Costantino moved Teschner Gallery uptown and renamed it Connoisseur Inc. Throughout her career, Costantino advised the private collections of Madame Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan, Mrs. Henry Ford II, Mr. Stavros Niarchos, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller II, and many more; served as the White House's principal purveyor of French eighteenth-century furniture during the Kennedy administration; and dealt fine arts, furniture, and other antique items to U.S. museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, National Gallery of Art, Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and internationally to the Uffizi in Florence and the Brera Museum in Milan. After Costantino died in 1981, Connoisseur Inc. merged with L'Antiquaire gallery, founded by Constantino's daughter, Helen Costantino Fioratti, in 1965.

Costantino's husband, Arturo Costantino, was an Italian diplomat and banker who had a substantial role in the building of the Italian Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair.

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## Scope and Contents

The Ruth Teschner Costantino papers and Connoisseur Inc. records measure 1.6 linear feet and date from the 1910s to 1981. The collection sheds light on the personal and professional life of fine art and antique dealer Ruth T. Costantino through correspondence between Costantino and the American Art Association, collectors, family members, friends, and museum representatives; autobiographical and travel writings; newspaper and magazine clippings on art as well as reviews and advertisements about her book, *How to Know French Antiques* (1961); and identification documents. Connoisseur Inc. include sales records, inventories, receipts, and some correspondence.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as two series.

- Series 1: Personal and Professional Papers, 1920s-1981 (Box 1; 11 folders)
  - Series 2: Connoisseur Inc. Records, 1949-1981 (Box 1-3; 1.4 linear feet)
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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:

Antiques -- United States  
Art -- Collectors and collecting  
Furniture, French  
Women art dealers

Names:

Costantino, Ruth Teschner, 1892-1981  
Ruth Teschner Gallery

Functions:

Art galleries, Commercial -- New York (State)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Personal and Professional Papers, 1910s-1981

#### 11 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Found here is an autobiographical essay written by Ruth Costantino; a draft of an essay on culture in Italy during the 1920s; passports; a 1923 catalog for the sale of items from the Lamm Collection; advertisements and reviews for Costantino's book, *How to Know French Antiques* (1961); and a miscellaneous file comprised of an unidentified photograph, memorial service programs, and more. Also present is scant correspondence between Costantino and the American Art Association, collectors, family members, friends, and museum representatives.

Box 1, Folder 1	Autobiographical Essay, circa 1960s-1981
Box 1, Folder 2-4	Correspondence, 1923-1981, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	"Getting About in Italy" or "Locomotion in Italy," Draft, undated
Box 1, Folder 6	How to Know French Antiques (1961), Reviews and Advertisements, 1961-1963
Box 1, Folder 7	The Lamm Collection, Public Sale Catalog, 1923
Box 1, Folder 8	L'Antiquaire, Invoices, 1979
Box 1, Folder 9	Miscellaneous, 1910s-1974
Box 1, Folder 10	Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1961-1974
Box 1, Folder 11	Passports, 1958-1972

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## Series 2: Connoisseur Inc. Records, 1949-1969

### 1.2 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: Found here are sales and price records, invoices submitted to buyers, and inventories. Several letters sent to collectors and item price tags are mixed in with the sales records.

Box 1, Folder 12-19	Cost and Sales Book, 1963-1969
Box 1, Folder 20	Inventories, undated
Box 1, Folder 21	Ruth T. Costantino, Sales Book, 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 22-25	Sales Records, 1949-1955
Box 2, Folder 1-6	Sales Records, undated
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Sales Records, 1966-1969
Box 3, Folder 3	Sales, Receipts, and Prices, 1952-1979, undated

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