



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Mildred Constantine papers, 1945-2008 in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Mildred Constantine Papers |
| Date: | 1945-2008 |
| Identifier: | AAA.consmild |
| Creator: | Constantine, Mildred |
| Extent: | 5.3 Linear feet |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | The papers of Mildred Constantine measure 5.3 linear feet and are dated 1945-2009. Subject files, writings, photographs, and a scrapbook provide an overview of her curatorial work in the Architecture and Design department of the Museum of Modern Art, and subsequent activities as an independent curator, and art consultant. Especially well documented is <i>Whole Cloth</i> , a book written with Laurel Reuter that presents an historical overview of how artists have used cloth in their work. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were donated to the Archives in 2009 by Mildred Constantine's daughters, Judith Bettelheim and Vicki McDaniel.

Related Material

Oral history interviews with Mildred Constantine were conducted for the Archives of American Art by Harlan Phillips, 1965 October 15, and by Paul Cummings, 1976 May 3-1976 August 26.

Processing Information

The papers were processed and a finding aid prepared by Justin Brancato in December of 2009.

Preferred Citation

Mildred Constantine papers, 1945-2008. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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Biographical Note

Curator and writer Mildred Constantine (1913-2008) was associated with the Museum of Modern Art's Department of Architecture and Design from 1943 to 1971. She then became an art consultant and independent curator, and wrote on fiber and textiles, decorative arts, photography, caricature and cartoons.

Mildred Constantine (known as "Connie") began her career at College Art Association. Hired as a stenographer in 1930, she soon was promoted to editorial assistant for *Parnassus*, the forerunner of *Art Journal*.

Constantine left the College Art Association in 1937 to study at New York University and earned BA and MA degrees. She then continued her education at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. In 1940, Constantine worked in the Office of Inter-American Affairs at the Library of Congress; it was there that she met René d'Harnoncourt.

Influenced by her 1936 travels in Mexico, Constantine's first curatorial effort was an exhibition of Latin American posters. Drawn from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, the exhibition was held at the Library of Congress.

At the urging of René d'Harnoncourt, The Museum of Modern Art's Architecture and Design Department hired Constantine in 1943. The majority of her 28 year tenure at the museum was spent working with the department's founder, architect Philip Johnson. As a curator during the 1950s and 1960s, Constantine's innovative exhibitions brought lesser known portions of the museum's collection to public attention. Among her exhibitions were: "Words and Images," that focused on graphic design and posters; "Polio Posters," the first Museum of Modern Art show dedicated to social issues; "Olivetti: Design in Industry;" "Signs in the Street;" and "Lettering by Hand." She also published books on Art Nouveau, contemporary package design, and other subjects.

In 1971, Constantine left the Museum of Modern Art to become an independent curator and art consultant. Exhibitions included "Frontiers in Fiber: The Americans," and "Small Works in Fiber" with Jack Lenor Larsen. *Tina Modotti: A Fragile Life*, Constantine's book on the photographer, actress, model, and political activist, appeared in 1974. That same year, she and Alan Fern produced *Revolutionary Soviet Film Posters* that focused on works from the 1920s. Her last published work, *Whole Cloth*, was written with Laurel Reuter and published in 1997. Constantine continued to research and write, and at the time of her death was working on a large, international survey of the study of thread.

Mildred Constantine and Ralph W. Bettelheim (1909-1993) were married for 50 years. They had two daughters, Judith and Vicki.

Mildred Constantine died from heart failure on December 10, 2008, at home in Nyack, New York.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Mildred Constantine measure 5.3 linear feet and are dated 1945-2008. Subject files, writings, photographs, and a scrapbook provide an overview of her curatorial work in the Architecture and Design department of the Museum of Modern Art, and subsequent activities as an independent curator, and art consultant. Especially well documented is the book *Whole Cloth* that she wrote with Laurel Reuter.

Correspondence, though mostly business related, often touches on personal matters since many of the artists and art world figures with whom she corresponded were also friends. Correspondents include Miguel Angel Corzo, Arthur C. Danto, Dorothy Dehner, Allen Hart (who sent more than 40 illustrated letters), Elizabeth Wilder and Donald L. Weisman. She also corresponded with many art institutions and organizations, among them the Cleveland Museum of Art, Independent International Design Conference, El Museo del Barrio, Museum of New Mexico, Ohio State University, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Estate of David Smith.

Subject files reflect Constantine's activities and interests. A large portion of this series concerns *Whole Cloth*, a book written with Laurel Reuter that presents an historical look at how artists have used cloth in their work. Correspondence between the two authors, with artists, institutions, and others concerns researching and writing the volume. Also documented are the successes and failures of Constantine's decade long pursuit to publish the book. Other substantive files relate to the Cleveland Museum of Art, Getty Conservation Institute, Sheila Hicks, Jack Lenor Larsen, Rhode Island School of Design, and *Soviet Film Posters*. Files concerning the University of the Arts' 2003 Commencement include a videocassette.

Writings by Constantine are lecture material and notes. Also found are transcripts of interviews with Constantine and writings by others. Printed material includes newspaper and magazine articles about Constantine and her career. A scrapbook of printed material and photographs documents an exhibition of Latin American posters at the Library of Congress organized by Constantine.

Photographs of people include Mildred Constantine with family, friends, artists and others at public and private events around the world. Notable photographs include: Magdalena Abakanowicz, Anni Albers, Alfred Barr, Luis Barragan, Lou Block, Louise Bourgeois, Jagoda Buic, Elaine Lustig Cohen, Charles Coiner, James Marston Fitch, Mathias Goeritz, Ingeborg Ten Haeff, Ann d'Harnoncourt, Sheila Hicks, Richard Koch, Nancy Koenigsberg, Jack Lenor Larsen, Leo Lionni, Roberto Burle Marx, Ruth Reeves, Laurel Reuter, Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Shahn, Massimo Vignelli, Ulfert Wilke, and Claire Zeisler. Also, there are photographs of artwork by a wide range of artists.

Arrangement

The Mildred Constantine papers are organized into 8 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1947-1997 (Boxes 1, 6; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1964-2008 (Boxes 1, 6; 1.0 linear feet)
- Series 3: Subject Files, 1964-2008 (Boxes 2-5; 3.3 linear feet)
- Series 4: Writings, 1991-2008 (Box 5; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1961-2006 (Box 5; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 6: Photographs, 1993 (Box 5; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 7: Artwork, 1945 (Box 5; 1 folder)
- Series 8: Scrapbook, circa 1940s (Box 6; 0.1 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Film posters, Russian
- Textile fabrics in art
- Women art historians
- Women authors
- Women museum curators

Types of Materials:

- Illustrated letters
- Interviews
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks
- Transcripts

Video recordings

Names:

Abakanowicz, Magdalena
Albers, Anni
Barr, Alfred Hamilton, 1902-
Barragán, Luis, 1902-
Block, Lou, 1895-1969
Bourgeois, Louise, 1911-2010
Buic, Jagoda, 1930-
Burle Marx, Roberto, 1909-1994
Cleveland Museum of Art
Cohen, Elaine Lustig, 1927-
Coiner, Charles T., 1897-
Corzo, Miguel Angel
D'Harnoncourt, Anne, 1943-2008
Danto, Arthur Coleman, 1924-
Dehner, Dorothy, 1901-1994
Fitch, James Marston
Getty Conservation Institute
Goeritz, Mathias, 1915-
Hart, Allen M., 1925-
Hicks, Sheila, 1934-
Koch, Richard H., d. 2009
Larsen, Jack Lenor
Lionni, Leo, 1910-
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Employees
Museum of New Mexico
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Reeves, Ruth, 1892-1966
Reuter, Laurel
Rhode Island School of Design
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962
Shahn, Ben, 1898-1969 -- Photographs
Smith, David, 1906-1965
Ten Haeff, Ingeborg, 1915-
The Ohio State University
Vignelli, Massimo
Weisman, Donald M.
Wilder, Elizabeth, 1908-
Wilke, Ulfert, 1907-1987
Zeisler, Claire, 1903-1991

Occupations:

Art consultants -- New York -- New York
Art historians -- New York (State) -- New York
Authors -- New York (State) -- New York
Curators -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1947-1997

0.2 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 6)

Scope and Contents: Constantine's honorary certificates are accompanied by photographs. The two National Bicentennial medals are from the United States Embassy in Mexico.

Box 1, Folder 1 Passports, 1947-1995

Box 1, Folder 2 Honorary Certificates, 1991-1992
Notes: oversized material housed in box 6

Box 1, Folder 3 National Bicentennial-Medal, 1977

Box 6 Honorary Certificates, 1991
Notes: from box 1, folder 2

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1964-2008

1 Linear foot (Boxes 1, 6)

Scope and Contents: The majority of Constantine's correspondence is professional in nature. Many of the correspondents - artists, curators, dealers, and other art world professionals - were friends as well as colleagues, and their letters often touch on personal matters as well. Also found are a small number of purely personal letters.

Arrangement: Additional correspondence is included in many subject files (series 3).

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Box 1 | Business Correspondence |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | General, 1978-1988 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | General, 1998-2000 Notes: Oversized material housed in box 6 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | General, 2000 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | General, 2001 January-June |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | General, 2001 August-December |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | General, 2002 January-September |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | General, 2002 October-December |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | General, 2003 January-April |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | General, 2003 May-November |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | General, 2003 November-December |
| Box 1, Folder 14-22 | General, 2004-2008 |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | Miguel Angel Corzo, 2000-2003 |
| Box 1, Folder 24 | Arthur Danto, 1991-1998 |
| Box 1, Folder 25 | Dorothy Dehner, 1971-2004 |
| Box 1, Folder 26 | Allen Hart, 1964-2006, undated Notes: oversized material housed in box 6 |
| Box 1, Folder 27 | Elizabeth Wilder/Don Weisman, 1980-1993, 1968 |
| Box 1, Folder 28 | Personal Letters, 1972-2002, undated |

| | |
|-------|--|
| Box 6 | Oversized Business Correspondence |
| Box 6 | General, 1999 Notes: from box 1, folder 5 |
| Box 6 | Allen Hart, 1964 Notes: from box 1, folder 26 |

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Series 3: Subject Files, 1964-2008

3.3 Linear feet (Boxes 2-5)

Scope and Contents: Created and maintained by Constantine, the subject files reflect her activities and interests. They contain varying combinations of correspondence, biographical material, writings, interviews, printed material and a videocassette.

Subject files are arranged alphabetically by title, Individual subject files are organized by record type and arranged chronologically within each folder. An exception is *Whole Cloth*, with 12 folders of correspondence arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Box 2 | Cleveland Museum of Art |
| Box 2, Folder 1-2 | Correspondence, 1992-2006, undated 2 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | Printed Material, 1992-1997, 2002 2 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Photographs, 1993 |
| Box 2 | Getty Conservation Institute |
| Box 2 | Correspondence |
| Box 2, Folder 5-6 | Tracy Bartley, 1995-1999, undated 2 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Ben Shahn, 1995-1997, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 8-9 | General, 1993-1999, undated 2 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | Althofer-Dusseldorf, 1987-1998 |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | Dusseldorf-Wollheim, 1994-1998 |
| Box 2, Folder 12 | Newsletter and Book, 1989-2000, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 13-14 | Interview Transcripts, 1992-1997, undated 2 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 15 | Printed Material, 1997-1998 |
| Box 2, Folder 16 | John Dumbacher, 1999-2000, undated |
| Box 2 | Sheila Hicks |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Box 2, Folder 17 | Biographical Material, circa 1970s, 1997-1998 |
| Box 2, Folder 18 | Letters from Mildred Constantine to Sheila Hicks, 1970-1975 4 Folders |
| Box 2, Folder 19 | Letters from Mildred Constantine to Sheila Hicks, 1976-1994 |
| Box 2, Folder 20 | Letters from Mildred Constantine to Sheila Hicks, 1995-2008 |
| Box 2, Folder 21 | Letters from Sheila Hicks to Mildred Constantine, circa 1970s-1973 |
| Box 3, Folder 1 | Letters from Sheila Hicks to Mildred Constantine, 1974-2007 |
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Correspondents A-L, circa 1970-2006 |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Correspondents M-Z, 1969-2008 |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Unidentified, circa 1970s-1977 |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | Writings, 1968-2000, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Exhibition Proposals and Notes, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Announcements and Press Material, 1974-2006, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Announcements and Press Material, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1971-2006, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | Catalogs, 1974-1995 |
| Box 3, Folder 11 | Books, 1973, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | Photographs, 1996, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | Miscellaneous, undated |
| Box 3 | Jack Lenor Larsen |
| Box 3, Folder 14-21 | Correspondence, 1989-2007 8 Folders |
| Box 3, Folder 22 | Exhibition Proposals, 1996-2000, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 23 | Catalogs, 1998-2001 |
| Box 3, Folder 24 | Digital Prints of Artwork, undated |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Box 3, Folder 25 | Magazine and Newspaper Clippings, 1960-2004, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 26 | Mexico, General, 1977-1997, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 27 | Rhode Island School of Design, 1992-1999, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 1 | Rhode Island School of Design, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 2 | Swann Foundation, 1970-2001, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 3 | Soviet Film Posters, 1991-1996, undated |
| Box 4 | Laurel Reuter |
| Box 4, Folder 4 | Artist Files, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 5-9 | Correspondence, 1990-2008, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 10 | Printed Material, Clippings, 1987-1998, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 11 | Catalogs and Exhibition Announcements, 1988-2003 |
| Box 4, Folder 12 | Photographs, 1990 |
| Box 4 | Whole Cloth |
| Box 4, Folder 13 | General Correspondence, 1997-2002, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 14-15 | Introduction and Chapter I, Correspondence, 1982-1998, undated 2 Folders |
| Box 4, Folder 16 | Chapter II, Metaphor and Symbol, Correspondence, 1985-1997 |
| Box 4, Folder 17 | Chapter III, Correspondence, 1983-1996 |
| Box 4, Folder 18 | Chapter V, Correspondence, 1981-1996 |
| Box 4, Folder 19-20 | Chapter VI, Correspondence, 1982-1997 2 Folders |
| Box 4, Folder 21 | Chapter VII, Correspondence, 1984-1997 |
| Box 4 | Chapter VIII |
| Box 4, Folder 22 | Correspondence, 1984-1997, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 23 | Printed Material, 1980-1994, undated |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Box 4, Folder 24 | Writings and Notes, undated |
| Box 4, Folder 25 | Chapter IX, Correspondence, 1986-1996, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 1 | Monacelli Correspondence, 1994-2002, undated |
| Box 5 | Research Material |
| Box 5, Folder 2 | Printed Material, 1980-1993, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 3 | Notes, 1982, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 4 | Photographs, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 5 | Transparencies, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 6 | Slides, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 7 | Tadanori Yokoo, 1977-1994, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 8-9 | University of the Arts Commencement, 2003 2 Folders Notes: includes 1 Videocassettes (VHS) |

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Series 4: Writings, 1991-2008

0.2 Linear feet (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: Writings include transcripts of interviews with Constantine conducted by Frances Pohl and Beverly M. Wolff. Writings by Constantine consist of lecture materials and notes.

Arrangement: Among the subject files (series 3) are additional writings by Constantine - specifically *Whole Cloth* and *Soviet Film Posters* - and other authors.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Box 5 | Interview Transcripts |
| Box 5, Folder 10 | Mildred Constantine with Frances Pohl, 2008 |
| Box 5, Folder 11 | Mildred Constantine with Beverly M. Wolff, 1991 |
| Box 5, Folder 12 | Way Beyond Craft by Jenni Sorkin, Galley Sheets with Corrections, 2003 |
| Box 5, Folder 13 | Writings by Others, unidentified, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 14-15 | Lectures, 2001, undated 2 Folders |

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1961-2006

0.2 Linear feet (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: Clippings are mostly about Constantine, her career, projects, and activities. Books are *Le Message* by Jean-Michel Folon (with an inscription and drawing) and *American Art Today*.

Arrangement: Printed material is also found in subject files (series 3) and in the scrapbook (series 8).

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Box 5, Folder 16 | Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1961-2006, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 17 | Announcements, 1976-1987, undated |
| Box 5, Folder 18 | Catalogues, 1991 |
| Box 5 | Books |
| Box 5, Folder 19 | Le Message by Folon, 1967 Notes: with original drawing |
| Box 5, Folder 20 | American Art Today, undated |

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Series 6: Photographs, 1993

0.3 Linear feet (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Mildred Constantine with artists, art world professionals, friends, and family. There are views of exhibition openings and other events, public and private. Also found are photographs of a wide variety of artwork, and a small number of slides and transparencies.

Arrangement: Photographs of people and events are arranged alphabetically by subject matter - person, event, or place; those of artwork are arranged by artist.

Biographical material (series 1) includes photographs that accompany honorary certificates. A small number of photographs are among the subject files (series 3), and are also found in the scrapbook (series 8).

Box 5, Folder 21-23

People and Events, undated
3 Folders

Notes:

- Magdalena Abakanowicz
- Anni Albers
- Alfred Barr
- Luis Barragan
- Lou Block
- Louise Bourgeois
- Jagoda Buic
- Elaine Lustig Cohen
- Charles Coiner
- Anne d'Harnoncourt
- James Marston Fitch
- Mathias Goeritz
- Ingeborg Ten Haeff
- Sheila Hicks
- Richard Koch
- Nancy Koenigsberg
- Jack Lenor Larsen
- Leo Lionni
- Roberto Burle Marx
- Ruth Reeves
- Laurel Reuter
- Eleanor Roosevelt
- Ben Shahn
- Massimo Vignelli
- Ulfert Wilke
- Claire Zeisler

Box 5

Artwork

Box 5, Folder 24

Magdalena Abakanowicz, undated

Box 5, Folder 25

Mildred Constantine Collections, Cleveland Museum, 1993

Box 5, Folder 26

Amat-London, undated

Series 6: Photographs

Mildred Constantine Papers
AAA.consmild

Box 5, Folder 27

Lorenzo-Unidentified, undated

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Series 7: Artwork, 1945

1 Folder (Box 5)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of a drawing by F. D. Berg.

Box 5, Folder 28 F. D. Berg, 1945 July 23

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Series 8: Scrapbook, circa 1940s

0.1 Linear feet (Box 6)

Scope and Contents: The scrapbook contains printed material and photographs that document an exhibition of Latin American posters at the Library of Congress organized by Constantine.

Box 6, Folder 1 Scrapbook, circa 1936-1940s
1 Volume

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