



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Hobart E. Cowles papers, 1924-1980, in the Archives of American Art

Christopher DeMairo

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Personal Papers, 1946-1980.....	4
Series 2: Writings and Notebooks, 1947-1980.....	5
Series 3: Professional Files, 1948-1980.....	7
Series 4: Printed Material, 1947-1980.....	8
Series 5: Photographs, 1924-1980.....	9
Series 6: Artwork, circa 1948-1970s.....	10

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Hobart E. Cowles papers
Identifier:	AAA.cowlhoba
Date:	1924-1980
Creator:	Cowles, Hobart E., 1923-1980
Extent:	2.5 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of ceramicist and educator Hobart E. Cowles measure 2.5 linear feet and date from 1924-1980. The collection sheds light on Cowles's career through personal papers, writings and notebooks, professional files, printed material, photographs, artwork, and one video recording.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Barbara Cowles, Hobart Cowles's widow, between 1981-1982.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Christopher DeMairo in 2021.

Citation

Hobart E. Cowles papers, 1924-1980. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Hobart E. Cowles (1923-1980) was a ceramicist and educator in Rochester, New York. He was an early experimenter with the firing of clay and is credited with playing an important role in the introduction of chemistry to clay processes.

Cowles, who was originally from Madison, Ohio, earned a BFA in ceramics from Wesleyan Conservatory in Macon, Georgia, in 1949, and completed his MFA at Ohio University in 1950. Cowles subsequently began teaching at Rochester Institute of Technology's School for American Crafts, working alongside Frans Wildenhain. He taught courses in glaze chemistry and ceramic history at R.I.T up until his death in 1980.

Cowles began showing his work, predominantly boxes, lidded jars, and sculptures decorated with self-designed glazes, almost immediately upon his arrival in Rochester. Although he went on to have his work featured in group exhibitions around the world, including at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York and at the Brussels Worlds Fair, he focused primarily on his craft and his teaching throughout his career.

Scope and Contents

The papers of ceramicist and educator Hobart E. Cowles measure 2.5 linear feet and date from 1924-1980. The collection sheds light on Cowles's career through personal papers, writings and notebooks, professional files, printed material, photographs, artwork, and one video recording.

Personal papers include resumes, an interview transcript, a video recording of a documentary on Cowles, and correspondence. Writings and notebooks include course notebooks, papers, and more pertaining to Cowles's undergraduate and graduate work, and an annotated outline for a slide presentation given by Cowles.

Professional files primarily deal with exhibitions, Cowles's years teaching at R.I.T., and his involvement with professional organizations.

Printed materials consist of articles and newspaper clippings, book excerpts, exhibition ephemera from solo and group shows, and an advertisement for a workshop conducted at R.I.T. Photographs are of Cowles and his family, his artwork, and events including organizational gatherings, exhibitions, and teaching at R.I.T.

Artwork consists of 5 sketchbooks as well as loose sketches and designs for various projects.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 6 series.

- Series 1: Personal Papers, 1924-1980 (Box 1; 11 folders)
- Series 2: Writings and Notebooks, 1947-1980 (Box 1-2; .8 linear feet)
- Series 3: Professional Files, 1948-1980 (Box 2; .5 linear feet)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1947-1980 (Box 2; 10 folders)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1924-1980 (Box 2-3; 9 folders)
- Series 6: Artwork, 1947-1980 (Box 3, OV 4; 6 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sketchbooks
Video recordings

Names:

Rochester Institute of Technology
School for American Crafts

Occupations:

Ceramicists -- New York (State) -- Rochester
Educators -- New York (State) -- Rochester

Container Listing

Series 1: Personal Papers, 1946-1980

11 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes resumes, an interview transcript, a list of books donated on Cowles behalf, and a VHS documentary on Cowles entitled, "Where Did I Go Right?". General correspondence is with friends, galleries, universities, collectors, colleagues and other artists. Papers concerning Cowles's barn construction consist of printed material, prices and purchase receipts, and plans.

Box 1, Folder 1	Books Donated to Wallace Memorial Library in Honor of Hobart Cowles, 1979
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondence, Harold J. Brennan, 1972-1980
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, Mother, 1946-1948
Box 1, Folder 4-6	General Correspondence, 1949-1980, undated
Box 1, Folder 7	Interview with Matt West, Transcript, 1979
Box 1, Folder 8	Papers Concerning Barn Construction, 1972
Box 1, Folder 9	Papers, 1970s
Box 1, Folder 10	Resumes, 1970s
Box 1, Folder 11	"Where Did I Go Right?", undated 1 Videocassettes (Betacam)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Writings and Notebooks, 1947-1980

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: The bulk of this series consists of notebooks, loose notes, course papers, Cowles's MA thesis, "The Analysis and Creation of Pottery Forms," and other scattered documents pertaining to his BFA at Wesleyan Conservatory and graduate work at Ohio State University. Other writings include an annotated outline prepared by Cowles for a slide presentation and biographical essays about Cowles.

Box 1, Folder 12	Course Notes and Papers, Art History, circa 1947-1950
Box 1, Folder 13	Course Notes and Papers, Introduction to Fine Art, 1947
Box 1, Folder 14	Course Paper, "Greek Mythology on Red-Figured Vases", 1948
Box 1, Folder 15	Course Paper, "Luca Della Robbia, The Father of Enamelled Terra Cotta Sculptures", 1949
Box 1, Folder 16	Master's Thesis, "The Analysis and Creation of Pottery Forms", 1950
Box 1, Folder 17	Master's Thesis, "The Analysis and Creation of Pottery Forms," Photographs, 1951
Box 1, Folder 18-20	Notebook, Ceramics, 1950-1951, 1974-1979
Box 1, Folder 21	Notebook, Glaze, circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 22	Notebook, Glaze Calculation, 1949
Box 1, Folder 23	Notebook, Latin American Art, 1950
Box 1, Folder 24	Notebook, Medieval and Ancient History, 1950
Box 1, Folder 25	Notebook, North Renaissance Art, 1950
Box 1, Folder 26	Notebook, Oriental Art, 1950
Box 2, Folder 1	Notes, Ceramics Projects, 1956
Box 2, Folder 2	Notes for Slide Presentation on Pre-Hispanic Mexican Art, circa 1970-1973
Box 2, Folder 3	Notes, Miscellaneous, 1978-1979
Box 2, Folder 4	Papers Concerning Article Written for "Ceramics Monthly", 1972-1980
Box 2, Folder 5	Writing on Hobart E. Cowles, circa 1960s-1970s

Box 2, Folder 6

"Once Fire and Stacking Plates and Bowls without Shelves," Chris Fitch, 1976

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Professional Files, 1948-1980

0.5 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Professional files relate to some of Cowles's artwork featured in exhibitions through loan forms, price lists, sales records, and printed material. Documenting his years teaching at R.I.T. are administrative memos, correspondence with colleagues and administrators, awards, exams, and other papers. Items pertaining to his involvement with professional organizations include photographs, correspondence, meeting minutes, and printed material. Of particular interest are meeting minutes from the 1950s related to The Journeymen, a craft organization set up for Rochester artists to sell their work through American House's showroom located in New York City. Also found here is a ledger, records of sales, and receipts for art supplies.

Box 2, Folder 7	Exhibitions, 1948-1980
Box 2, Folder 8	Financial, Exhibitions, 1956-1980
Box 2, Folder 9	Financial, Ledger, 1951-1956
Box 2, Folder 10	Financial, Receipts and Bills, 1954-1980
Box 2, Folder 11	Financial, Records of Sales, 1968-1969
Box 2, Folder 12	Financial, Tax Forms, 1955-1969
Box 2, Folder 13	Teaching, Administrative Papers, 1958-1979
Box 2, Folder 14	Teaching, Correspondence , 1959-1971
Box 2, Folder 15	Teaching, Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teaching, 1974-1977
Box 2, Folder 16	Teaching, Exams Given by Cowles, 1952-1979
Box 2, Folder 17	Teaching, Faculty Evaluations, 1977-1979
Box 2, Folder 18	Teaching, Schedule for Classes, 1952
Box 2, Folder 19	Teaching, Miscellaneous Papers from R.I.T., 1952-1979
Box 2, Folder 20	Teaching, Thousand Islands Museum Craft School, 1968-1971
Box 2, Folder 21-22	Organizations, American Craftsmen's Council, 1951-1972
Box 2, Folder 23	Organizations, The Journeymen, 1951-1955
Box 2, Folder 24	Organizations, New York State Craftsmen, 1967-1971

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Printed Material, 1947-1980

10 Folders (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Materials include articles and newspaper clippings regarding Cowles, exhibitions, and various art topics; book excerpts that discuss ancient Egyptian materials and industries, sculpture and ceramics, and contemporary pottery; solo and group show exhibition announcements, catalogs, and related ephemera; and an advertisement for a workshop conducted at R.I.T.

Box 2, Folder 35	Articles and Newspaper Clippings, Cowles, 1947-1980
Box 2, Folder 36	Articles and Newspaper Clippings, Pottery; Postcards, 1950s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 37	Articles and Newspaper Clippings, Miscellaneous Art Topics, 1950s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 38	Book Excerpts, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 39	Exhibition Announcements, 1949-1980
Box 2, Folder 40-41	Exhibition Materials, Group Show Catalogs, 1948-1975
Box 2, Folder 42	Exhibition Materials, Solo Show Catalogs, 1980, undated
Box 2, Folder 43	Workshop, R.I.T. School for American Craftsmen, 1955
Box 2, Folder 44	Miscellaneous, 1962-1980

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Photographs, 1924-1980

9 Folders (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Photographs include snapshots of Cowles and his family, dating to his childhood in a rural Ohio. Other images include snapshots, slides, and prints of Cowles's artwork; and pictures from events such as organization gatherings, exhibitions, and teaching at R.I.T.

Box 2, Folder 45	Artwork, circa 1949-1970s
Box 3, Folder 1	Artwork, circa 1949-1970s
Box 3, Folder 2	Artwork, Slides, 1973-1977
Box 3, Folder 3	Cowles Family and Childhood, 1924-1977
Box 3, Folder 4	Cowles, Hobart, 1948-1977
Box 3, Folder 5	Homes of Hobart Cowles, 1926-1980
Box 3, Folder 6	Military, 1943-1944
Box 3, Folder 7	Professional Events, 1973, 1977
Box 3, Folder 8	Teaching; R.I.T., 1951-1952, 1970s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Artwork, circa 1948-1970s

6 Folders (Box 3, OV 4)

Scope and Contents: Artwork consists of 5 sketchbooks, some loose sketches, and designs for various projects.

Box 3, Folder 9-10	Annotated Sketchbooks, circa 1960s, undated
Box 3, Folder 11-12	Sketchbook, circa 1948, 1960s
Box 3, Folder 13	Sketches and Designs for Ceramics Projects, 1950s-1970s
Oversize 4	Sketches and Designs for Ceramics Projects, 1950s-1970s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)