



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Margaret De Patta papers,
circa 1930-2012, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Margaret De Patta papers
Date:	circa 1930-2012
Identifier:	AAA.depamarg
Creator:	De Patta, Margaret, 1903-1964
Extent:	2.7 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English.
Summary:	The papers of California jewelry designer Margaret De Patta measure 2.7 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2012. The papers include correspondence, writings, teaching files, exhibition files, personal business records, printed material, artwork and sketchbooks, and photographs.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Margaret De Patta papers were donated in two installments in 2003 and 2015 by Martha Bielawski, the second wife of Margaret De Patta's second husband, Eugene Bielawski. These papers were collected as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Rihoko Ueno in 2016.

Preferred Citation

Margaret De Patta papers, circa 1930-2012. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

San Francisco contemporary jewelry designer Margaret De Patta, née Strong, was born in Tacoma, Washington in 1903 and raised in San Diego, California. She was among the first contemporary studio jewelers and a proponent of modernism. De Patta studied painting at the San Diego Academy of Fine Arts from 1921-1923, the California School of Fine Arts from 1923-1925, and the New York Art Students League from 1926-1929.

Margaret De Patta began to create jewelry when she designed her own modernist wedding ring for her marriage to Sam De Patta in 1929. By the mid-1930s, she had become an accomplished jeweler whose work was frequently shown in galleries and museums. Her jewelry was featured in the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco. Around 1939, De Patta also started collaborating with Francis Sperisen, a noted San Francisco lapidary. De Patta designed the shapes of the jewelry using Lucite and wood, and Sperisen would use her models as a reference for the actual gem cutting.

From 1940-1941, De Patta attended the Chicago Bauhaus (now the Institute of Design) where she studied under Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. De Patta's time at the school was formative and Moholy-Nagy was tremendously impressed with her work. She also met her future second husband Gene Bielawski while she was a student in Chicago.

In 1941, De Patta returned to San Francisco, divorced Sam De Patta, and renovated her Laidley Street house in Glen Park. In 1946, she married Eugene Bielawski. The couple taught at the California Labor School. They also moved to Napa and founded Designs Contemporary, a business for producing jewelry that was as high quality as De Patta's handcrafted pieces at more affordable prices. Since all aspects of the business were conducted by the two of them, the workload became overwhelming and Designs Contemporary closed in 1957.

In 1951, Margaret De Patta was a founding member of the San Francisco Metal Arts Guild, established to promote the metal arts and specifically address the unique needs of studio jewelers. During her lifetime, she befriended many artists and continued to create jewelry, teach, and lecture. De Patta committed suicide in 1964. Her innovative jewelry designs continue to be influential today.

Scope and Contents

The papers of California jewelry designer Margaret De Patta measure 2.7 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2012. The papers include correspondence, writings, teaching files, exhibition files, personal business records, printed material, artwork and sketchbooks, and photographs.

Personal and professional correspondence is with family, friends, artists, galleries, museums, and universities. Notable correspondents include Fred Barson, Adelle Davis, Janet Fleisher, Alice Flory, Janet McHendrie, Victor Ries, Oppi Untracht, and Nanny's Design Gallery.

Writings include essays, personal statements, and notes. There is also an outline for a book on design and an annotated calendar.

Teaching files consist of course materials, administrative records, meeting minutes, and limited correspondence from the California Labor School. There are also a few folders from the California College of Arts and Crafts and the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

Exhibition files include announcements, correspondence, inventories, price lists, loan forms, and other material for Margaret De Patta shows at museums and galleries.

Personal business records consist of financial, legal, and administrative records on Margaret De Patta's jewelry designs and sales, as well as material related to Designs Contemporary, the jewelry production business created and managed by De Patta and her husband Eugene Bielawski. There is also material on large gifts and loans to museums and universities, and files relating to the San Francisco Metal Arts Guild.

Printed materials are mostly clippings about Margaret De Patta and other subjects, along with a few magazines and periodicals, including the San Francisco Metal Arts Guild newsletters, 1952-1964.

There is one sketchbook and several folders of drawings, jewelry designs, and flatware designs.

The bulk of the photographs are of jewelry and other objects designed by Margaret De Patta. There are a few photographs of Margaret De Patta working on jewelry and other subjects, such as a trip to Japan and her house on Laidley Street in California.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 8 series.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1946-2011 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Writings, circa 1935-1963 (0.1 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Teaching Files, 1944-1969 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 4: Exhibition Files, 1948-2012 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 1-2)
- Series 5: Personal Business Records, 1943-2001 (0.9 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1938-1981 (0.1 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 7: Artwork and Sketchbook, circa 1930-circa 1960 (0.2 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 8: Photographs, circa 1935-1967 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 3-4, OV 5)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Women artists
Women designers
Women educators

Types of Materials:

Designs
Drawings
Photographs
Sketchbooks

Names:

Barson, Fred
Bielawski, Eugene
California College of Arts and Crafts (San Francisco, Calif.)
California Labor School
Davis, Adelle
Designs Contemporary
Fleisher, Janet
Flory, Alice
McHendrie, Janet
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Nanny's Design Gallery
Oregon State System of Higher Education
Ries, Victor, 1907-

San Francisco Metal Arts Guild
Untracht, Oppi

Occupations:

Educators -- California -- San Diego
Jewelers -- California -- San Diego

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1946-2011

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes personal and professional correspondence with family, friends, artists, galleries, museums, universities, and arts organizations on the subject of exhibitions, loans, travels, jewelry designs, and business inquiries. Notable correspondents include Adelle Davis, Alice Flory, Victor Ries, and Oppi Untracht.

Arrangement: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by name of correspondent or subject. There is one folder of miscellaneous correspondence at the end of the series for letters with just one or two letters each from various individuals.

Box 1, Folder 1	Aloi, Robert, 1949-1955
Box 1, Folder 2	American Craft Museum, 1996
Box 1, Folder 3	American Craftsmen's Council, 1956-1961
Box 1, Folder 4	American Craftsmen's Educational Council, 1953-1957
Box 1, Folder 5	American Federation of Arts, 1956-1960
Box 1, Folder 6	Architectural League of New York, 1951
Box 1, Folder 7	Archives of American Art, 2003-2011
Box 1, Folder 8	Arts & Architecture Magazine, 1947-1950
Box 1, Folder 9	Atlanta Art Association, 1956
Box 1, Folder 10	Bielawski, Eugene and Martha, 1976-2001
Box 1, Folder 11	Ceramic Studio, 1946-1947
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence with Artists about Trading Work, 1951-1963
Box 1, Folder 13	Correspondence with Customers about Jewelry Designs, 1952-1963
Box 1, Folder 14	Correspondence with Customers about "Jewelry on Order", 1960-1965
Box 1, Folder 15	Craft Horizons, 1963
Box 1, Folder 16	Crawford, Ruth, 1956
Box 1, Folder 17	Davis, Adelle, 1956-1966

Box 1, Folder 18	Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, 1951
Box 1, Folder 19	Flory, Alice, 1959
Box 1, Folder 20	Hanada, Teruko, 1961-1962
Box 1, Folder 21	Letters of Inquiry and Prospects, 1948-1961 Notes: Correspondence with stores interested in seeing jewelry samples based on ads and brochures.
Box 1, Folder 22	Letters to Family from Japan Trip, 1960 October-December
Box 1, Folder 23	Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2000
Box 1, Folder 24	Ries, Victor, 1956
Box 1, Folder 25	San Francisco Museum of Art, 1952-1956
Box 1, Folder 26	Smithsonian National Collection of Fine Arts, 1969
Box 1, Folder 27	Sperisen, Francis, 1964
Box 1, Folder 28	Turner, Ralph, 1994-1998
Box 1, Folder 29	Untracht, Oppi, 1961
Box 1, Folder 30	Walker Art Center, 1948-1959
Box 1, Folder 31	Miscellaneous Correspondence, 1946-1975

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Series 2: Writings, circa 1935-1963

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes Margaret De Patta's essays on jewelry design and craftsmanship, personal statements, and notes on materials, designs, and gem cutting. There is also an outline for a book on design and one annotated appointment calendar. There is some writing by Eugene Bielawski.

Arrangement: The material in this series is grouped by document type.

Box 1, Folder 32	Essays on Jewelry, Craftsmanship, and Design, circa 1935-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 33	Personal Statements and Biographical Chronology, circa 1945-circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 34	Outline of Book on Design by Margaret De Patta and Eugene Bielawski, circa 1949
Box 1, Folder 35	Annotated Appointment Calendar, 1963
Box 1, Folder 36	Notes on Gem Cutting for Francis Sperisen, circa 1940-circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 37	Notes on Jewelry "Concepts and Designs", circa 1945-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 38	Notes on Materials by Margaret De Patta and Eugene Bielawski, circa 1940-1954
Box 1, Folder 39	Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1940-circa 1960

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Series 3: Teaching Files, 1944-1969

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The bulk of this series consists of material from the California Labor School where Margaret De Patta and her husband Eugene Bielawski taught. The files include class outlines, course materials, administrative records, staff meeting minutes, and limited correspondence. There are also two folders from the California College of Arts and Crafts and the Oregon State System of Higher Education.

Arrangement: This series is arranged alphabetically by the name of the educational institution. California Labor School folders are further broken down into document type.

Box 1, Folder 40	California College of Arts and Crafts, 1956
Box 1	California Labor School
Box 1, Folder 41	Administrative Records, circa 1946-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 42	Budget and Expenses, 1946
Box 1, Folder 43	Class Outlines, 1944-1969
Box 1, Folder 44	Course Materials and Reading Lists, circa 1945-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 45	Notes, circa 1946-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 46	Staff Meeting Minutes, 1946
Box 1, Folder 47	Summaries of Student Feedback, circa 1946-circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 48	Oregon State System of Higher Education, 1947

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Series 4: Exhibition Files, 1948-2012

0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

Scope and Contents: This series includes announcements, correspondence, jewelry inventories, price lists, loan and shipping forms, invoices, and other material for exhibitions at museums and galleries.

Arrangement: The series is arranged chronologically by exhibition date. A few folders related to recurring exhibition series, not dedicated to one specific exhibition, are grouped together in loose chronological arrangement at the end of the series.

Box 1, Folder 49	For Modern Living (1949), 1949
Box 1, Folder 50	University of Minnesota - Useful Objects (1951), 1950-1963
Box 1, Folder 51	Designer-Craftsman U.S.A. (1953), 1953-1955
Box 1, Folder 52	American Craftsman (1955), 1953-1956
Box 1, Folder 53	American Jewelry and Related Objects (1955), 1955-1958
Box 1, Folder 54	California Designed (1955), 1955
Box 1, Folder 55	California State Fair and Exposition (1955), 1955-1960
Box 1, Folder 56	Ohio Union - Jewelry by Margaret De Patta (1956), 1955-1956
Box 1, Folder 57	Brussel's World Fair (1958), 1957-1959
Box 1, Folder 58	International Exhibition of Modern Jewellery 1890-1961 (1961), 1961-1963
Box 1, Folder 59	Margaret De Patta Memorial Exhibition (1964), 1964-1967
Box 1, Folder 60	Masters of Modern Design, 1935-1960 (1990), 1986-1991
Box 1, Folder 61	Loom and Lathe: The Art of Kay Sekimachi and Bob Stocksdale (2008), 2007-2012
Box 1, Folder 62	California Design, 1930-1965: "Living in a Modern Way" (2011-2012), 2010-2012
Box 1, Folder 63	Space-Light-Structure: The Jewelry of Margaret De Patta (2012), 2008-2012
Box 1, Folder 64	Assorted University Exhibitions, 1948-1966
Box 2, Folder 1	Los Angeles County Fair Association Exhibitions, 1951-1957
Box 2, Folder 2	Fiber, Clay & Metal Exhibitions, 1952-1963

Box 2, Folder 3

Miscellaneous Exhibition Applications and Invitations, 1950-1963

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Series 5: Personal Business Records, 1943-2001

0.9 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of financial, legal, and administrative records related to Margaret De Patta's jewelry designs and sales. There are several folders on Designs Contemporary, the jewelry production company created and managed by De Patta and Eugene Bielawski. There are numerous folders tracking sales and inventory of Margaret De Patta jewelry at retailers and stores. Receipts and invoices, inventories, special orders, production bills, and other material related to budget and expenses are also included herein. Information on large gifts, donations, and loans of De Patta jewelry to museums and universities and records relating to the Metal Arts Guild are in this series as well.

Arrangement: Materials in this series are grouped alphabetically by document type.

Box 2, Folder 4	21 Laidley Street Property, 1956
Box 2, Folder 5	Bielawski vs. Palmer Legal Case, 1949-1951
Box 2, Folder 6	Budget and Expenses Notes, 1948
Box 2, Folder 7	Business Cards and Contacts, circa 1940-circa 1960
Box 2	Designs Contemporary
Box 2, Folder 8	Billing Ledger, 1951-1963
Box 2, Folder 9	Business Name Filing and Business Plan, circa 1956
Box 2, Folder 10	Invoices, 1943-1959
Box 2, Folder 11	Promotional Letter and Retailers List, 1949-1952
Box 2, Folder 12	Stationary, circa 1949-circa 1957
Box 2, Folder 13	Donation of Moholy-Nagy Artwork to Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1989-1996
Box 2, Folder 14	Eugene Bielawski Legal Document, 1966
Box 2, Folder 15	Gifts and Loans to the Oakland Museum of California, 1967-2001
Box 2, Folder 16	Gifts to the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, 1956-1976
Box 2, Folder 17-18	Invoices and Records, circa 1944-1959
Box 2, Folder 19	Information on Special Orders, 1957-1964
Box 2, Folder 20	Inventory and Price List, circa 1950-circa 1960

Box 2, Folder 21	Jewelry Appraisals by Eugene Bielawski, 1963-1991
Box 2, Folder 22	Lapidary - Francis Sperison Receipts and Invoices, 1947-1973
Box 2, Folder 23	Margaret De Patta Jewelry Brochure, circa 1945-circa 1960
Box 2, Folder 24	Metal Arts Guild, 1952-1980 Notes: Includes newsletters, by-laws, reports, membership lists, jewelry orders, and correspondence.
Box 2, Folder 25	Production Bills, 1946-1947
Box 2	Retailers
Box 2, Folder 26	Amberg-Hirth Gallery, 1943
Box 2, Folder 27	Arts and Crafts Design Unit of Tibbals, Crumley, Musson Architects, 1951-1953
Box 2, Folder 28	Black, Starr & Gorham, Inc., 1948-1950
Box 2, Folder 29	Boyd Britton Associates, 1948-1949
Box 2, Folder 30	Cabaniss, 1948
Box 2, Folder 31	Cele Peterson Store, 1951-1952
Box 2, Folder 32	Contemporary House, 1950
Box 2, Folder 33	Crossroads Inc., 1947-1949
Box 2, Folder 34	Design Today Incorporated, 1952
Box 2, Folder 35	Elm Shop, 1958-1961
Box 2, Folder 36	Fifty-50 Gallery, 1989
Box 2, Folder 37	Fresno Art Center, 1961
Box 2, Folder 38	Georg Jensen Inc., 1960
Box 2, Folder 39	The Guild, 1950-1953
Box 2, Folder 40	Harry Koepke, 1949-1953
Box 2, Folder 41	Hughes Gallery, 1948-1949
Box 2, Folder 42	I.F.A. Galleries, 1951

Box 2, Folder 43	Leonard Linn Inc., 1949-1953
Box 2, Folder 44	Modern Center, 1949
Box 2, Folder 45	Nanny's Design Gallery, 1953-1963
Box 2, Folder 46	Pacific Shop, 1947-1951
Box 2, Folder 47	Ted Herried, 1949-1951
Box 2, Folder 48	Treasure Chest, 1950-1951
Box 2, Folder 49	Sterling Silver Flatware Design Competition, 1959-1960
Box 2, Folder 50	Suppliers - Wildberg Brothers, circa 1950-1961

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1938-1981

0.1 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: This series includes clippings and articles on Margaret De Patta and other subjects, along with a few magazines and periodicals.

Arrangement: Clippings about Margaret De Patta are at the beginning of the series. The rest of the material is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 3, Folder 1	Articles about Margaret De Patta, 1940-1969
Box 3, Folder 2	Architecture, Art, Sculpture, 1948-1959
Box 3, Folder 3	Crafts, 1953-1957
Box 3, Folder 4	Falkenstein, Claire, 1938
Box 3, Folder 5	Modern Jewelry, 1952-1960
Box 3, Folder 6	Renk, Merry, 1981
Box 3, Folder 7	Miscellaneous Clippings, circa 1962
Box 3, Folder 8	Magazines and Catalogs, 1944-1964

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Series 7: Artwork and Sketchbook, circa 1930-circa 1960

0.2 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: This series includes one untitled sketchbook of abstract line drawings, loose "transparencies" drawings, jewelry designs, and flatware designs.

Arrangement: The sketchbook is at the start of the series, followed by drawings and designs in loose chronological order since the bulk of material is undated.

Box 3, Folder 9	Sketchbook, circa 1935-circa 1940
Box 3, Folder 10	"Transparency" Drawings, circa 1930-circa 1950
Box 3, Folder 11	Jewelry Designs, circa 1930-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 12	Jewelry Designs for Custom Orders, circa 1930-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 13	Designs for Flatware, circa 1940-circa 1955

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Series 8: Photographs, circa 1935-1967

0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4, OV 5)

Scope and Contents: The bulk of the series consists of black and white photographs of Margaret De Patta's jewelry. There are 4 photographs of Margaret De Patta working on jewelry and a few photographs of other subjects, such as a trip to Japan, and the house on Laidley Street in California which she extensively renovated.

Arrangement: The photographs of Margaret De Patta come first, followed by the rest of the photographs which are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Box 3, Folder 14	Margaret De Patta Making Jewelry, circa 1948
Box 3, Folder 15	Margaret De Patta Making Jewelry, circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 16	Brooches, circa 1935-1964
Box 3, Folder 17	Chicago Institute of Design Photographs of Artwork, 1939-1940
Box 3, Folder 18	Copper Ashtray, circa 1935
Box 3, Folder 19	Earrings, circa 1937-circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 20	Flatware, 1936
Box 4, Folder 1	Jewelry for "The Production Line" Brochure, circa 1950-circa 1955 Notes: Oversized material housed in OV 5.
Box 4, Folder 2	Kyoto, Japan Trip, 1960
Box 4, Folder 3	Laidley Street House, circa 1939
Box 4, Folder 4	Pendants, circa 1940-1967
Box 4, Folder 5	Rings, circa 1935-circa 1960
Box OV 5	Oversized Photographs of Jewelry for "The Production Line" Brochure from Box 4, Folder 1, circa 1950-circa 1955

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