A Finding Aid to the John DeWitt Papers, 1962-1979, in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art
Title: John DeWitt papers
Identifier: AAA.dewijohn
Date: 1962-1979
Extent: 1.4 linear feet
Creator: DeWitt, John, 1910-1984
Language: English
Summary: The scattered papers of federal arts administrator John DeWitt date from 1962-1979, and measure 1.4 linear feet. The collection primarily documents 1970s arts programs sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, an agency of the Department of the Interior. Found within the papers are correspondence concerning the department's art projects and exhibition files for The American Artist and Water Reclamation, 1972, and America 1976.

Administrative Information

Provenance
The John DeWitt papers were donated in 1987 by DeWitt's widow, Miriam Hapgood DeWitt.

Preferred Citation

Restrictions on Access
Use of original papers requires an appointment.

Ownership and Literary Rights
The John DeWitt papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

John DeWitt was born in 1910 and was a wood sculptor and federal arts administrator in Washington, D.C.

DeWitt began his career as a professional writer and was a wood sculptor connected with the Veerhoff Gallery in Washington, D.C. His wife, Miriam Hapgood DeWitt, was a painter. In the late 1960s, DeWitt
was the Director of Art Programs for the Bureau of Reclamation, an agency of the Department of Interior responsible for water conservation in arid regions of the United States. At this time, the Bureau initiated a program to present its accomplishments to the public through arts commissions and exhibitions. Under the direction of DeWitt and Lloyd Goodrich of the Whitney Museum of American Art, some 40 artists including Ralston Crawford, Peter Hurd, and Norman Rockwell, were invited to depict the scope of reclamation projects in the American West. The artists were given a free hand to depict any scene in any medium as long as the subject matter pertained to the Bureau of Reclamation's program. The resulting artwork was displayed in an exhibition, *The American Artist and Water Reclamation*, that opened at the National Gallery of Art in April 1972, and then toured the country in a traveling exhibition sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution.

As the Director of the Visual Arts Program for the Department of the Interior, DeWitt celebrated the Bicentennial by organizing the exhibition *America 1976*, for which he hired over forty realist painters including Vija Celmins, Ralston Crawford, Alex Katz, Philip Pearlstein, and Wayne Thiebaud, to depict a diverse range of Americana. DeWitt was employed by the Department of the Interior until 1977.


**Scope and Content Note**

The scattered papers of federal arts administrator John DeWitt date from 1962-1979, and measure 1.4 linear feet. The collection primarily documents 1970s arts programs organized by DeWitt while working for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, an agency of the Department of the Interior. Found within the papers are scattered correspondence concerning the department's art projects, including the Preservation of Endangered Species Art Program and activities of the Hereward Lester Cooke Foundation. There are letters from artists Vija Celmins, Lamar Dodd, and Ethel Magafan.

Files for the two exhibitions organized by DeWitt for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, *The American Artist and Water Reclamation* and *America 1976*, include a wide variety of materials. There are correspondence, lists of artwork, printed materials, a scrapbook, financial materials, audio recordings of interviews with DeWitt, audio recordings of a symposium on *America 1976*, and numerous photographs of exhibited artwork and participating artists. There are also additional photographs of DeWitt and his colleagues and artists Joseph Raffael and Ann Wyeth McCoy.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged as 3 series; each series is arranged chronologically.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1965-1979 (Box 1; 10 folders)
- Series 2: Exhibition Files, 1962-1978 (Box 1, 2; 1.3 linear feet)
- Series 3: Photographs, 1970-1974 (Box 2; 1 folder)

**Names and Subject Terms**

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

Arts administrators -- Washington (D.C.)

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sound recordings

Names:

American artist and water reclamation (1973: Washington, D.C.)
Celmins, Vija, 1938-
Dodd, Lamar
Hereward Lester Cooke Foundation
Magafan, Ethel, 1915 or 6-1993
McCoy, Ann Wyeth
Raffael, Joseph, 1933-
United States. Bureau of Reclamation
Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1965-1979

(Box 1; 10 folders)

General correspondence discusses miscellaneous proposed art projects for the Bureau of Reclamation, most notably the Preservation of Endangered Species Art Program. There are scattered letters from Vija Celmins, Lamar Dodd, and Ethel Magafan, and a photocopy of a letter from Miriam Hapgood DeWitt's father, Hutchins Hapgood to Bernard Berenson, discussing Berenson's books, their friendship and Hapgood's travels on the Amalfi coast of Italy.

Box 1, Folder 1  Correspondence, 1965-1971, undated
Box 1, Folder 2  Correspondence, 1972
Box 1, Folder 3  Correspondence, 1973
Box 1, Folder 4  Correspondence, 1976
Box 1, Folder 5  Correspondence, 1977-1978
Box 1, Folder 6-7  Correspondence Concerning the Preservation of Endangered Species Art Program, 1974-1977 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 8-10 Correspondence Concerning the Hereward Lester Cooke Foundation, 1975-1979 (3 folders)
Series 2: Exhibition Files, 1962-1978

*Boxes 1-2; 1.3 linear feet*

Exhibition files concern two exhibitions, *The American Artist and Water Reclamation* in 1972 and *America 1976*. Files contain a wide variety of materials, such as scattered correspondence, a drawing by William Palmer, scattered financial material, lists of exhibited artwork, miscellaneous notes, a scrapbook, clippings, exhibition catalogs; photographs of scenes of the American West; photographs of participating artists including Vija Celmins, Hereward Lester Cooke, Ralston Crawford, Richard Diebenkorn, Lamar Dodd, Michael Frary, Xavier Gonzalez, Peter Hurd, Billy Morrow Jackson, Mitchell Jamieson, Dong Kingman, Ethel Magafan, Carl Morris, William Palmer, Norman Rockwell, and Fritz Scholder; and photographs of their artwork. There is also an album of photographs of the opening of the exhibition *The American Artist and Water Reclamation*. Audio recordings on cassettes and reel-to-reel tapes contain interviews concerning the exhibition, as well as a tape of a symposium on the exhibition *America 1976*.

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<td>Correspondence, 1969-1972</td>
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<td>Drawing by William Palmer, 1970</td>
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<td>Photographs of Vija Celmins and Hereward Lester Cooke, 1970-1974</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 39</td>
<td>Photographs of Michael Frary, 1970, undated</td>
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Photographs of Lloyd Lozes Goff and Xavier Gonzalez, 1969-1970

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Box 1, Folder 42  
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Photographs of Dong Kingman, 1971

Box 1, Folder 44  
Photographs of Edward Laning and Ethel Magafan, 1969-1970

Box 1, Folder 45  
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Photographs of Unidentified Artists, 1969-1973  
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Box 1, Folder 59  
Photographs of Artwork by Oliver Chafee, Michael Frary, Edward Laning, and Fletcher Martin, 1969-1972

Box 1, Folder 60  
Slides of Artwork by Richard Diebenkorn, 1972

Box 1, Folder 61  
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Box 1, Folder 62  
Photographs of Artwork by Norman Rockwell, undated

Box 1, Folder 63  
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Box 1, Folder 64-65  
Slides of Miscellaneous Artwork, 1973  
(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 66  
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Box 1, Folder 67  
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Box 1, Folder 68  
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<td>Box 1, Folder 74</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 4-5</td>
<td>Clippings, 1976-1978</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 6</td>
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<td>Box 2, Folder 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 8-9</td>
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<td>(2 folders)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 10</td>
<td>Photographs of the Exhibition Opening, 1976</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 11</td>
<td>Audiocassette of Interview with DeWitt, 1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 12-14</td>
<td>Audio recordings on Reel-to-Reel Tapes of a Symposium on the Exhibition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>including panelists Michael Mazur, Susan Shatter, and Alex Katz, 1975-1976</td>
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<td>(3 folders)</td>
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</tbody>
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(Box 2; 1 folder)

Photographs are of John DeWitt at unidentified locations, and of artists Joseph Raffael and Ann Wyeth McCoy in Hawaii.

Box 2, Folder 15