



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Ruth Duckworth Papers,  
circa 1930-2010, in the Archives of American Art

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Ruth Duckworth papers
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1930-2010
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.duckruth
<b>Creator:</b>	Duckworth, Ruth, 1919-2009
<b>Extent:</b>	4.7 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of sculptor and ceramicist Ruth Duckworth measure 4.7 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2010. The collection comprises exhibition files for <i>Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor</i> , a multifaceted retrospective of Duckworth's life and work; professional files including business papers, writings, and correspondence regarding Duckworth's professional activities; printed materials recording Duckworth's career; artwork that includes sketches of ceramics, figure drawings, self portraits, and paper cutouts; and photographic materials of Duckworth, her artwork and studio, travel in Europe and Japan, and personal snapshots.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The Ruth Duckworth papers were donated in 2015 by Thea Berger, Duckworth's agent. A portion of this material had been lent for microfilming in 1977 by Ruth Duckworth. Additional contact sheets and negatives of Duckworth were donated in 2020 by photographer Cal Kowal.

### Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming on Reel 1397 including biographical information, photographs, twelve silhouette cutouts, a scrapbook of clippings, and loose printed material. Loaned materials returned to the donor that were not subsequently donated are not described in the collection container inventory.

### Related Materials

Also in the Archives of American Art is an interview with Ruth Duckworth conducted on April 27, 2001 by Kenneth R. Trapp for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America at the studios of Smithsonian Productions, Washington, D.C.

### Available Formats

Material lent for microfilming is available on 35mm microfilm Reel 1397 at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

## Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2022.

## Preferred Citation

Ruth Duckworth papers, circa 1930-2010. 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 in this collection must use access copies. Contact References Services for more information.

## Terms of Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009) was a sculptor and ceramicist in Chicago, Illinois, known for abstract modernist forms that were heavily inspired by the natural world.

Duckworth was born Ruth Windmüller in Hamburg, Germany, as the youngest of five children. As a child, Duckworth was often sick and would draw in bed as a way to pass the time. It became evident that she had talent as an artist, but under the Nazi regime in Germany, Duckworth was unable to attend art school because her father was Jewish.

In 1936 she left Germany as a refugee to live in Liverpool, England, with her sister. She attended the Liverpool School of Art from 1936 to 1940. She then moved to Manchester where she began making puppets until she took work in a munitions factory to support the war effort. Around 1942, Duckworth moved to London with friends she had made at the factory. There she met and married artist Aidron Duckworth in 1949. She also became acquainted with other sculptors, including Lucie Rie and Henry Moore, who encouraged her to pursue sculpture.

Duckworth attended Hammersmith Art School, then taught at the Central School of Art and Craft from 1959 to 1964 before taking a teaching position at the University of Chicago in 1964. After feeling that her career had been slow to develop she enjoyed breakthroughs in the late 1960s and 1970s with the commissions *Earth, Water, and Sky*, for the University of Chicago Geophysical Science Building, and *Clouds Over Lake Michigan* for Dresdner Bank in Chicago. Duckworth and Aidron divorced in 1967.

In 1981 Duckworth met Thea Burger, while working on a commission for one of Burger's clients. The two realized they could both benefit from a working relationship where Burger worked as Duckworth's agent taking care of the business aspects of the sculptor's career while Duckworth focused solely on her artwork.

Burger organized *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor*, a multifaceted retrospective of Duckworth's life and work, with curator Jo Lauria in 2005. A catalog that included written contributions by Tony Birks, Martin Puryear, and Jo Lauria and a short film titled, *Ruth Duckworth: My Life in Clay*, were created to accompany the retrospective. The exhibition opened in January 2005 at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York. Over the course of two years the exhibition traveled to the Chicago Cultural Center, Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Cranbrook Art Museum, Hoffman Gallery at Lewis and Clark University, Long Beach Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian Institution's Renwick Gallery.

Duckworth had intended to return to the United Kingdom later in life but continued living in her Chicago home and studio until she died in 2009.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of sculptor and ceramicist Ruth Duckworth measure 4.7 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2010. The collection documents Duckworth's career through exhibition files, professional files, printed materials, artwork, and photographs.

Exhibition files are for *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor*, a multifaceted retrospective of Duckworth's life and work organized by her agent Thea Burger and curator Jo Lauria. Professional files consist of business papers, writings, correspondence regarding Duckworth's professional activities, and files containing Burger's speech delivered at Duckworth's memorial service and sympathy letters received after Duckworth's death. Printed material consists of clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and a few miscellaneous items. Duckworth's artwork includes sketches of ceramics, figure drawings, self portraits, and paper cutouts. Photographic materials picture Duckworth, her artwork and studio, and travel in Europe and Japan, and include personal snapshots.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 5 series.

- Series 1: *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor* Exhibition Files, 1996-circa 2005 (1.0 linear feet; Box 1)
  - Series 2: Professional Files, circa 1970-2009 (0.5 linear feet; Boxes 2, 6)
  - Series 3: Printed Materials, circa 1970-2010 (0.2 linear feet; Box 2)
  - Series 4: Artwork, circa 1935-circa 1985 (0.2 linear feet; Box 2)
  - Series 5: Photographic Materials, circa 1930-circa 2005 (2.8 linear feet; Boxes 3-6)
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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:

Jewish artists  
Women artists  
Women ceramicists  
Women sculptors

### Types of Materials:

Sketchbooks

### Names:

Burger, Thea  
Lauria, Jo

### Occupations:

Ceramicists -- Illinois -- Chicago  
Sculptors -- Illinois -- Chicago

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor* Exhibition Files, 1996-circa 2005

#### 1 Linear foot (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series documents *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor*, the multifaceted retrospective of Duckworth's life and work organized by her agent Thea Burger and curator Jo Lauria.

The series contains catalog preparation material including drafts of Tony Birks's biographical essay about Duckworth, correspondence and contracts with Birks, correspondence with prospective U.S. and European museums explaining the retrospective, and research and correspondence regarding sources of funding through donations and grants. Also found are press and publicity files which include reviews and articles regarding Duckworth and the exhibition, installation photographs of the exhibition's opening at the Museum of Arts and Design, the exhibition outline and proposal, press release material including born-digital records, and administrative records such as loan documents, insurance forms, and exhibition agreements. Additional material related to the exhibition may be found in Series 2 and 5.

Box 1, Folder 1	British Museums, 2002-2004
Box 1, Folder 2	Catalog, Tony Birks Drafts and Correspondence, circa 2004
Box 1, Folder 3-4	Catalog, Section 1 - Tony Birks, circa 2005
Box 1, Folder 5-7	Catalog, Section 3 - Chronology, circa 1918-circa 2005
Box 1, Folder 8	Correspondence, Jo Lauria, circa 2004
Box 1, Folder 9	Correspondence, Jo Lauria Regarding Visuals, 2004-2005
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence with Museums, 2002
Box 1, Folder 11	Correspondence, Museums in England, 2001-2004
Box 1, Folder 12	Correspondence, Museums in Germany, 2003-2004
Box 1, Folder 13	Curatorial Services International, 1996-2002
Box 1, Folder 14	Donors, 2001-2004
Box 1, Folder 15	Exhibitions International / Robert Buck, 2002-2003
Box 1, Folder 16	Exhibition Agreements, 2004-2005
Box 1, Folder 17	Grants, 2001-2003

Box 1, Folder 18	Insurance, 2004
Box 1, Folder 19-20	Loans, circa 2004
Box 1, Folder 21	Museum of Arts and Design, Correspondence, 2002-2004
Box 1, Folder 22-23	Museum of Arts and Design, Installation Photographs, 2005
Box 1, Folder 24	Outline, 2001
Box 1, Folder 25	Press Release Material, 2004-2005 Includes 1 electronic disc (3.5 floppy)
Box 1, Folder 26-27	Press / Publicity, circa 2005 Includes 1 electronic disc (3.5 floppy) in folder 27.
Box 1, Folder 28	Press / Publicity, Ceramics Writers Research, 2002-2003
Box 1, Folder 29	Proposal, circa 2004

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## Series 2: Professional Files, circa 1970-2009

### 0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2, 6)

**Scope and Contents:** The series contains files pertaining to Duckworth's career and Thea Burger's role as Duckworth's agent. A speech typescript Burger wrote for Duckworth's memorial service and sympathy letters to Burger after Duckworth's death illustrate their close friendship.

Business papers consist of inventories, sales records, price lists, and correspondence with Exhibit A Gallery, Jacques Baruch Gallery, and Thea Burger. Other correspondence is between Duckworth, Burger, Tanya Harrod, and others regarding travel to England, appearances on a radio program, and Duckworth's other professional activities. Also included is a paper on creativity by Duckworth, her speech given at the Ceramics Millennium Conference in Amsterdam, and a speech delivered to young people. Typescripts by Henry W. Rothschild, Dorothy Johnson, and Harold Haydon are about Duckworth as an artist. Also included in the series are a couple of Duckworth's portfolios containing photographs of artwork and printed materials, a file containing born-digital records and other material for an article Kerameiki Techni Magazine, and biographical writings about Duckworth. Some of the records in the series may relate to Series 1.

Box 2, Folder 1-2	Address Book, circa 1970-circa 2005 Notes: 2 books
Box 2, Folder 3	Biographical Writings, circa 2005 Notes: Some writings are photocopies.
Box 2, Folder 4	Correspondence Between Duckworth, Thea Burger, and Others, 1928, 1975-1988, 2002-2008
Box 2, Folder 5	Correspondence Between Thea Burger and Tanya Harrod, 2002
Box 2, Folder 6	Correspondence Between Thea Burger and NPR Radio (WBEZ), 2002
Box 2, Folder 7-8	Exhibit A Gallery, circa 1972-circa 2000
Box 6, Folder 1	Exhibit A Gallery, circa 1970s
Box 2, Folder 9	Letters to Thea Burger Regarding Duckworth's Death, 2009
Box 2, Folder 10	Material for Article on Duckworth in Kerameiki Techni Magazine, circa 2005 Includes 1 electronic disc (3.5 floppy disc).
Box 2, Folder 11	Notes, circa 1975-circa 1995
Box 2, Folder 12	Portfolio, 2006-2008
Box 2, Folder 13	Portfolio, circa 2000
Box 2, Folder 14	Price Lists, Thea Burger, circa 2000-2008



Box 2, Folder 15	Sales, Jacques Baruch Gallery, 1973
Box 2, Folder 16	Typescripts by Duckworth, circa 1973-1999 Notes: Includes a speech given to young people, a paper on creativity presented at the University of Chicago, and a speech given at the "Ceramics Millennium" Conference in Amsterdam.
Box 2, Folder 17	Typescripts About Duckworth, circa 1970s Notes: Includes writings by Henry W. Rothschild, Dorothy Johnson, and Harold Haydon.
Box 2, Folder 18	Speech Typescript by Thea Burger and Memorial Program, Duckworth's Memorial Service, 2009

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## Series 3: Printed Materials, circa 1970-2010

### *0.2 Linear feet (Box 2)*

Scope and Contents: Series includes clippings about Duckworth, her obituary, catalogs and announcements for Duckworth's exhibitions, and a file containing a few miscellaneous items.

Box 2, Folder 19          Clippings, 1972-2010

Box 2, Folder 20          Clippings, Duckworth's Obituary, 2009

Box 2, Folder 21-23      Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, Duckworth, 1977-2009

Box 2, Folder 24          Miscellaneous, circa 1970-2003

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## Series 4: Artwork, circa 1935-circa 1985

### *0.2 Linear feet (Box 2)*

Scope and Contents: The series contains artwork by Duckworth including paper cutouts of various shapes and a series of paper silhouettes. Also found are sketches and two sketchbooks of self portraits, figure drawings, ceramic designs, and Duckworth's signature.

Box 2, Folder 25	Paper Cutouts, circa 1940-circa 1975
Box 2, Folder 26	Sketches, circa 1935-circa 1985
Box 2, Folder 27-28	Sketchbook, circa 1973
Box 2, Folder 29	Sketchbook, 1939

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## Series 5: Photographic Materials, circa 1930-circa 2005

### 2.8 Linear feet (Boxes 3-6)

Scope and Contents: Photographic materials of Duckworth include portraits by Cal Kowal and Jerome de Perlinghi, snapshots, and photos of Duckworth in her studio, with assistants, and her pets. Two photograph albums include a handmade album of a trip to Japan and an album with photographs of multiple European cities taken circa 1930. Most of the series comprises photographs of Duckworth's artwork which includes her commissioned works, sculptures, murals, "mama" pots, and small vessels.

Many of the photographs were received in labeled boxes. The box labels are included in the folders along with the set of photographs that were received in each box. Some material in the series may relate to Series 1.

Box 3, Folder 1-3	Duckworth, circa 1970-circa 1995 Notes: Includes photographs of Duckworth's studio, pets, and assistants.
Box 3, Folder 4	Duckworth by Jerome de Perlinghi, circa 2005
Box 3, Folder 5	Duckworth Portraits by Cal Kowal, 1982
Box 3, Folder 6-7	Duckworth Portraits, circa 1970-circa 2003
Box 3, Folder 8	<a href="#">Duckworth Portraits, circa 1970-circa 2003</a>
Box 3, Folder 9	Duckworth Portraits, circa 1970-circa 2003
Box 6, Folder 2	Duckworth Portraits, circa 1975-2006
Box 3, Folder 10-12	Duckworth Portraits and Works of Art, circa 1990s
Box 3, Folder 13	Duckworth in Studio and Works of Art, circa 1970-1980s
Box 3, Folder 14	Personal Snapshots, circa 1980-1990s
Box 3, Folder 15	Photograph Album, Duckworth Travel in Japan, 1990
Box 6, Folder 4	Photograph Album, Europe, circa 1930
Box 3, Folder 16	Photograph Album, Europe - Loose Material, circa 1930-circa 1980
Box 3, Folder 17	Works of Art and Landscapes, Banff, circa 1960-1977
Box 3, Folder 18-23	Works of Art, circa 1970-1990s
Box 4, Folder 1-4	Works of Art, circa 1970-1990s
Box 6, Folder 3	Works of Art, circa 1970-2005

Box 4, Folder 5	Works of Art, Book Rejections, circa 1970-1980s
Box 4, Folder 6	Works of Art, Esther Saks Piece, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 7	Works of Art, Free Standing and Slabs, circa 1960s
Box 4, Folder 8	Works of Art, Geophysical Building, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 9	Works of Art, Hamburg Show, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 10	Works of Art, Mama Pots, circa 1980s
Box 4, Folder 11	Works of Art, Pots and Vessels, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 12-13	Works of Art, Rotterdam, 1970s-1990s
Box 4, Folder 14	Works of Art, Sculptures, circa 1980s
Box 4, Folder 15	Works of Art, Small Sculptures, circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 16	Works of Art, Small White Porcelains, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 4, Folder 17-19	Works of Art, Vessels and Other Works, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 5, Folder 1	Works of Art, Wall Murals, circa 1980s
Box 5, Folder 2-3	Works of Art, Wall Slab Pieces, circa 1960s
Box 5, Folder 4	Works of Art, Wall Pieces, circa 1970-1989

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