



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Betty Esman Papers, 1936-1979, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

Processing of this collection received support from  
the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

2022/10/07

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Betty Esman papers
<b>Date:</b>	1936-1979
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.esmabett
<b>Creator:</b>	Esman, Betty, 1904-1996
<b>Extent:</b>	0.9 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The scattered papers of painter and collector Betty Esman measure 0.9 linear feet and date from 1936 to 1979. Found are artworks, artist files, biographical material, correspondence, photographs of Esman and others, printed material, and a mixed media scrapbook. Of note are files on Ray Johnson which include mail art addressed to and collected by Esman.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Betty Esman donated her papers to the Archives of American Art in several installments between 1986 to 1994.

### Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35mm microfilm reel 4861 at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

### Processing Information

Portions of the Betty Esman papers were microfilmed in 1994 with funding provided by the Henry and Lucy Moses Fund. The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2022 with support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

### Preferred Citation

Betty Esman papers, 1936-1979. 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.

### Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Betty Esman (1904-1996) was a painter, collector, and art patron in New York City, New York. Esman studied at the Syracuse University College of Fine Arts and the Art Students League. In the 1950s, Esman taught painting at Ball State College. She maintained personal and professional relationships with artists Ray Johnson, Rufino Tamayo, Jacques Lipchitz and others.

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## Scope and Contents

The scattered papers of painter and art collector Betty Esman measure 0.9 linear feet and date from 1936 to 1979. Found are artworks, artist files, biographical material, correspondence, photographs of Esman and others, printed material, and a mixed media scrapbook. Of note are files on Ray Johnson which include mail art addressed to and collected by Esman.

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## Arrangement

Due to the small size of this collection the papers are arranged as one series.

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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:

- Art -- Collectors and collecting
- Jewish artists
- Mail art
- Scrapbooks
- Women artists
- Women painters

### Names:

- Johnson, Ray, 1927-1995
- Lipchitz, Jacques, 1891-1973
- Tamayo, Rufino, 1899-1991

### Occupations:

- Art patrons -- New York (State) -- New York
- Collectors -- New York (State) -- New York
- Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Betty Esman Papers, 1936-1979

#### 0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OV 3)

**Scope and Contents:** Artworks include a print by Rufino Tamayo and pastel drawings of figures by Betty Esman. Files for friends Ray Johnson, Yasuhide Kobashi, and Olga and Rufino Tamayo include original artworks, mail art, correspondence, and printed material. Mail art by Johnson is addressed to Esman and to others and was collected by Esman.

General correspondence is with A. L. Chanin, Chaim and Renee Gross, the Guggenheim Museum, Takeshi Kawashima, Jacques Lipchitz, Jack Pearl, John Rewald, Manfred Schwartz, and Ben Shahn.

Photographs depict Betty Esman, and Esman in her studio and with her artworks. Photos of others include Jacques Lipchitz, Rufino Tamayo, and Charlotte Weidler. Many photos were taken by Esman's husband, Vernon Samuels. Found within photographs of works of art are three photos of the old sculpture garden at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Printed materials include a book on Tamayo, exhibition announcements and catalogs, clippings, and autographed Abraham Walkowitz exhibition catalogs. Also found is a mixed media scrapbook with clippings and exhibition material documenting Esman's career.

Oversize 3                      Artwork, circa 1940s

Box 1, Folder 1-3              Artists Files, Ray Johnson, circa 1960

Box 1, Folder 4                Artists Files, Yasuhide Kobashi, 1971-1976

Box 1, Folder 5                Artists Files, Rufino and Olga Tamayo, 1956-1973

Box 1, Folder 6                Biographical Material, circa 1970

Box 1, Folder 7-8              Correspondence, 1936-1979

Box 1, Folder 9                Photographs, Portraits of Esman, circa 1950s-1960s

Box 2, Folder 1                Photographs, with Others and Events, circa 1950s-1960s

Box 2, Folder 2                Photographs, Works of Art, circa 1960s

Box 2, Folder 3-6              Printed Material, 1952-1979

Box 2, Folder 7                Scrapbook, circa 1950-circa 1970

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