



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Bernard and Phyllis Fischer papers, circa 1905-1983, in the Archives of American Art

Sabine Lipten

The processing of this collection received Federal support from the Smithsonian Collections Care and Preservation Fund, administered by the National Collections Program and the Smithsonian Collections Advisory Committee.

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Bernard and Phyllis Fischer papers
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1905-1983 (bulk 1928-1977)
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.fiscbern
<b>Creator:</b>	Fischer, Bernard, 1900-1986 Fischer, Phyllis Potter
<b>Extent:</b>	3.4 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The Bernard and Phyllis Fischer papers measure 3.4 linear feet and date from circa 1905-1983 with bulk dates from 1928-1977. The papers document the Fischers' careers as art teachers and craft business administrators through biographical material, correspondence, writings and personal business files. Also found are printed material, photographs and an extensive amount of artwork.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Donated 1986 by Norma Kerlin, the Fischers' niece.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Sabine Lipten in 2023.

### Preferred Citation

Bernard and Phyllis Fischer papers, circa 1905-1983. 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.

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## Biographical / Historical

Bernard and Phyllis Fischer were a New York City based artist couple who operated a crafts business specializing in enamels and exhibited their work in galleries and at crafts exhibitions. Bernard Fischer (1900-1986) was a painter, sculptor, designer, puppeteer, art teacher. Bernard taught Industrial Arts in the New York City schools for over 20 years, along with courses at museums and crafts organizations in the city. Phyllis, born 1899, was a decorator, designer, and painter. She also worked as a Works Progress Administration craft teacher and project supervisor in New York City as a part of a WPA recreation project initiative.

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## Scope and Contents

The Bernard and Phyllis Fischer papers measure 3.4 linear feet and date from circa 1905-1983 with bulk dates from 1928-1977. The papers document the Fischers' careers as art teachers and craft business administrators through biographical material, correspondence, writings and personal business files. Also found are printed material, photographs and an extensive amount of artwork. Biographical material consists of resumes for both Fishers and a copy of their marriage certificate along with certificates corresponding to the Fishers respectively, such as Bernard Fischer's baptismal certificate and Phyllis college diplomas. Also found is an essay documenting Bernard Fischer's family history. Correspondence is foremost professional in nature with a marginal number of personal letters and holiday greeting cards from friends. Professional correspondence relates to job opportunities, Phyllis Fischer's WPA work, project manufacturing costs and supplies, project designs and price quotes.

The writings series contains fourteen of Phyllis Fischer's diaries which span nearly sixty years, along with the notes on multiple subjects such as art projects and techniques, planning advertising and manufacturing of their enamel works, and resume drafts. The personal business series documents the Fischers' careers through financial material along with Phyllis Fischer's Works Progress Administration records, professional organization memberships and Bernard Fischer's teaching records. Printed material includes advertisements for the Fisher's commercial work and exhibition announcements along with pamphlets and event flyers related to unionizing and socialist organizations the Fishers were interested in. Photographic material contains many photographs of the Fishers spanning most of their lives along with a substantial number of photographs of the Fishers' sculptural and functional artwork. Also found are a small number of photographs of the Fishers' paintings. The artwork series includes thirteen sketchbooks, approximately two hundred loose drawings plus an additional 16 drawings done on hard plastic sheets. Also found are watercolors, prints and paper cutouts.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as seven series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1918-1983 (0.1 Linear feet: Box 1, 4)
- Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1928-1972 (0.4 Linear feet: Box 1)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1914-1977 (0.5 Linear feet: Box 1)
- Series 4: Personal Business, 1928-1961 (0.6 Linear feet: Box 2)
- Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1939-1960 (7 Folders: Box 2)
- Series 6: Photographic Material, circa 1905-1977 (0.8 Linear feet: Box 2-3)
- Series 7: Artwork, circa 1915-1979 (0.8 Linear feet: Box 3-5)

## Names and Subject Terms

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

### Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Enamel and enameling
- Handicraft

### Types of Materials:

- Drawings
- Sketchbooks

### Names:

- United States. Work Projects Administration. Division of Recreation and Education

### Occupations:

- Art teachers -- New York (State) -- New York
- Designers -- New York (State) -- New York
- Sculptors -- New York (State) -- New York

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical Material, 1918-1983

#### *0.1 Linear feet (Box 1, 4)*

Scope and Contents: Biographical material consists of resumes for both Fishers and a copy of their marriage certificate, along with certificates corresponding to the Fishers respectively, such as Bernard Fischer's baptismal certificate and Phyllis Fischer's college diplomas. Also found is an essay documenting Bernard Fischer's family history.

Box 1, Folder 1	Resumes and Biographical Summaries, circa 1954-1957
Box 1, Folder 2	Marriage Certificate, Notarized Copy, 1983
Box 1, Folder 3	Notarized Letter of Lost Birth Certificate, Bernard Fischer, 1983
Box 1, Folder 4	Baptismal Certificate, Bernard Fischer, 1983
Box 1, Folder 5	Family History Essay, Bernard Fischer, circa 1971
Box 4, Folder 1	School Diplomas, Phyllis Fischer, 1918-1929

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## Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1928-1972

### 0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is primarily professional in nature with a small number of personal letters and holiday greeting cards from friends. Professional correspondence relates to job opportunities, Phyllis Fischer's WPA work, project manufacturing costs and supplies, project designs and price quotes. Also found are two address books. The series has been arranged in chronological order by each Fischer.

Box 1, Folder 6	Bernard and Phyllis Fischer Correspondence, circa 1936-1972
Box 1, Folder 7	Bernard Fischer Correspondence, circa 1934-1961
Box 1, Folder 8	Phyllis Fischer Correspondence, circa 1933-1947
Box 1, Folder 9	Phyllis Fischer Correspondence, 1948-1954
Box 1, Folder 10	Phyllis Fischer Correspondence, 1955-1956
Box 1, Folder 11	Phyllis Fischer Correspondence, 1957-1971
Box 1, Folder 12	Holiday and Greeting Cards, circa 1928-1951
Box 1, Folder 13	Address Books, circa 1936-1972

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## Series 3: Writings, circa 1914-1977

### 0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The writings series contains fourteen of Phyllis Fischer's diaries which span nearly sixty years, along with the notes on multiple subjects such as art projects and techniques, planning advertising and manufacturing of their enamel works, and resume drafts. Also found is a piece of writing titled what to do with beads which includes collaged images of beads alongside descriptions of beading techniques.

Box 1, Folder 14	Phyllis Fischer Journals, circa 1914-1920
Box 1, Folder 15	Phyllis Fischer Journals, circa 1923, 1926
Box 1, Folder 16	Phyllis Fischer Journals, circa 1929-1934
Box 1, Folder 17	Phyllis Fischer Journals, 1937, 1941
Box 1, Folder 18	Phyllis Fischer Journals, 1947-1953
Box 1, Folder 19	Phyllis Fischer Journals, 1958
Box 1, Folder 20	Phyllis Fischer Journals, 1968-1970, 1973
Box 1, Folder 21	Phyllis Fischer Interior Decoration School Notebook, circa 1921
Box 1, Folder 22	"What to Do With Beads" Collaged Writing, circa 1920s-1950s
Box 1, Folder 23	Art Process and Project Notes, circa 1924-1956
Box 1, Folder 24	Advertising and Manufacturing Notes, circa 1939-1950
Box 1, Folder 25	Resume Drafts and Career Notes, circa 1937-1939
Box 1, Folder 26	Travel Notes, circa 1977
Box 1, Folder 27	Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1948-1977

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## Series 4: Personal Business, 1928-1961

### 0.6 Linear feet (Box 2)

**Scope and Contents:** The personal business series documents the Fischers careers through financial material along with Phyllis Fischer's Works Progress Administration records, professional organization memberships and Bernard Fischer's teaching records. Financial records include weekly planners, account ledgers, price lists and sale records; the WPA files include numerous reports co-written by Mrs. Fischer on the project's fieldwork in crafts educational initiative and employee records detailing her job position and responsibility. The teaching records document Mr. Fischer's time as a ceramic's teacher at a New York City junior high school and as guest instructor at the Brooklyn Museum Art School through performance evaluations, schedules, correspondence and lesson plans.

Financial	
Box 2, Folder 1	Appointment Diaries, 1954-1955
Box 2, Folder 2	Appointment Diaries, 1956-1957
Box 2, Folder 3	Account Ledgers, 1928-1929
Box 2, Folder 4	Account Ledgers, circa 1953-1961
Box 2, Folder 5	Price Lists and Sale Records, circa 1953-1960
Box 2, Folder 6	Supply and Shipping Receipts, circa 1937-1960
Box 2, Folder 7	Bernard Fischer Royalty Statements, 1955
Box 2, Folder 8	WPA Employee Assignment and Identification Slips, 1936-1939
Box 2, Folder 9	WPA Education and Recreation Department Reports of Fieldwork in Crafts, 1938
Box 2, Folder 10	Miscellaneous WPA Material Relating to Recreation Training School, circa 1936-1939
Box 2, Folder 11	Bernard Fischer Teaching Records, circa 1954-1960
Box 2, Folder 12	Phyllis Fischer Job Applications, 1943
Box 2, Folder 13	The American Designers Institute , 1949
Box 2, Folder 14	Industrial Designers' Institute, circa 1953-1956
Box 2, Folder 15	New York Society of Craftsmen, circa 1955-1957

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## Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1939-1960

### 7 Folders (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes advertisements for the Fisher's commercial work and exhibition announcements along with pamphlets and event flyers related to unionizing and socialist organizations the Fishers were interested in. Also found are sixteen screen printed war time postcards created by the Unitary Socialist Party.

Box 2, Folder 16 Enamel Business Advertisements, circa 1954-1956

Box 2, Folder 17 Exhibition Announcements, circa 1960

Box 2, Folder 18 Gallery Invitations, circa 1956-1957

Box 2, Folder 19 Craft Student League, 1955

Box 2, Folder 20 Political Organizing Ephemera, circa 1943-1952

Box 2, Folder 21 Italian Unitary Socialist Party (P.S.U) Blank Postcards, circa 1939-1945

Box 2, Folder 22 Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1954-1955

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## Series 6: Photographic Material, circa 1905-1977

### 0.8 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Photographic material contains many photographs of the Fishers spanning most of their lives along with a substantial number of photographs of the Fishers' sculptural and functional artwork. Functional artwork includes ceramics, mirrors and lamps the couple designed and decorated. Also found are a small number of photographs of the Fishers' paintings and two photographs of the north wall of the *Detroit Industry Mural* painted by Diego Rivera, located in the Detroit Institutes of Arts museum.

Some images in this series may be offensive to viewers. It is presented as it exists in the original documents for the benefit of research. This material in no way reflects the views of the Archives of American Art or the Smithsonian Institution.

Box 2, Folder 23	Photographs, The Fischers, circa 1916-1977
Box 2, Folder 24	Photographs, The Fischers, circa 1916-1977
Box 2, Folder 25	Photographs, Residence and Studios, circa 1924-1974
Box 2, Folder 26	Photographs, Family and Friends, circa 1905-1976
Box 2, Folder 27	Photographs, Family and Friends, circa 1905-1976
Box 2, Folder 28	Photographs, Travel, circa 1930-1934
Box 2, Folder 29-31	Photographs, Sculptures, circa 1939-1975
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Photographs, Sculptures, circa 1939-1975
Box 3, Folder 3-5	Photographs, Ceramics and Homeware, circa 1952-1975
Box 3, Folder 4	Photographs, Paintings, circa 1952-1975
Box 3, Folder 5	Photographs, Detroit Industry Murals (1932-1933), By Diego Rivera, circa 1932-1933
Box 3, Folder 6	Negatives, Artwork, circa 1952-1975

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## Series 7: Artwork, circa 1915-1979

### 0.8 Linear feet (Box 3-5)

Scope and Contents: The artwork series includes thirteen sketchbooks, approximately two hundred loose drawings plus an additional 16 drawings done on hard plastic sheets. Also found are watercolors, prints and paper cutouts. The drawings and paintings depict several subjects ranging from cartoon to realistic sketches of animals, figure drawings and landscapes, ceramic and textile design and flyers for Works Progress Administration and political organizing initiatives.

Box 3, Folder 7-16	Sketchbooks, circa 1915-1977
Box 3, Folder 17-19	Drawings on Plastic, circa 1933-1977
Box 4, Folder 2	Drawings, WPA and Political Flyers, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 3	Drawings, Animals, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 4	Drawings and Paintings, Ceramics, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 5	Drawings, Textiles, Furniture and Technical, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 6	Drawings, Christmas, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 7	Drawings, Miscellaneous, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 8	Fabric Pattern Paintings, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 9	Screen Prints, circa 1936-1979
Box 4, Folder 10	Paper Cutouts, circa 1936-1979
Box 5, Folder 1	Watercolors , circa 1936-1979

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