



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the La Vern Frank-
Rush papers regarding the WPA Art
Center in Sioux City, Iowa, 1936-2007, bulk
1936-1942, in the Archives of American Art

Jivan Kaur Soverall

June 18, 2009

Table of Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Collection Overview | |
| Administrative Information | 1 |
| Biographical / Historical | 2 |
| Scope and Content Note | 2 |
| Arrangement | 3 |
| Names and Subjects | |
| Container Listing | |
| Series 1: Scrapbooks, 1936-2007, undated. | 4 |
| Series 2: Memoir, circa 2007 | 5 |
| Series 3: Digitized Collection Items (2006-2007), 2014 | 6 |

Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | La Vern Frank-Rush papers |
| Date: | 1936-2007 (bulk 1936-1942) |
| Identifier: | AAA.franla |
| Creator: | Frank-Rush, La Vern, 1918-2011 |
| Extent: | 0.2 Linear feet 0.277 Gigabytes |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | The La Vern Frank-Rush papers regarding the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, measure 0.2 linear feet and 0.277 GB and date from 1936 to 2007 with the bulk dated 1936 to 1942. Two scrapbooks compiled by Frank-Rush between 1936 and 1942 contain introductory and concluding statements added by her in 2006. A memoir, circa 2007, documents activities, achievements, staff, and participants of the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa. Also included are digital images of the scrapbooks and memoir, along with seven images of Frank-Rush's artwork. |

Administrative Information

Provenance

The La Vern Frank-Rush papers regarding the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, were donated by La Vern Frank-Rush in 2007.

Related Material

The Archives of American Art houses microfilm copies of selected official WPA records of interest to art historians. The following microfilm, available at AAA offices and through interlibrary loan, contain additional documentation of the WPA Art Center in Sioux city, Iowa:

Records of the WPA, General Correspondence files include selected documents pertaining to the Federal Art Project in Iowa. (Reel DC 76, frames 317-2309)

WPA Photograph Collection contains 18 photographs of the Sioux City Art Center, classes, projects, puppet workshops, exhibitions, and marionettes. (Reel 1178, frames 0011-0044)

Iowa Community Art Centers, 1938-1939, features 13 photographs of the Sioux City Art Center. (Reel NDA 16, frames 290-317)

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Jivan Kaur Soverall in June 2009. Born-digital materials were processed by Kirsi Ritosalmi-Kisner in 2019 with funding from Smithsonian Collection Care and Preservation Fund.

Preferred Citation

La Vern Frank-Rush papers regarding the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, 1936-2007. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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Biographical / Historical

LaVern Frank-Rush (b. 1918) worked at the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, from its opening in 1938 until 1941, first as a volunteer and then as an employee. During this time, she compiled two scrapbooks about the Art Center; circa 2007, she wrote a memoir that focused on the Art Center.

After finishing junior high school, La Vern Frank-Rush won a contest that enabled her to attend free summer art classes at the Sioux City Public Library. The instructor, Roy Langley, had a lasting influence on the aspiring artist.

The WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, offered free exhibits, lectures, and art classes to a community which otherwise would not have had such opportunities. The Art Center organized plays, marionette shows, and exhibitions. It also provided classes in ceramics, puppetry, and watercolor painting. The weekly schedule included 32 different offerings and hundreds of children and adults were enrolled. Performances were always well received and record crowds gathered to view the exhibits.

Soon after it opened in 1938, Frank-Rush started working as a volunteer at the WPA Art Center and began compiling a scrapbook about Art Center activities. She studied painting and printmaking with the various artists who taught there. After she became an employee, Frank-Rush served as an instructor, art teacher, and librarian until 1942.

LaVern Frank and George Rush, who also worked at the Art Center, married in 1943. Three days after their marriage, Rush was assigned to the Engineer Corps at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Frank-Rush served in the Civil Service War Department in Washington, DC, but soon was able to transfer to Fort Belvoir. In 1953 the couple moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, where she taught art at the University of Nebraska from 1956 through 1966. Frank-Rush, who was certified to teach care and raising of houseplants, helped organize the Nebraska Herbal Society, and presented herbal and plant demonstrations at South East Community College in Lincoln. Since retiring in 1980, she has lived quietly in Oregon.

Scope and Content Note

The La Vern Frank-Rush papers regarding the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa, measure 0.2 linear feet and 0.277 GB and date from 1936 to 2007 with the bulk dated 1936 to 1942. Two scrapbooks compiled by Frank-Rush between 1936 and 1942 contain introductory and concluding statements added by her in 2006. A memoir, circa 2007, documents activities, achievements, staff, and participants of the WPA Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa. Also included are digital images of the scrapbooks and memoir.

Two scrapbooks document the Sioux City Art Center's founding by the WPA in 1938, its activities, and programs. The Center, which still exists today, is one of four WPA art centers in Iowa to survive without interruption. Photographs record exhibits, staff members, students, and work produced at the Art Center and also depict Frank-Rush's personal life.

Frank-Rush's memoir and scrapbooks provide insight into how the WPA Art Center impacted her as well as the larger community. In her own words, the collection "reveals the personality of the Sioux City Art Center." A small selection of her artwork, digitized, lends a view into the late 1930s.

Arrangement

The collection is organized into 3 series:

- Series 1: Scrapbooks, 1936-2007 (Box 1; 0.1 linear ft.)
- Series 2: Memoir, circa 2007 (Box 1; 1 folder)
- Series 3: Digitized Collection Items (ER01; 0.277 GB)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art centers -- Iowa -- Sioux City

Types of Materials:

CD-ROMs
Memoirs
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

United States. Work Projects Administration
United States. Works Progress Administration

Container Listing

Series 1: Scrapbooks, 1936-2007, undated.

(Box 1; 0.1 linear ft.)

Scope and Contents: The scrapbooks contain a variety of material: newspaper articles and publicity clippings, black and white photographs, recital and exhibition programs, correspondence, original art work by Art Center students, pamphlets, class and workshop schedules, personal comments, bulletins, flyers, surveys of activities, invitations, lists of artists in Sioux City and vicinity, and Christmas and thank you cards. Also found are the script and program for a three-act play, *The Shoe Bears*, and the program for a performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Frank-Rush collected articles from two newspapers in order to make the scrapbooks. This was her personal copy; duplicates were presented to the Central Library in Sioux City and to the regional WPA office. Items pre-dating the Art Center concern Frank-Rush's participation in an art contest for a scholarship.

Arrangement: The electronic record (ER) in Series 3 contains scanned images from both scrapbooks.

Box 1, Folder 1-2 Scrapbook Volume 1, 1936-2007
(2 folders; removed from 3-ring binder)

Box 1, Folder 3-4 Scrapbook Volume 2, 1936-circa 2007
(2 folders; removed from 3-ring binder)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Memoir, circa 2007

(Box 1; 1 folder)

Scope and Contents: La Vern Frank-Rush's well-narrated 47-page memoir centers on her experiences and activities at the Art Center in Sioux City, Iowa. Her various jobs and salaries, Art Center instructors and friends are mentioned, and she recalls the Great Depression, Dust Bowl phenomenon, World War II, and difficulties in paying for food, shelter, and tuition.

Arrangement: The electronic record (ER) in Series 3 contains a digital version of the memoir.

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| Box 1, Folder 5 | How the WPA Art Center shaped my life between two wars, circa 2007 (1 folder) |
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[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Digitized Collection Items (2006-2007), 2014

0.277 Gigabytes (ER01)

Scope and Contents: The ER contains scans of both scrapbooks and the memoir. Also included are images of 5 paintings by La Vern Frank-Rush (*Downtown*, undated; *Grocery Orders*, 1942; *Downtown Rooftops*, undated; *Railroad*, circa 1938, and *Midwest Factory*, 1941); a watercolor (*Old Houses (from a Sioux City Alley)*, 1939); and a lithograph (*Window Shopping*, 1942). The original artwork is not a part of the collection.

This ER is created from a CD-ROM, which is a digitized version of the collection, produced by Phyllis Wrynn, director of the Park Slope Art Gallery in Brooklyn, New York. The gallery specialises in the art of the WPA Federal Art Project and American mid-century art and design. Images in the ER do not completely reproduce the scrapbooks. For instance, although the complete script for *The Shoe Bears* is found in volume 2, the entire play does not appear in the ER.

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| Folder ER01 | LaVern Frank-Rush: Sioux City WPA Art Center Scrapbook, Memoir, and Images, Digital Photographs and Documents, 2006-2007 0.277 Gigabytes (10 computer files) |
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[Return to Table of Contents](#)