



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Al Hirschfeld Papers, 1931-1983, in the Archives of American Art

Jean Fitzgerald

Funding for the digitization of this collection was
provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Al Hirschfeld papers
Date:	1931-1983
Identifier:	AAA.hirsal
Creator:	Hirschfeld, Al
Extent:	0.9 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of caricaturist Al Hirschfeld measure 0.9 linear feet and date from 1931-1983. Found within the papers are letters to Hirschfeld, business records, writings, artwork, printed material, and photographs.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Al Hirschfeld papers were donated in 1983 by Al Hirschfeld and his dealer, George J. Goodstadt.

Alternative Forms Available

This site provides access to the papers of **Al Hirschfeld** in the Archives of American Art that were digitized in 2010, and total 1,004 images.

Processing Information

The papers were processed to an intermediate level in November 2006 by Jean Fitzgerald. The collection was digitized in 2010 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Al Hirschfeld papers, 1931-1983. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Albert Hirschfeld was born on June 21, 1903 in St. Louis, Missouri, the youngest of the three sons of Isaac Hirschfeld and his Russian-born wife Rebecca.

Al Hirschfeld studied art in St. Louis and moved with his family to New York City in 1915. He studied at the National Academy of Art and Design and at the Art Students League, but due to financial difficulties in 1919, he took a job at Selznick Pictures where he was given his first art assignments designing advertisements. He was soon made art director, a position he held for several years, until the company went bankrupt. Because the company could not pay him what they owed, Hirschfeld worked for an entire year to earn enough to pay his artists what he, in turn, owed them.

By 1924, Hirschfeld was able to travel to Paris and London, where he studied painting, drawing, and sculpture, and began to grow his distinctive beard. By mid-1925, he had returned to New York City planning to begin a career as a painter, but on December 26, 1926, a sketch he had done of French actor Sacha Guitry was published in the *New York Herald Tribune*. Within two years his theatrical drawings were appearing in five different New York newspapers, including the *New York Times*, for which he worked on a freelance basis until the newspaper offered him a contract in 1930. Hirschfeld's caricatures have also appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Playbill*, *TV Guide*, *New Masses*, *Time*, *Life*, *Reader's Digest*, *Rolling Stone*, and many other publications.

Beginning in the late 1920s, Hirschfeld was assigned to capture the essence of each new Broadway play through his line drawings that were published prior to the play's opening night. Performers and the public alike were captivated with the accuracy of his seemingly effortless caricatures. During this time, Hirschfeld also co-edited a satirical journal, *Americana*, with Alexander King.

Divorced from his first wife, Florence Ruth Hobby, Hirschfeld met German-born film actress Dolly Haas when he was assigned to do a caricature of her. They were married in May 1943. Two years later, to celebrate the birth of his daughter Nina, Hirschfeld concealed her name in the background of his drawing for the play *Are You With It?* Finding the "Ninas" in his caricatures soon became an American ritual. During World War II, the Department of Defense trained bomber pilots the techniques of camouflage and target-spotting by having them search for the "Ninas" in Hirschfeld's drawings.

For forty years, Hirschfeld collaborated with S. J. Perelman in illustrating and writing books, including *Westward Ha!*, *Listen to the Mockingbird*, and *The Swiss Family Perelman*. Hirschfeld also provided illustrations for the 1986 memoir of Perelman, *And Did You Once See Sidney Plain?* Other books published by Hirschfeld include *The Speakeasies of 1932*, *Harlem as Seen by Hirschfeld*, *Show Business is No Business*, and *Hirschfeld on Line*.

Hirschfeld also had solo art exhibitions at the Heller Gallery, Hammer Gallery and at the Lincoln Center Museum of the Performing Arts. He received a Special Tony Award "for 50 years of theatrical cartoons" in 1975.

In 1991 and 1994, the United States Postal Service commissioned Hirschfeld to design a series of stamps commemorating comedians and silent film stars respectively. He was not only allowed to be the first artist to put his name on a U. S. postage stamp, but was allowed to include Nina's name within the caricatures as well.

In 1996, an Academy Award-nominated documentary film about Hirschfeld's life, *The Line King*, was released.

Hirschfeld's wife Dolly passed away in September 1994. Three years later, in October 1997, he married Louise Kerz, widow of Broadway producer and designer Leo Kerz. Al Hirschfeld died on January 20, 2003 in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The collection measures 0.9 linear feet, dates from 1931-1983, and documents the career of caricaturist Al Hirschfeld. Found within the papers are letters, business records, writings, artwork, printed material, and photographs.

Letters are from friends and colleagues, and the subjects of Hirschfeld's drawings. A small majority of letters are from Brooks Atkinson, John Mason Brown, Edward Chodorov, Beauford Delaney, Roger K. Fruse, and Charles F. Lowe. Additional correspondents for which there are one or two letters are listed in the series description that follows.

Business records include a receipt for artwork delivered, a notice of probate on the will of Billy Rose, a loan agreement from the Studio Museum in Harlem for a work by Beauford Delaney, and a contract from The Franklin Library for a portrait of Mencken. Writings by Hirschfeld consist of brief typescripts of film and theater critiques.

Artwork consists of a sketchbook of caricatures of theater performers, a sketchbook of images from travel to Japan, loose sketches, and drawings by children inspired by a visit to see Hirschfeld.

Also found within the papers are 11 folders of clippings, posters, and miscellaneous printed material. Photographs are of Hirschfeld, his wife, and a drawing.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 6 series. All series are arranged chronologically.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Letters, 1931-1983 (Boxes 1-2; 1.75 linear feet)
- Series 2: Business Records, 1932-1979 (Box 2; 1 folder)
- Series 3: Writings, 1937-1973 (Box 2; 3 folders)
- Series 4: Art Work, 1967-1977 (Box 2; 4 folders)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1953-1983 (Box 2, OV 3; 11 folders)
- Series 6: Photographs, 1965 (Box 2; 1 folder)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Photographs
Sketchbooks
Sketches
Writings

Names:

Atkinson, Brooks, 1894-
Brown, John Mason, 1900-1969
Chodorov, Edward, 1904-1988
Delany, Beauford, 1901-
Fruse, Roger K.
Lowe, Charles

Occupations:

Caricaturists -- New York (State) -- New York

Places:

Japan -- Description and Travel

Container Listing

Series 1: Letters, 1931-1983

(Boxes 1-2; 1.75 feet)

Scope and Contents: Letters are primarily from friends, colleagues, the subjects of Hirschfeld's drawings, and the general public. There are also copies of seven letters sent by Hirschfeld. A small majority of letters are from Brooks Atkinson, John Mason Brown, Edward Chodorov, Beauford Delaney, Roger K. Fruse, and Charles F. Lowe.

There are one or two letters each from Bella Abzug, Harold Arlen, Richard Avedon, Russell Baker, Richard Benjamin, Herb Block, Hume Cronyn, Melvyn Douglas, Nora Ephron, Jules Feiffer, Don Freeman, Herb Gardner, Ira Gershwin, Lillian Gish, Benny Goodman, Tammy Grimes, George Grosz, Frances Hackett, Victor J. Hammer, Paul Hartman, Goldie Hawn, John Held, Katharine Hepburn, Hilaire Hiler, Wendy Hiller, Gordon Kahn, Jean Kerr, Alan King, Alexander King, Andre Kostelanetz, Maya Ying Lin, John V. Lindsay, Russell Lynes, Groucho Marx, A. Hyatt Mayor, Roddy McDowall, Lee Minnelli, Ogden Nash, Laurence Olivier, Jack Paar, Sid Perelman, George Price, Harold Prince, Lynn Redgrave, Billy Rose, Aline Saarinen, Hermenegildo Sábat, Peter Shaffer, Lawrence Spivak, Adlai Stevenson, Marlo Thomas, Gloria Vanderbilt, Vera Ellen, Lotte Lenya Weill-Detwiler, John Weitz, and Art Wood.

Box 1, Folder 1	Letters, Surnames Unknown, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Letters, Surnames "A-D", undated Image(s): Letters, Surnames "A-Z,"
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters, Surnames "E-G", undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Letters, Surnames "H-L", undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Letters, Surnames "M-R", undated
Box 1, Folder 6	Letters, Surnames "S-T", undated
Box 1, Folder 7	Letters, Surnames "V-W", undated
Box 1, Folder 8	Letters, 1931-1935
Box 1, Folder 9	Letters, 1937-1938
Box 1, Folder 10	Letters, 1939
Box 1, Folder 11	Letters, 1940-1942
Box 1, Folder 12	Letters, 1943-1944
Box 1, Folder 13	Letters, 1945

Box 1, Folder 14	Letters, 1947-1949
Box 1, Folder 15	Letters, 1950-1951
Box 1, Folder 16	Letters, 1952-1954
Box 1, Folder 17	Letters, 1955-1956
Box 1, Folder 18	Letters, 1957-1959
Box 1, Folder 19	Letters, 1960
Box 1, Folder 20	Letters, 1961
Box 1, Folder 21	Letters, 1962
Box 1, Folder 22	Letters, 1963
Box 1, Folder 23	Letters, 1963
Box 1, Folder 24	Letters, 1964
Box 1, Folder 25	Letters, 1964
Box 1, Folder 26	Letters, 1965
Box 1, Folder 27	Letters, 1965
Box 1, Folder 28	Letters, 1966
Box 1, Folder 29	Letters, 1967
Box 1, Folder 30	Letters, 1968
Box 1, Folder 31	Letters, 1968
Box 1, Folder 32	Letters, 1969
Box 1, Folder 33	Letters, 1969
Box 1, Folder 34	Letters, 1970
Box 1, Folder 35	Letters, 1970
Box 1, Folder 36	Letters, 1970
Box 1, Folder 37	Letters, 1971

Box 1, Folder 38	Letters, 1972
Box 1, Folder 39	Letters, 1973
Box 2, Folder 1	Letters, 1974
Box 2, Folder 2	Letters, 1975
Box 2, Folder 3	Letters, 1976
Box 2, Folder 4	Letters, 1977
Box 2, Folder 5	Letters, 1978
Box 2, Folder 6	Letters, 1979
Box 2, Folder 7	Letters, 1980
Box 2, Folder 8	Letters, 1981
Box 2, Folder 9	Letters, 1982
Box 2, Folder 10	Letters, 1982
Box 2, Folder 11	Letters, 1983

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Series 2: Business Records, 1932-1979

(Box 2; 1 folder)

Scope and Contents: Business records consist of a receipt for artwork delivered to the Cleveland Museum of Art, a notice of probate on the will of Billy Rose, a loan agreement from the Studio Museum in Harlem for a work by Beauford Delaney, and a contract from The Franklin Library for a portrait of Mencken.

Box 2, Folder 12

[Receipt, Notice of Probate, Loan Agreement, and Contract, 1932-1979](#)

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Series 3: Writings, 1937-1973

(Box 2; 3 folders)

Scope and Contents: Writings by Hirschfeld consist of brief typescripts of film and theater critiques. Writings by others include a typescript by Brooks Atkinson for his book *The Lively Years*, a poem by Oriana Atkinson with caricatures drawn in the margin, and a typescript from the magazine *Movie Makers* illustrated with color cartoon drawings in the margin.

Box 2, Folder 13	Miscellaneous Writings by Hirschfeld, 1940-1942, undated
Box 2, Folder 14	Typescripts by Brooks and Oriana Atkinson, 1973, undated
Box 2, Folder 15	Typescript from Movie Makers Magazine, 1937

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Series 4: Artwork, 1967-1977

(Box 2; 4 folders)

Scope and Contents: Artwork consists of a sketchbook of caricatures of theater performers, a sketchbook of images from travel to Japan, loose sketches, and drawings by children inspired by a visit to see Hirschfeld.

Box 2, Folder 16	Sketchbook 1, 1974
Box 2, Folder 17	Sketchbook 2, 1975-1977
Box 2, Folder 18	Loose Sketches, undated
Box 2, Folder 19	Children's Drawings, 1967

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1953-1983

(Box 2, OV 3; 11 folders)

Scope and Contents: This series includes clippings, posters, and miscellaneous printed material.

Box 2, Folder 20	Clippings, undated
Box 2, Folder 21	Clippings, 1953
Box 2, Folder 22	Clippings, 1956
Box 2, Folder 23	Clippings, 1960
Box 2, Folder 24	Clippings, 1960
Box 2, Folder 25	Clippings, 1960
Box 2, Folder 26	Clippings, 1970-1979
Box 2, Folder 27	Clippings, 1982-1983
Box 2, Folder 28	Posters, 1960-1980 (Oversized items housed in OV3)
Box 2, Folder 29	Miscellaneous, undated, 1962
Box OV 3	Poster for Hirschfeld Art Expo at New York Coliseum, 1980 (Scanned with Box 2, folder 28)

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Series 6: Photographs, 1965

(Box 2; 1 folder)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Hirschfeld, his wife, and a drawing.

Box 2, Folder 30 [Photographs, 1965, undated](#)

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