



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the John Kearney papers, 1945-2016, in the Archives of American Art

Sabine Lipten

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	John Kearney papers
Date:	1945-2016
Identifier:	AAA.kearjohn
Creator:	Kearney, John, 1924-
Extent:	2.7 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of John Kearney measure 2.7 linear feet and date from 1945-2016. The papers document Kearney's career as a sculptor through correspondence, writings, project files and personal business files. Also found are printed materials such as clippings and exhibition announcements and photographic material of Kearney and his artwork.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated 2015 and 2017 by Lynn Kearney, John Kearney's widow.

Related Materials

Related materials include an Archives of American Art oral history interview with John Kearney, 2009 Mar. 12-13.

Processing Information

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

Preferred Citation

John Kearney papers, 1945-2016. 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 or audiovisual recordings in this collection must use access copies. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

John Kearney (1924 –2014) was a Chicago, Illinois based sculptor best known for his sculptures of animals made out of car bumpers. Kearney studied art at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, MI, after serving four years in the Navy during World War II during which time he learned welding skills repairing naval vessels. He received a Fulbright scholarship to Italy in 1963 and was a visiting artist at the American Academy in Rome, in 1985, 1992, 1998 and 2003. In 1949 he co-founded the Contemporary Art Workshop in Chicago, an organization dedicated to providing affordable studios and exhibition space for emerging and mid-career artists.

While based in Chicago, Kearney spent summers in Provincetown, MA and was a fixture of the artist community there, serving as a member of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum and in the Beachcombers, a local club of artists and writers. His public sculptures can be found across Provincetown, as well as in Chicago and in many other cities across the country, including his well-known installation at Oz Park in Chicago of the Tin Man, Cowardly Lion, Scare Crow and Dorothy and Toto. Kearney also had numerous solo exhibitions and has shown in galleries and museums internationally and across the States, including the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Cherry Stone Gallery in Wellfleet, MA. A major retrospective of his work was mounted in 1994 at the Mitchell Museum in Mt. Vernon, IL.

Scope and Contents

The papers of John Kearney measure 2.7 linear feet and date from 1945-2016. The papers document Kearney's career as a sculptor through personal and professional correspondence, writings, project files and personal business files. Also found are printed materials and photographic material of Kearney and his artwork. Correspondence contains letters with friends, other artists, museums, galleries and city governments. Personal letters document Kearney's friendship with other artists including illustrated letters from Oreste DeQuel; letters regarding his summers in Provincetown and letters to his wife Lynn while Kearney was working in Rome. Professional correspondence relates to the appraisal, purchase and installation of Kearney's sculptures. Writings include biographical notes but primarily consist of writings by others on Kearney and his work, including a memorial service speech written by his daughter Jill Kearney, poems inspired by his sculptures and a page of an article draft on the artist.

Project files contain correspondence, photographic material, applications, planning documents, news clippings and exhibition catalogs detailing installations as well as individual sculptures Kearney worked on. Personal business records contain materials related to professional organizations Kearney participated in, exhibition planning, financial records and subject files on other artists. Documents include invoices, exhibition agreements, a Guggenheim application and materials such as correspondence and planning documents related to the Contemporary Art Workshop, of which Kearney was a co-founder. Printed material comprises a significant portion of the collection and is made up of exhibition announcements, press releases, posters, catalogs and news clippings. Finally, the photographic material series contains photographs of Kearney working and with his sculptures along with photographs of his artwork spanning his career.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as six series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1945-2015 (0.7 Linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Writings, circa 1962-2014 (5 Folders; Box 1)
- Series 3: Project Files, 1972-2016 (0.4 Linear feet; Box 1)

- Series 4: Personal Business, 1951-2009 (0.3 Linear feet: Box 2)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1949-2015 (1.3 Linear feet: Box 2-4)
- Series 6: Photographic Material, 1960-2007 (2 Folders: Box 3)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Occupations:

Arts administrators -- Illinois -- Chicago
Sculptors -- Illinois -- Chicago
Sculptors -- Massachusetts -- Provincetown

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1945-2015

0.7 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence contains a mix of personal and professional letters with friends, other artists, museums, galleries and city governments. Personal letters document Kearney's friendship with other artists including illustrated letters from Oreste DeQuel and letters regarding his summers in Provincetown and letters to his wife Lynn while Kearney was working in Rome. Professional correspondence relates to the appraisal, purchase and installation of Kearney's sculptures.

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 1	American Academy in Rome, 1973-2015
Box 1, Folder 2	A, 1959-1995
Box 1, Folder 3	Beach Combers Club, 1978-2008
Box 1, Folder 4	Bramalea Limited, 1984-1986
Box 1, Folder 5	B, 1962-2015
Box 1, Folder 6	Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1971-2014
Box 1, Folder 7	C, 1954-1989
Box 1, Folder 8	Department of State: Art in the Embassies Program, 1966-1969
Box 1, Folder 9	Oreste DeQuel, 1966-1985
Box 1, Folder 10	Jacob Druckman, 1968-2002
Box 1, Folder 11	D, 1966-2010
Box 1, Folder 12	E, 1964-2002
Box 1, Folder 13	F, 1952-1996, 2005-2007
Box 1, Folder 14	Francoise Gilot, circa 1964-1979
Box 1, Folder 15	G, 1962-1993, 2008-2009
Box 1, Folder 16	Honor Flight Network, 2010
Box 1, Folder 17	H, 1962-2008

Box 1, Folder 18	I, 1959-1997
Box 1, Folder 19	J, 1945-1973
Box 1, Folder 20	Letters from John Kearney to Lynn Kearney, 1965
Box 1, Folder 21	K, 1964-1999, 2009
Box 1, Folder 22	Lincoln Park Zoo, 1982-1983
Box 1, Folder 23	L, 1962-2007
Box 1, Folder 24	Lucy Montgomery, 1963
Box 1, Folder 25	Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1964-1998
Box 1, Folder 26	M, 1963-2009
Box 1, Folder 27	N, 1953-2008
Box 1, Folder 28	O, 1963-1994, 2005
Box 1, Folder 29	P, 1962-2006, 2013
Box 1, Folder 30	R, 1962-1966, 2013
Box 1, Folder 31	Stampford Downtown, 2005-2006
Box 1, Folder 32	S, 1951-1994, circa 2007-2010
Box 1, Folder 33	T, 1961-2013
Box 1, Folder 34	U-V, 1970-1977, 1992-2008
Box 1, Folder 35	W, 1962-2007
Box 1, Folder 36	Y, 1965-1970
Box 1, Folder 37	Z, 1985, 2006-2010
Box 1, Folder 38	Miscellaneous, Last Name Unsigned, circa 1952-1962

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Series 2: Writings, circa 1962-2014

5 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The writings series primarily consists of writings by others on Kearney and his work including a memorial service speech written by his daughter Jill Kearney, poems inspired by his sculptures and a page of an article draft on the artist. Also found are some biographical notes.

Box 1, Folder 39	Biographical Notes, circa 1962
Box 1, Folder 40	John Kearney Memorial Speech by Jill Kearney, 2014
Box 1, Folder 41	Article on Kearney Typescript , 1988
Box 1, Folder 42	Poetry About Kearney's Artwork, 1968, 2007
Box 1, Folder 43	"The Kearneys and Their Workshop" Poem by Marjorie Michel, 2008

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Series 3: Project Files, 1972-2016

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Project files contain correspondence, photographic material, applications, planning documents, news clippings and exhibition catalogs detailing installations as well as individual sculptures Kearney worked on. Of note are files on the Oz Park project in Chicago and numerous projects Kearney worked on in Wichita, Kansas.

Box 1, Folder 44	Cedarhurst Sculpture Garden, Mitchell Museum, 1991-1994, 2002-2016
Box 1, Folder 45	"Detroit Horsepower IV" Sculpture to the Detroit Children's Museum, 1972
Box 1, Folder 46	Goudy School Cougar Sculpture, 2002-2006
Box 1, Folder 47	Lincoln Park Community Art Initiative Installation, 2002
Box 1, Folder 48	Ogden Mall Sculptures, 1975
Box 1, Folder 49	Oakton Community College Stag Sculpture, 1993-1994
Box 1, Folder 50	Oz Park, "Cowardly Lion" Sculpture, 2001, 2008
Box 1, Folder 51	Oz Park, "Dorothy" Sculpture, 2005-2007
Box 1, Folder 52	Oz Park, "Scarecrow" Sculpture, 2004-2005
Box 1, Folder 53	Oz Park, "Tin Man" Sculpture, 1994-1998, 2005
Box 1, Folder 54	Rolling Meadows High School Mustang Statue, 1978
Box 1, Folder 55	"T-Rex" Sculpture Installations, 1989-1998
Box 1, Folder 56	"White Tail Deer" Sculpture to Capital Complex Visitor Center, Illinois, 1989-1998
Box 1, Folder 57	Wichita Kansas, "Longhorn Bulls" Coliseum Sculptures, 1977-1978, 1983
Box 1, Folder 58	Wichita Kansas, Maize South High School Bull Statue Installation, 2012
Box 1, Folder 59	Wichita Kansas, Wichita State University, 1973-1988
Box 1, Folder 60	Wichita Kansas, Miscellaneous Projects, 1977-1995

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Series 4: Personal Business, 1951-2009

0.3 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: Personal business records contain materials related to professional organizations Kearney participated in, exhibition planning, financial records and subject files on other artists. Documents include invoices, exhibition agreements, a Guggenheim application and materials such as correspondence and planning documents related to the Contemporary Art Workshop, of which Kearney was a co-founder. Subject files include photographs, correspondence and compiled clippings on three of Kearney's artist friends.

Box 2, Folder 1	American Craftsmen's Council, 1960
Box 2, Folder 2	Contemporary Art Workshop, circa 1959-2009
Box 2, Folder 3	Fulbright Award to Italy, 1963
Box 2, Folder 4	Fulbright Alumni Art Association, 1966-1986, 1992
Box 2, Folder 5	Guggenheim Foundation Institute of International Education Application, 1962
Box 2, Folder 6	Illinois Council Against Handguns, circa 1970-1998
Box 2, Folder 7	Midwest Designer-Craftsmen, 1959-1961
Box 2, Folder 8	Subject Files, Norman Mailer, 1966-2007
Box 2, Folder 9	Subject Files, Robert Motherwell, 1979-2000, 2009
Box 2, Folder 10	Subject Files, Studs Terkel, 1965-1980, 2005-2009
Box 2, Folder 11	Apartment and Workshop Leases, 1951, 1957
Box 2, Folder 12	Artwork Invoices, 1964-1983
Box 2, Folder 13	Foundry Invoices, 1965-1990
Box 2, Folder 14	Exhibition Agreements, 1991-1996
Box 2, Folder 15	Exhibition Lists, circa 1964-1976
Box 2, Folder 16	Publicity Information Questionnaires, circa 1954-1993

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1949-2015

1.3 Linear feet (Box 2-4)

Scope and Contents: Printed material comprises a significant portion of the collection and is made up of exhibition announcements, press releases, posters, catalogs and news clippings.

Box 2, Folder 17-18	Exhibition Announcements and Pamphlets, 1952-2005
Box 2, Folder 19-20	Exhibition Posters, 1949-2012
Box 4, Folder 1	Exhibition Posters, 1950s-1992
Box 2, Folder 21-24	Exhibition Catalogs, 1952-2006
Box 2, Folder 25	News Clippings , 1949-1959
Box 2, Folder 26	News Clippings , 1960-1969
Box 2, Folder 27-28	News Clippings , 1970-1979
Box 2, Folder 30	News Clippings , 1980-1989
Box 2, Folder 31	News Clippings , 1990-1999
Box 2, Folder 32	News Clippings , 2000-2015
Box 4, Folder 2-3	News Clippings , 1960-1994, 2001-2014
Box 3, Folder 1	ACA Galleries, 1964-1985
Box 3, Folder 2	The Art League, 1963-1967
Box 3, Folder 3	Burned Cross Crucifixion Exhibit , 2008, 2015
Box 3, Folder 4	Cherry Stone Gallery, 1979-2001
Box 3, Folder 5	Contemporary Art Workshop, 1960-2002
Box 3, Folder 6	Provincetown Group Gallery, circa 1970-1990
Box 3, Folder 7	Illinois Council Against Handguns, 1977-2009
Box 3, Folder 8	Italy Exhibitions, 1964-1969
Box 3, Folder 9	Provincetown Art Association and Museum , 1967-2008

Box 3, Folder 10	Wichita Fourth Financial Center Bank, 1975-1984
Box 3, Folder 11	John Kearney 8/31/1924-8/10/2014, Memorial Service Pamphlet, 2014
Box 3, Folder 12	World War II Drawings, Photocopies, circa 2010
Box 3, Folder 13	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1954-2011

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Series 6: Photographic Material, 1960-2007

2 Folders (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: Photographic material contains photographs of Kearney working and with his sculptures along with photographs of his artwork spanning his career. Also found is a DVD with photographs of bronze statues.

Box 3, Folder 14	Photographs, Kearney, circa 1962-1985
Box 3, Folder 15	Photographs, Artwork, 1960-2007
Box 3, Folder 16	Early Works, Mitchell Museum Bronzes Photograph Slides DVD, circa 1960-2007 1 Electronic discs (DVD)

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