



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Greta Kempton Papers, 1942-1975, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

Processing of this collection received federal support from the Collections
Care Initiative Fund, administered by the Smithsonian American
Women's History Initiative and the National Collections Program

2020/11/09

Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Arrangement.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	3
Series 1: Greta Kempton Papers, 1942-1975.....	3

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Greta Kempton papers
Identifier:	AAA.kempgret
Date:	1942-1975
Creator:	Kempton, Greta, 1903-1991
Extent:	1.1 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of portrait painter Greta Kempton measure 1.1 linear feet and date from 1942 to 1975. The papers document Kempton's career as an artist and include biographical material, correspondence, an exhibition file, printed material, photographs, and scattered writings.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Greta Kempton donated her papers to the Archives of American Art in 1976 and 1977.

Related Materials

The Harry S. Truman Library also holds the Papers of Greta Kempton, 1930-91, bulk dates 1946-1991.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2020.

Preferred Citation

Greta Kempton papers, 1942-1975. 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

The Archives of American Art makes its archival collections available for non-commercial, educational and personal use unless restricted by copyright and/or donor restrictions, including but not limited to access and publication restrictions. AAA makes no representations concerning such rights and restrictions and it is the user's responsibility to determine whether rights or restrictions exist and to obtain any necessary permission to access, use, reproduce and publish the collections. Please refer to the Smithsonian's Terms of Use for additional information

Biographical / Historical

Greta Kempton (1903-1991) was a portrait painter active in New York City and Ohio. She is noted for her portraits of Harry S. Truman and his family.

Greta Kempton was born in Vienna, Austria in 1903. She came to the United States in the mid-1920s and studied at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League. Focusing on portraits, Kempton's subjects included political figures in Washington, D.C., most notably Harry S. Truman, his wife Elizabeth (Bess) Truman, and members of President Truman's cabinet.

Kempton and her husband, businessman Ambrose McNamara, retired to Medina, Ohio, where she continued to paint portraits for local and national figures. She died in New York City in 1991.

Scope and Contents

The papers of portrait painter Greta Kempton measure 1.1 linear feet and date from 1942 to 1975. The papers document Kempton's career as an artist and include biographical material, correspondence, an exhibition file, printed material, photographs, and scattered writings.

Much of Kempton's correspondence is with members of prominent families whose portraits she painted. Photographs of Kempton are with members of the Truman and Johnson Administrations during the presentation of her portraits. Other photos are of her works of art. Writings by Kempton include recollections of her experience painting portraits of the Truman family.

Arrangement

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

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Portrait painting
- Women artists
- Women painters

Names:

- Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972

Occupations:

- Portrait painters -- New York (State) -- New York
- Portrait painters -- Ohio

Container Listing

Series 1: Greta Kempton Papers, 1942-1975

1.1 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 2)

Scope and Contents: Biographical materials include scattered resumes, membership cards, and certificates. Correspondence is largely professional and includes letters from many of Kempton's portrait subjects and their families, some of whom she kept in touch for many years. An exhibition file is from a show of portraits held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1948. Printed materials consist of clippings, exhibition material, and art related publications. Photographs depict Greta Kempton, Kempton with her art and portrait subjects, works of art, and exhibitions. Scattered writings are by Kempton concerning her art.

Correspondents include members of the Truman Administration and others giving praise for her portraits. Found are letters from the Canton Institute of Art, Helen Compton, C. Powell Minnigerode, and Toots Shor, among others. Photographs of works of art include Kempton's portraits of Bess and Harry Truman, the Compton Brothers (Wilson, Arthur, and Karl), and other figures in Washington, D.C. and Northeast Ohio.

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Material, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 2-3	Correspondence, 1943-1949
Box 1, Folder 4	Correspondence, 1950-1959
Box 1, Folder 5-8	Correspondence, 1960-1969
Box 1, Folder 9-10	Correspondence, 1970-1975
Box 1, Folder 11-12	Exhibition File, Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1942-1948
Box 1, Folder 13-16	Printed Material, 1940s-1970s
Oversize 2	Printed Material, Oversized, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 17-19	Photographs, 1940s-1970s
Box 1, Folder 20	Writings, by Greta Kempton, 1950s-1960s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)