



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Robert Kushner Papers, 1967-2011, in the Archives of American Art

Megan McShea

Funding for the preservation of the video and sound recordings
and motion picture film digitization was provided by Bridget Moore.

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Robert Kushner papers
Date:	1967-2011
Identifier:	AAA.kushrobe
Creator:	Kushner, Robert, 1949-
Extent:	4.6 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of the artist Robert Kushner measure 4.6 linear feet and date from 1967 to 2011. The collection documents primarily the early career of Robert Kushner through performance videos and other media artworks, correspondence, notes, lab records, inventories, an exhibition proposal, and subject files regarding critic Amy Goldin.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated 2013 by Robert Kushner.

Available Formats

All of the sound recordings and moving image materials in the collection were digitized for preservation and research access in 2018 and are available in the Archives' Washington, D.C. and New York, N.Y. research centers.

Processing Information

The collection was processed to a preliminary level by Joy Weiner in 2014. Motion picture film was inspected and re-housed during a motion picture film preservation assessment project in 2016. All sound recordings and moving image material were digitized for preservation and access in 2018 with funding provided by Bridget Moore. The preservation of the video recordings used the original video reels and videocassettes as sources as much as possible, but in some cases duplicate tapes re-mastered from the originals in 1988 or 1999 were found to be in better condition than the original recordings. In such cases, duplicate tapes were used as sources for the new digital preservation masters. Legacy re-mastered tapes that were not used as sources for preservation were removed from the collection, leaving the digitized original recording as the authoritative archival record of the event. Paper documentation of the analog re-mastering projects is found in Series 2. Regardless of the source's generation, digital preservation and access copies now exist for all the unique content found among the original and duplicate tapes.

Preferred Citation

Robert Kushner papers, 1967-2011. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

Biographical / Historical

Robert Kushner (1949-) is a New York, N.Y.-based painter of the Pattern and Decoration movement and an installation artist who began his career as a performance artist.

Kushner was born in Pasadena, California in 1949 and studied visual arts at the University of California at San Diego, La Jolla in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Kushner met and worked closely with the critic Amy Goldin at UCSD, and his work was strongly influenced by her scholarship and thinking about non-Western visual cultures, particularly regarding Islamic decorative art.

Kushner began his work with fashion, costume, and performance in the early 1970s in New York City. He performed and exhibited in the many SOHO art spaces that emerged at that time supporting avant garde and experimental art, such as the 98 Greene Street Loft, the Kitchen, The Clocktower, St. Mark's Church, and Paula Cooper Gallery. The work evolved from the creation of soft sculptures using found materials, to the creation of costumes and fashion "lines" with nontraditional materials, including fresh food, which he presented in the performance genres of pageants and fashion shows, using models to exhibit his works before live audiences. In 1973, art dealer Holly Solomon became a champion of his work. He was a founding member of the Pattern and Decoration movement beginning in the mid-1970s, and his performance, costume, and paintings are strongly associated with that movement.

Kushner has exhibited his work widely, with major exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Philadelphia Institute of Contemporary Art. Kushner's work is included in the permanent collections of the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the National Gallery of Art, among many others. He is represented in New York by the DC Moore Gallery.

Scope and Contents

The papers of the artist Robert Kushner measure 4.6 linear feet and date from 1967 to 2011. The collection documents primarily the early career of Robert Kushner through performance videos, other media artworks, correspondence, notes, lab records, inventories, an exhibition proposal, and subject files regarding critic Amy Goldin.

Performances and artworks comprise the bulk of the collection and include video recordings, sound recordings, and motion picture films documenting works by Robert Kushner created between circa 1967 and 1982. Most of the video footage documents live performances of Kushner's pageants and fashion shows that took place between 1972 and 1981, primarily in art spaces in the SOHO district of New York City. In addition to live performance documentation, videos and films include four moving image artworks, recorded music used in performances, and publicity including a television news magazine segment featuring Kushner and his edible costumes. Paper documentation of Kushner's video recordings includes correspondence, notes, lab records, performance programs, edit worksheets, and inventories of Kushner's performance videos. An exhibition file contains documentation of the development of a proposed exhibition from 1999-2000 entitled "Pret-a-porter: Robert Kushner, performance and fashion, 1970-1980."

Subject files compiled by Robert Kushner regarding critic Amy Goldin (1926-1978), Kushner's former teacher and close friend, contain mainly photocopies and a few original documents. Included are published and unpublished writings, letters to and from Goldin, photographs, and biographical material. A small amount of original primary sources related to Goldin are also found.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged in 3 series:

- Series 1: Performances and Artwork, 1967-1988 (Boxes 1-4, FC 6-7; 3.7 linear feet)
- Series 2: Video Documentation and Exhibition Proposal, 1988-2002 (Box 4; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 3: Research Material on Amy Goldin, 1971-2011 (Boxes 4-5; 0.7 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Pattern and decoration (Art movement)
Performance artists -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Sound recordings
Video recordings

Names:

98 Green St. Loft
Clocktower Gallery
Goldin, Amy
Kitchen, The
Paula Cooper Gallery
Solomon, Holly
St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery (New York, N.Y.)

Places:

SoHo (New York, N.Y.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Performances and Artwork , 1967-1988

3.7 Linear feet (Boxes 1-4, FC 6-7)

Scope and Contents: This series includes video recordings, sound recordings, and motion picture films documenting works by Robert Kushner created between circa 1967 and 1982. Most of the video footage documents live performances of Kushner's pageants and fashion shows that took place between 1972 and 1981 at The Kitchen, 98 Greene Street Loft, Holly Solomon Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery, Minnesota College of Art and Design, and the Mandeville Gallery at the University of California, San Diego. Works entitled "Robert Kushner and Friends Eat Their Clothes" (1972-1973), "Winter and Spring Lines" (1973-1974), and "Persian Line" (1974-1976) have multiple performances with video documentation in the series.

In addition to performances, the series includes four moving image artworks: a short animated film called "Repetition of a Theme," a live action film called "Greeting" featuring Kushner with Ellen Saltonstall, and short videos entitled "New York Hat Line," directed by David Weinrib, and "Sentimental Fables (I)." A second iteration of Sentimental Fables was performed with live music before an audience in 1981 at the Museum of Modern Art.

Also found are 6 sound recordings of music used in performances including "Persian Line," "One Size Fits All," and "Layers." One reel is labeled "Traveling" and also contains recorded music. A 1973 television broadcast program called "You wear what you eat" for the series *AM New York* features Kushner demonstrating his wearable artworks and being interviewed. Also found is a compilation video for the Kitchen's 1974-1975 season that includes a clip from Kushner's "Persian Line."

Available Formats: All of the video, film and sound recordings have been digitized for research access.

Arrangement: Paper documentation related to the content of the video and film in this series is found in Series 2. Arrangement of this series is chronological within three subseries:

- Series 1.1: Performances and Artworks
- Series 1.2: Recorded Music Used in Performances
- Series 1.2: Publicity

1.1: Performances and Artwork

Item FC 6	"Repetition of a Theme", circa 1967 1 Film reel (super 8 mm) Notes: Stop-motion animation film created with C. Stephens
Box 1, Folder 2	"Man's Triumph over Nature", 1972 September 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) Notes: Performance at the University of California, San Diego
Box 1, Folder 3-4	"Robert Kushner and Friends Eat Their Clothes", 1972 December

	<p>1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) 1 Videocassettes (BetacamSP) Notes: Performance at The Kitchen. Digitized from BetacamSP duplicate created in 1999 due to condition of original video reel.</p>
Box 1, Folder 5	<p>"The Winter and Spring Lines," Model Warmup, 1973 December 20 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch)</p>
Box 1, Folder 6-9	<p>"The Winter and Spring Lines," Performance, 1973 December 20 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) 1 Videocassettes (BetacamSP) (duplicate) 2 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (vintage duplicates; 1 tape is labeled 1974, but content is a poor quality duplicate of the original recording of the 20 December, 1973 performance) Notes: Performance at Paula Cooper Gallery. Digitized from BetacamSP duplicate created in 1999 due to poor condition of original video reel and vintage duplicate reels.</p>
Box 1, Folder 10	<p>"The Winter and Spring Lines," Edited Master with Titles, 1988 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) Notes: Titles and credits added to December 20, 1973 recording in 1988.</p>
Box 2, Folder 1	<p>"Masque of Monuments (Rocks and Water)", 1973 February 2 Videoreels (1/2 inch) Notes: Performance at 98 Greene Street Loft. This event was recorded on two cameras simultaneously; tapes are labeled camera A and camera B.</p>
Item FC 7	<p>"Greeting", circa 1974 1 Film reel (super 8 mm) Notes: Filmed performance with Robert Kushner and Ellen Saltonstall</p>
Box 2, Folder 3-4	<p>"Persian Line," Rehearsal, 1974 December 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) (duplicate) Notes: Digitized from a U-matic videocassette duplicate created in 1988 due to the condition of the original video reel. Also found on this videocassette is the 1988 edited master with titles of the November 1976 performance of the Persian Line, described below.</p>
Box 2, Folder 5-7	<p>"Persian Line," Performance, 1975 January 18 2 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (vintage duplicate) Notes: Performance at The Kitchen. This event was recorded on two cameras simultaneously, one shooting color and the other black and white, but very little of the color signal has survived, and the quality of the black and white original tape is superior.</p>
Box 2, Folder 8-9	<p>"Persian Line, Part 2," Performance, 1976 March 14</p>

	1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) 1 Videocassettes (BetacamSP) (duplicate) Notes: Performance at Holly Solomon Gallery. Digitized from BetacamSP duplicate created in 1999 due to condition of original video reel.
Box 2, Folder 10	"Persian Line, Part 2," Edited Master with Titles, 1988 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) Notes: Titles and credits added to March 14, 1976 recording in 1988.
Box 3, Folder 1	"Persian Line," Performance, 1976 November 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) Notes: Performance at the Minnesota College of Art and Design.
Box 3, Folder 2	"Persian Line," Performance, Edited Master with Titles, 1988 Notes: Content is found on the same tape as the duplicate videocassette of the "Persian Line" Rehearsal of December 1974.
Box 3, Folder 3	"That Kushner Look - One Size Fits All", 1977 January 20 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) Notes: Performance held at Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego.
Box 3, Folder 4	"New York Hat Line", 1978 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) (labeled "Weinrib Hats")
Box 3, Folder 5-6	"Layers", 1978 October 25 3 Videocassettes (U-matic)
Box 3, Folder 7	"Sentimental Fables," Performance for Video, 1980 April 12 1 Videocassettes (U-matic)
Box 3, Folder 8	"Sentimental Fables," Live Performance, 1981 November 19 1 Videocassettes (VHS) Notes: Performance at the Museum of Modern Art

1.2: Recorded Music Used in Performances

Box 3, Folder 9	Music for "The Persian Line" Performance, 1975 2 Sound tape reels
Box 3, Folder 10	Music for "The Persian Line, Part 2" Performance, 1976 1 Sound tape reel Notes: Contains cue sheet
Box 3, Folder 11	Music for "Persian Line" Performance, 1976 1 Sound tape reel (Box is labeled "Berlin Persian Line Duet")
Box 4, Folder 1	Music for "That Kushner Look - One Size Fits All", 1977

1 Sound tape reel

Box 4, Folder 2	Music for "Layers" Performance, 1978 1 Sound tape reel Notes: Contains cue sheets
Box 4, Folder 3	Music for "Layers" Performance, 1978 September 1 Sound tape reel (Labeled "Layers duet") Notes: Contains cue sheet
Box 4, Folder 4	Unidentified sound recording, 1982 February 25-26 1 Sound tape reel (Labeled "Traveling")

1.3: Publicity

Box 4, Folder 5-6	"You wear what you eat," segment on AM New York television series, 1973 July 30 1 Videoreels (1/2 inch) (original) 1 Videocassettes (U-matic) (duplicate) Notes: Digitized from U-matic copy created in 1988 due to condition of original video reel.
Box 4, Folder 7	Kitchen Promotional Video, 1974-1975 Season, circa 1995 1 Videocassettes (VHS)

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Series 2: Video Documentation and Exhibition Proposal, 1988-2002

0.2 Linear feet (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Documentation of Kushner's video recordings includes correspondence, notes, lab records, and inventories of Kushner's performance videos. Notes, correspondence, and photocopies of original event programs are found among records related to work performed by Carlota Schoolman in 1988 to restore Kushner's original video recordings and create edited masters and highlight compilation reels. Her notes include detailed content lists and credits for some pieces, as well as documentation of their work at that time. Also found are records of the video conservation work performed in 1999 by Dara Meyers-Kingsley of Vidipax on six of the original video recordings in preparation for a proposed exhibition she planned with Catherine Morris. Videos duplicated by Schoolman and Meyers-Kingsley are found in series 1.

A file documenting a proposed exhibition of Kushner's performance works includes a statement by Kushner about the evolution of his work, a brief biography of Kushner, an exhibition proposal by the curators, and notes and correspondence related to the proposed exhibition, which was entitled "Pret-a-porter: Robert Kushner, performance and fashion, 1970-1980."

Box 4, Folder 8	Video Notes and Inventories by Carlota Schoolman, 1988-1998
Box 4, Folder 9	Video Lab Records, Vidipax, 1998-2000
Box 4, Folder 10	Video Inventories, 1998-2002
Box 4, Folder 11	Exhibition Proposal, 1999-2000

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Series 3: Research Material on Amy Goldin, 1971-2011

0.7 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)

Scope and Contents: Subject files compiled by Robert Kushner regarding critic Amy Goldin (1926-1978), Kushner's former teacher and close friend, contain mainly photocopies and include published and unpublished writings, letters to and from Goldin, photographs, biographical material, and writings. A small amount of original primary sources are found, including letters from Goldin to Kushner, photographs of Goldin, slides of artwork shown at A.I.R. Gallery, and writings.

Arrangement: Arrangement is alphabetical by subject, with published books and a catalog filed at the end of the series.

Box 4, Folder 12	A.I.R Exhibition, 1978 Notes: Contains a photocopied review and slides of artwork.
Box 4, Folder 13	Antin, Eleanor, 2002 Notes: Photocopied exhibition announcement with essay by Amy Goldin
Box 4, Folder 14	Biographical File, 1971-2009 Notes: Contains original photographs dated 1971-1978, photocopies of materials dating from the 1940s through the 1970s, as well as research notes and correspondence from 2007-2009.
Box 4, Folder 15	"The Form of the Timurid Miniature", circa 1975 Notes: Photocopied typescript of article by Amy Goldin
Box 4, Folder 16	Grabar, Oleg and Lavater, Warja, circa 2000 Notes: Photocopies of letters dated 1974-1975
Box 4, Folder 17	Kushner, Robert, 1971-1979 Notes: Contains original letters from Goldin to Kushner.
Box 4, Folder 18	McConnell, Kim, circa 2000 Notes: Photocopied correspondence between Amy Goldin, Kim McConnell, and Robert Kushner, and an essay by Kushner on Goldin and McConnell.
Box 4, Folder 19	Schiff, Naomi, 1978, circa 2000 Notes: Contains clipping fom 1978, photocopied letters from the 1970s, and photocopied, undated writings
Box 4, Folder 20	Woodman, George, 2007 Notes: Photocopies
Box 4, Folder 21-23	Published and Unpublished Writings, 2007 Notes: Photocopies and print outs of published and unpublished writings, with annotations by Robert Kushner
Box 5, Folder 1	Unpublished Letters to Editor by Goldin and Kushner, circa 2000

	Notes: Photocopies of typescript outgoing letters.
Box 5, Folder 2	Reviews by Amy Goldin in Arts Magazine, circa 2000 Notes: Photocopies of clippings from the 1960s and 1970s
Box 5, Folder 3	Exhibition Catalog for Leger, Our Contemporary, 1978
Box 5, Folder 4	The Wonderful World of Food: 50 Funny Recipes by Amy Goldin and Robert Kushner, 1978
Box 5, Folder 5	Collective Behavior: A Review and Reinterpretation of the Literature, 1973
Box 5, Folder 6	Amy Goldin: Art in a Hairshirt, Art Criticism 1964-1978, 2011

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