



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Jack Lenor Larsen Papers,
1941-2003, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Jack Lenor Larsen papers
Identifier:	AAA.larsjack
Date:	1941-2003
Extent:	3.7 Linear feet
Creator:	Larsen, Jack Lenor
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Jack Lenor Larsen papers measure 3.7 linear feet and date from 1941-2003. Larsen was a renowned weaver and designer, entrepreneur, and a scholar who wrote and lectured on modernist design. His career in the New York design world is documented by biographical materials, correspondence, writings by and about him, various printed materials and photographs.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The records were donated to the Archives in 2004 by Jack Lenor Larsen in connection with the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Processing Information

The papers were processed by Justin Brancato in June, 2008.

Preferred Citation

Jack Lenor Larsen papers, 1941-2003. Archives of America Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment. Use of archival audiovisual recordings with no duplicate access copy requires advance notice.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Jack Lenor Larsen papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Jack Lenor Larsen (b. 1927), based in New York and of international reputation, has been deeply involved in the design of hand woven fabric and its application to modernist interior design. An international entrepreneur, Larsen also has written books on design and has been a frequent lecturer.

Larsen was born in Seattle, Washington to parents of Canadian/Scandinavian descent; his father was a building contractor. Larsen studied architecture at the University of Washington and became interested in materials design, receiving his M.F.A. from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan in 1951. Following graduation, he opened a studio in New York and established Jack Lenor Larsen Incorporated. Just months later, Larsen successfully competed for the commission to design draperies for the important glass walled Lever House building on Park Avenue designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

Larsen was highly successful in marketing his ideas and innovations, which included combining metallic thread with natural polished linen and hand woven fabrics consisting of varied yarns in random and repeating patterns. This later style of fabric became known as the "Larsen Look" and was synonymous with modern design. Larsen's firm successfully adapted technological advances to fabric design but also used ancient techniques; they were first to design fabrics for jet air planes, stretch upholstery and printed velvets.

In 1958-1960, Larsen represented the United States Department of State in Vietnam and Taiwan, studying those countries' crafts with the goal of developing industry to create jobs and products for export. Larsen then saw the opportunity for international fabric design and production. He travelled to Latin America, Africa and Asia to study local crafts and weaving with an eye towards business opportunities, focusing on hand spun and hand woven silks. By the 1990s Larsen was producing fabric in over 30 countries. In 1997, Jack Lenor Larsen, Inc. merged with the British fabric house, Cowtan and Tout and became the United States subsidiary of the British company, Colefax and Fowler.

Many museums have collected and/or exhibited Larsen fabrics. Notable among them are The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Musee des Arts Decoratifs (in the Louvre Museum), Museum of Modern Art, Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In addition, Larsen is the author of several books relating to fabric and fabric design including *Material Wealth: Living with Luxurious Fabrics* (an international survey of contemporary fabric design) and an autobiography, *Jack Lenor Larsen: A Weaver's Memoir*.

Scope and Content Note

The Jack Lenor Larsen papers measure 3.7 linear feet and date from 1941-2003. Larson was a renowned weaver and designer, entrepreneur, and a scholar who wrote and lectured on modernist design. His career in the New York design world is documented by biographical materials, correspondence, writings by and about him, various printed materials and photographs.

Found are biographical materials and artifacts including items from his early years, 4 volumes of daily planners and numerous awards. Correspondence includes letters from notables such as Isamu Noguchi, Walter F. Mondale, and various craft artists such as Helen W. Drutt English, Magdalena Abakanowicz, and Beatrice Wood, and author Hannah Tillich, widow of Paul Tillich. Business correspondence is from museums, professional societies, magazines and other organizations such as the Josef Albers Foundation. Larsen also curated textile exhibitions and there are records pertaining to these exhibitions.

There are a substantial number of writings, lectures and speeches by Larsen, and proofs of a book he co-authored with Mildred Constantine, *Beyond Craft: The Art of Fabric*. Also found are writings about Larsen

and 3 interviews with him including a 1965 videotaped interview, 2 transcribed interviews, and an audio tape of Larsen's talk "Personal Perspective," presented at a conference of the American Craft Council.

Photographs show Larsen and his employees at work and at professional events. Photographs removed from albums retain their original order. Lastly, there are printed materials include catalogs and announcements, newspaper and magazine clippings, and press and promotional materials.

Arrangement

The Jack Lenor Larsen papers are organized into 7 series based primarily on record type and arranged chronologically.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1941-2001, (Box 1, 5; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1958-2003, (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 3: Exhibition Records, 1986-1990, (Boxes 1-2; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 4: Writings, 1950-2003, (Boxes 2-3; 1.3 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1970-1992, (Box 3, 5; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1972-2002, (Boxes 4-5; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 7: Audio Recordings, 1965, (Box 4; 0.1 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Modernism (Art)
Textile design -- New York (State) -- New York
Weavers -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Audiocassettes
Interviews
Photographs
Sound recordings
Video recordings

Names:

Abakanowicz, Magdalena
Constantine, Mildred
Drutt, Helen Williams
Josef Albers Foundation
Mondale, Walter F., 1928-
Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988
Tillich, Hanna
Wood, Beatrice

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1941-2001

0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 5)

Biographical material consists mostly of diplomas, honorary doctorates, and awards and certificates from associations, institutions and colleges. There are 4 volumes of daily planners, an address book, Boy Scout merit badges and sash, and a short genealogical outline.

Box 1, Folder 1	Family Tree, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Passports, 1955-1994
Box 1	Diplomas
Box 1, Folder 3	Bremerton High School, 1945
Box 1, Folder 4	University of Washington, 1949
Box 1	Honorary Doctorates
Box 1, Folder 5	Parsons School of Design, 1981 Oversized material housed in Box 5
Box 1, Folder 6	Philadelphia College of Art, 1982
Box 1, Folder 7	Awards and Certificates, (College of Arts and Sciences, University of Washington), 1991
Box 1, Folder 8	Washington Intermediate School Pupil's Quarterly Report, 1941-1944
Box 1, Folder 9	Eagle Scout Badge, undated
Box 1, Folder 10	Boy Scout Merit Badges and Sash, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	Elmer Lenor Larsen Memorial, 1980
Box 1, Folder 12	Daily Planners and Address Book, 1991-2001 <i>4 Volumes</i>
Box 5, Folder 1	Honorary Doctorate, (Parsons School of Design), 1981
Box 5	Awards and Certificates

Box 5, Folder 2	American Institute of Decorators, 1954-1956
Box 5, Folder 3	American Society of Interior Designers, 1976
Box 5, Folder 4	Deco Press, 1974
Box 5, Folder 5	House and Garden, 1958, 1969
Box 5, Folder 6	Industrial Design Review, 1969-1974
Box 5, Folder 7	Institute of Business Designers, 1973
Box 5, Folder 8	International Contract Product Design Award, 1975
Box 5, Folder 9	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1925
Box 5, Folder 10	Mostra Internazionale dell' Arredamento, 1973
Box 5, Folder 11	Paulex, Inc., 1957
Box 5, Folder 12	Printing Industries of Metropolitan New York, Inc., 1984
Box 5, Folder 13	Resources Council Product Design Awards Programs, 1974-1983
Box 5, Folder 14	The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, 1975
Box 5, Folder 15	Surface Design Association, 1980
Box 5, Folder 16	Upholstery Leather Group, 1957

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1958-2003

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

This series contains personal and professional correspondence including letters from craft artists and other notables such as Walter F. Mondale, Isamu Noguchi, and Hannah Tillich, (Mrs. Paul Tillich). Also found are greeting cards and postcards from colleagues, friends and family including some artwork as illustrations or enclosures. Professional correspondence includes letters from museums and art institutions, including the American Craft Museum, the Corning Museum of Glass, and the Josef Albers Foundation, design and manufacturing corporations and magazines such as *Connoisseur* and *Contact*.

Box 1, Folder 13	Personal Correspondence, 1958, 1972-1997
Box 1, Folder 14	Personal Correspondence, 1998-2003, undated
Box 1, Folder 15	Business Correspondence, 1981-2003, undated
Box 1, Folder 16	Letters, Invitations, Party/Event Lists, 1991-2003, undated

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Series 3: Exhibition Records, 1986-1990

0.7 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

This series is comprised of records of exhibitions at the Bellas Artes Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico and the Erie Art Museum in Erie, Pennsylvania, both curated by Larsen. Also found is correspondence, other business documentation, slides and printed material.

Bellas Artes Gallery

- Box 1, Folder 17 Correspondence, 1988-1990, undated
- Box 1, Folder 18 Artists, 1988-1990
- Box 1, Folder 19 Printed Material, 1988-1989
- Box 1, Folder 20-21 Slides, 1989
 (35mm color)

Erie Art Museum

- Box 1, Folder 22 Biographies, 1988
- Box 1, Folder 23-25 Correspondence, Artists, 1987-1988

Erie Art Museum

- Box 2, Folder 1 Correspondence, Artists, 1987-1988
- Box 2, Folder 2 General Correspondence, 1986-1988, undated
- Box 2, Folder 3 Artist Lists, 1987-1988
- Box 2, Folder 4 Shipping Expense, 1987-1988
- Box 2, Folder 5 Photographs, undated
- Box 2, Folder 6-7 Slides of Artwork, 1987-1988

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Series 4: Writings, 1950-2003

1.3 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Writings by Larsen include a foreword to *The Miracle of Ancient at the Peru Merrin Gallery* and many lectures, speeches and magazine articles. Larsen lectured at prestigious institutions including the Louvre Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, and World Craft Council. Also found are a draft of an unpublished book and articles by Larsen for publications such as *American Craft*, *Art and Antiques* and *Fiber Arts, I.D.* There also are writings about Larsen such as "Body and Soul: Jack Lenor Larsen as Designer and Collector" by David Revere McFadden, Chief Curator at the Museum of Art and Design.

The materials in the folders titled Lectures and Writings by Larsen preserve their original order.

Box 2, Folder 8	Writings by Larsen, 1983-1988, 1950s, undated
Box 2, Folder 9	Foreword for <i>The Miracle of Ancient Peru at the Merrin Galley</i> together with correspondence, contracts and printed material, 1988
Box 2, Folder 10	Writings about Larsen, 1950, undated
Box 2, Folder 11	Lectures and Speeches by Larsen, 1997, 1982, undated
Box 2, Folder 12	Lectures and Speeches about Larsen, undated
Box 2, Folder 13-17	Lecture Notes by Larsen, 1964-2002, undated
Box 2, Folder 18	Master List of Lectures and Writings by Larsen, undated
Box 2, Folder 19-24	Lectures and Writings by Larsen 1-80, 1970-1986, undated
Box 3, Folder 1-9	Lectures and Writings by Larsen 81-189, 1987-2003
Box 3, Folder 10	Transcript of Larsen Interview by Susan Lindsay, 1995
Box 3, Folder 11	Transcript of Larsen Interview by Suzanne Ramljak, 2003

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Series 5: Photographs, circa 1970-1992

0.5 Linear feet (Box 3, 5)

This series includes photographs of Larsen and his employees at work and professional activities. The photographs have been removed from their albums, retaining their original order.

Box 3, Folder 12	Photograph Albums 1-2, 4, circa 1970-1992, undated
Box 3, Folder 13	Photograph Album 3, undated
Box 3, Folder 14	Photograph Album 5, RHIDEC Los Angeles, 1990
Box 3, Folder 15	Trade Shows, undated
Box 3, Folder 16	Events, MK 40th Anniversary, undated
Box 5, Folder 17	Photographs of Fabrics designed by Marga Hielle-Vatter, undated

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1972-2002

0.3 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)

Printed material includes announcements, magazine and newspaper clippings, catalogues and journals. Also found are press materials for Larsen's "Terra Nova" Collection, designed in collaboration with Museum Industries and the Museum of the American Indian and a proof of *Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric*, a book co-written by Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen.

Box 4, Folder 1	Announcements, 1992-2002, undated
Box 4, Folder 2	Clippings, 1972-1996, undated
Box 4, Folder 3	Catalogs and Journals, 1986-1992, undated
Box 4, Folder 4	Press Materials, "Terra Nova," 1985
Box 4, Folder 5	Poster, undated
Box 4, Folder 6	Programs, 1992-1996, undated
Box 5, Folder 19	Proofs, <i>Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric</i> , 1972

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Series 7: Audio Recordings, 1965

0.1 Linear feet (Box 4)

This series consists of a radio interview with Larsen aired on KCBS, San Francisco and a talk titled "Personal Perspective" that Larsen presented at a meeting of the American Craft Council.

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|-----------------|---|
| Box 4, Folder 7 | Radio Interview, KCBS, San Francisco, Jack Lenor Larsen and Helen Bentley, 1965
<i>1 Sound tape reel</i> |
| Box 4, Folder 8 | "Personal Perspective," talk by Jack Lenor Larsen, undated
<i>1 Sound cassette</i> |

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