



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Ibram Lassaw Papers, 1928-2004, in the Archives of American Art

Ricky Gomez

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	3
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Correspondence, 1934-2001	4
Series 2: Writings, 1966-1985	5
Series 3: Professional Activity, 1928-2003	6
Series 4: Printed Material, 1928-2004	7
Series 5: Video Recordings, 1987-2004	8

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Ibram Lassaw papers
Date:	1928-2004
Identifier:	AAA.lassibra
Creator:	Lassaw, Ibram, 1913-2003
Extent:	3.1 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Ibram Lassaw papers measure 3.1 linear feet and date from 1928-2004. Included are biographical materials, correspondence, writings, slides, a scrapbook and additional printed material and audio visual material documenting the career of sculptor Ibram Lassaw. Some of the material has been compiled by Lassaw's daughter, Denise Lassaw, by photocopying original documents and in some cases, compiling them into booklets for her "Lassaw Archives Project." There are also 29 VHS tapes, circa 1984-2004, of lectures, television appearances, interviews and other events regarding Ibram Lassaw and other artists.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Ibram Lassaw papers were donated in installments between 2001 and 2019 by Denise Lassaw, Ibram Lassaw's daughter, and Ernestine Lassaw, Lassaw's widow. Materials on reels NY65-1, N69-129, N69-130, and 1810 were lent for microfilming between 1965 and 1980 by Ibram Lassaw. Material on reel N69-129 was subsequently donated with the 2015 accession.

Separated Materials

Also available in the Archives on microfilm only are Lassaw's papers lent for microfilming. Microfilm reel NY65-1 includes approximately 200 photographs of Lassaw and his work, 1929-1964. Reel N69-121 includes letters received; writings on diverse subjects, such as art, religion and philosophy; drafts of articles and lectures; biographical sketches; typescript of interview with Lassaw and transcript of TV program in which he appeared along with Theodore Roszak discussing their sculptures commissioned by Yale & Towne; jottings of ideas and techniques for sculpture, and personal reflections. Reels N69-129-N69-130 and reel 1810 contain and notebooks recording daily activities, sculpture ideas, philosophical reflections, quotes from the writings of artists, philosophers and religious figures and some sketches of ideas for sculpture. Those mentioned include Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Bill King, Herman Cherry, Jim Brooks, Adolph Gottlieb and Peter Selz. Microfilm reel 2129 contains a photocopy of a notebook containing an inventory of Lassaw's work, 1929-1958, with a description of each work including the title, date, medium and size and records of the owners, selling prices, where and when each work was exhibited and reproduced, and some sketches of the works of art.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35mm microfilm reels NY65-1, N69-129, N69-130, 1810, and 2129 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Ricky Gomez in 2020.

Preferred Citation

Ibram Lassaw papers, 1928-2004. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Ibram Lassaw (1913-2003) was a Russian American sculptor, known for non-objective construction in brazed metals. Lassaw was born in Alexandria, Egypt to Russian emigre parents, and moved to New York in 1921. Lassaw studied sculpture at the Clay Club and later at the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York, and he later went on to study at City College of New York. During the mid-1930s, Lassaw worked briefly for the Public Works of Art Project cleaning sculptural monuments around New York City. He subsequently joined the WPA as a teacher and sculptor until he was drafted into the army in 1942. Lassaw's contribution to the advancement of sculptural abstraction went beyond mere formal innovation; his promotion of modernist styles during the 1930s did much to insure the growth of abstract art in the United States. He was one of the founding members of the American Abstract Artists group, and served as president of the American Abstract Artists organization from 1946 to 1949.

Scope and Contents

The Ibram Lassaw papers measure 3.1 linear feet and date from 1928-2004. Included are biographical materials, correspondence, writings, slides, a scrapbook and additional printed material and audio visual material documenting the career of sculptor Ibram Lassaw. Some of the material has been compiled by Lassaw's daughter, Denise Lassaw, by photocopying original documents and in some cases, compiling them into booklets for her "Lassaw Archives Project." There are also 29 VHS tapes, circa 1984-2004, of lectures, television appearances, interviews and other events regarding Ibram Lassaw and other artists.

Correspondence includes letters from the Public Works of Art Project, the Whitney Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, among others. A notebook labeled "Alice Mason" contains approximately 50 letters and postcards

from Lassaw's friend and colleague Alice Trumbull Mason to Lassaw, 1932-1944, and a few letters from Lassaw to Mason.

Writings include teaching notes, notebooks and student essays.

Professional material includes resumes and interview certificates; two booklets compiled by Denise Lassaw contain a variety of photocopied documentation; slides; records from Lassaw's involvement with the Springs Annual Art Exhibition; and mimeographed recipes from various artists, labeled "draft for artists' cookbook."

Printed material includes clippings, exhibition announcements, exhibition catalogs, articles on Lassaw, published article by Lassaw, and three hand-made encyclopedias by Lassaw.

Video recordings include lectures, television appearances, interviews and other events regarding Lassaw and other artists.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into five series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1934-2001 (0.1 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Writings, 1966-1985 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Professional Activity Files, 1928-2003 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1928-2004 (1.1 linear feet; Boxes 1, 4-6)
- Series 5: Video Recordings, 1987-2004 (1.5 linear feet; Boxes 1-3)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Scrapbooks
Video recordings

Names:

American Abstract Artists
Mason, Alice Trumbull, 1904-1971

Occupations:

Sculptors -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1934-2001

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence includes letters from the Public Works of Art Project, the Whitney Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, among others. A notebook labeled Alice Mason contains approximately 50 letters and postcards from Lassaw's friend and colleague Alice Trumbull Mason to Lassaw, 1932-1944, and a few letters from Lassaw to Mason.

Box 1, Folder 1 Correspondence, 1934-2001

Box 1, Folder 2 Alice Trumbull Mason, 1934-1944

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Writings, 1966-1985

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents Writings include teaching notes and notebooks and student essays.

Contents:

Box 1, Folder 3	Notebooks, 1966-1981
Box 1, Folder 4	Notebook, 1979
Box 1, Folder 5	Notebook, 1982-1985
Box 1, Folder 6	Notebook, undated
Box 1, Folder 7	Student Essays, 1966

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Professional Activity, 1928-2003

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Professional material includes resumes and interview certificates; Two booklets compiled by Denise Lassaw contain a variety of photocopied documentation; slides; records from Lassaw's involvement with the Springs Annual Art Exhibition; and mimeographed recipes from various artists, labeled "draft for artists' cookbook."

Box 1, Folder 8	Artists Cookbook, 1977
Box 1, Folder 9	Biographical Material, Circa 1928-2000
Box 1, Folder 10	Booklet, "Ibram Lassaw: Deep Space and Beyond/Multipositional Art and the Projection Paintings", 2003
Box 1, Folder 11	Booklet, "The Lassaw Archives Project", undated
Box 1, Folder 12	"Ibram Lassaw, American Abstract Sculptor: Sculpture Slides", 1999
Box 1, Folder 13	Interviews with Ibram Lassaw, 1958, 1963
Box 1, Folder 14	List of Artists and Addresses, undated
Box 1, Folder 15-16	The Spring Improvement Society, 1972-1992
Box 1, Folder 17	Teaching Contract with Ozenfant School of Fine Arts, 1947-1949

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Printed Material, 1928-2004

1.1 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 4-6)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes clippings, exhibition announcements, exhibition catalogs, articles on Lassaw, published article by Lassaw, and three hand-made encyclopedias by Lassaw.

Box 1, Folder 18	Articles on Lassaw's Artwork, 1938, 1981-1983
Box 1, Folder 19	Clippings, 1932, 1950-1951
Box 1, Folder 20	Exhibition Announcements, 1969-1998
Box 1, Folder 21-22	Exhibition Catalogs, 1938-2002
Box 4, Item 1-2	Handmade Encyclopedias, undated Notes: A book on art and artists compiled by Lassaw in his youth. Book is in fragile condition.
Box 5, Item 1	Handmade Encyclopedias, undated Notes: A book on art and artists compiled by Lassaw in his youth. Book is in fragile condition.
Box 1, Folder 23	"Perspectives and Reflections of a Sculptor: A Memoir" by Lassaw, 1968
Box 6	Scrapbook, 1953-1986
Box 1, Folder 24	Scrapbook, Denise Browne Hare, 1997
Box 1, Folder 25	Miscellaneous, 1928-2004

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Video Recordings, 1987-2004

1.5 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Scope and Contents: Video recordings include lectures, television appearances, interviews and other events regarding Lassaw and other artists.

Arrangement: Videocassettes were originally stored in a box in no particular order, and there is no set order in the finding aid.

Box 1, Folder 26, Item 1	"Ibram Lassaw", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 1, Folder 26, Item 2	"Ibram Lassaw 'The Evolution of Abstract Expressionism'", 1989 July 16 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 1, Folder 27, Item 1	"New Sculpture Show: Natalie Edgar", 1988 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 1, Folder 27, Item 2	"Margaret Kerr 1986-1996: The Brick Years", Circa 1996 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 1, Folder 28, Item 1	"Edek Memorial", undated 2 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 1, Item 1	"American Abstract Expressionists: Conrad Marca-Relli", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 1, Item 2	"American Abstract Expressionists: Perle Fine", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 2, Item 1	"American Abstract Expressionists: Ibram Lassaw", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 2, Item 2	"American Abstract Expressionists: David Slivka", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 3, Item 1	"Ibram Lassaw at Anita Shapulsky Gallery", 1992 October 1 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 3, Item 2	"Looking at Sculpture", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 4, Item 1	"Art Criticism in the 1950s", 1995 May 7 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 4, Item 2	"Art Beat With Jim Owen: With Ibram Lassaw", 1987 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 5, Item 1	"Berenice D' Vorzon, undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 5, Item 2	This is Modern Art Programme One - "I am a Genius", undated 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 6, Item 1	"Ibram Lassaw at Work", 1995 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 6, Item 2	"Ibram Lassaw-Artist", 2002-2003 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 7, Item 1	"Ernestine Lassaw Interviews About Elaine DeKooning", 1989 July 6 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 2, Folder 7, Item	"Ibram Lassaw Memorial Service at Guild Hall" 2004 March 14

1 Videocassettes (VHS)

Notes: Label with title on videocassette is partially illegible.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)