



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Percy Leason Papers, circa 1929-2011, in the Archives of American Art

Sarah Mundy

2014 April 29

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	3
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1957, 2006	4
Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1973	5
Series 3: Diaries, 1938-1959	6
Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1939-2011	7
Series 5: Printed Material, 1973, circa 1946-1973	8
Series 6: Photographic Materials, circa 1929-1970s, 2010	9
Series 7: Scrapbook, 1938-1972	10

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Percy Leason papers
Date:	circa 1929-2011
Identifier:	AAA.leasperc
Creator:	Leason, Percy, 1889-1959
Extent:	1.3 Linear feet 0.402 Gigabytes
Language:	The collection is in English
Summary:	The papers of painter, illustrator, and educator Percy Leason measure 1.3 linear feet and 0.402 GB and date from circa 1929 to 2011. The collection documents his career through biographical material, correspondence, diaries, writings and notes, printed and digital material, photographic material, and a scrapbook.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated in 1969-1979 and 2014 by Max A. Leason, Percy Leason's son.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 74, 999-1000, 1050 and 3090 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was processed to a minimal level and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2014. The collection has been minimally rearranged and retains the existing/original folder titles when possible. All materials have been rehoused in archival folders and boxes for long-term stability, but often staples and other fasteners have not been removed. Materials within folders have not been rearranged. Born-digital materials were processed by Kirsi Ritosalmi-Kisner in 2019 with funding provided by Smithsonian Collection Care and Preservation Fund.

Preferred Citation

Percy Leason Papers, circa 1929-2011. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

Terms of 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

Percy Leason (1889-1959) was a painter, illustrator, writer, and educator from Kaniva, Victoria in Australia. Leason took an interest in art at an early age winning first prize in painting at the 1904 State Fair. He later attended art school in the town of Nhill, and in 1906, he went to Melbourne to be an apprentice at Sands and McDougall Lithographers. Soon after starting his apprenticeship, Leason moved to the art department where he began drawing illustrations for products and advertisements. In the evenings, he attended the Melbourne Gallery School where he studied art under Bernard Hall and Frederick McCubbin. While in Melbourne, Leason associated himself with the Victorian Artist Society and lived a bohemian lifestyle. He began creating illustrations for books in 1914 and went on to do illustrations for the Sydney Bulletin, Melbourne Punch, Tabletalk Magazine, and the Melbourne Herald where he developed the Wiregrass cartoon series. In 1924, Leason and Max Meldrum, who Leason had met a few years before, discussed tonal realism, a systematic style of painting that uses light and shade to produce a misty quality. Leason's devotion to tonal realism along with his participation in Victorian Artist Society exhibitions helped advance his career. In 1934 Melbourne University commissioned him to do a series on Australian aborigines. He became interested in cave art and archeology during this time. In Cambridge, England in 1937 he presented his theory that cave artists sketched using dead animals as models.

Due to the impending World War, art scene rivalries, and the lack of commercial art employment prospects, Leason immigrated to New York in 1938 in search of more opportunities in the United States. Before emigrating to the U.S., he completed a portrait of Basil Burdett which now hangs in the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia. His career in New York included work for New York Daily News, Blue Book Magazine, the Saturday Evening Post, Street and Smith, and book illustrations for *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank Baum (Whitman Publishing Company) in 1939. In New York, Leason continued his opposition to modernist and expressionist art by aligning himself with the Salmagundi Club, Allied Artists, and the American Artist Professional League, all of which supported tonal realism. In association with Portraits Incorporated in New York, he painted the portraits of TV personality Arlene Francis, Michael Engel of Grumbacker art supplies, and Missouri congressman Dewey Short whose portrait is housed in the House of Representative's collection in Washington D.C.

By the late 1950's, Leason had difficulties within the art world because the trends in art no longer held a place for his tonal realism. He died in 1959 on Staten Island in New York. As a tribute to Leason after his death, the Staten Island Institute and the Salmagundi Club held retrospective exhibitions of his work.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter, illustrator, and educator Percy Leason measure 1.3 linear feet and 0.402 GB and date from circa 1929 to 2011. The collection documents his career through biographical material, correspondence, diaries, writings and notes, printed and digital material, photographic material, and a scrapbook.

Biographical materials include financial records, biographical statements about the artist, certificates, and a few sketches. Correspondence contains letters and writings of Max Leason, Percy Leason's son, correspondence to and from Percy Leason, letters from congressmen, and letters regarding Leason's work displayed at the State Library of Victoria in Australia. Four diaries document Leason's life over 20 years. A series of published and unpublished

writings and notes includes two digital books of Leason's writings. Printed material contains new clippings, gallery flyers, a framed statement about art, and the book *The Science of Appearances* by Max Meldrum with typed pages written by Leason inserted into the book. Photographic materials include slides and digital photographs of Leason's artwork, personal photographs, and photographs of the State Library of Victoria. One scrapbook contains mostly news clippings and other printed material.

Scattered throughout the collection are annotations made by Max Leason which are usually signed "Max" with the date of annotation.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1957, 2006 (5 folders; Box 1, 2)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1973 (4 folders, Box 1)
- Series 3: Diaries, 1938-1959 (0.3 linear ft.; Box 1)
- Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1939-2011 (6 folders, Box 1, 0.155 GB; ER01-ER02)
- Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1946-1973 (4 folders; Box 1)
- Series 6: Photographic Materials, circa 1969-1972 (0.2 linear ft.; Box 1, 2, 0.247 GB; ER03)
- Series 7: Scrapbook, 1938-1972 (0.1 linear ft.; Box 2)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Illustrators -- New York (State) -- Staten Island
Painters -- New York (State) -- Staten Island

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketches

Names:

Leason, Max
Meldrum, Max, 1875-1955
State Library of Victoria

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1957, 2006

5 Folders (Box 1, 2)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes an account book, account ledger, biographical statement written by Max Leason, Percy Leason's son, for AskArt.com, and certificates awarded by the Salmagundi Club, the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, and the Audubon Artists. Also included are six small sketches of figures in historical costume and one sketch of a boat.

Box 1, Folder 1	Account Book, 1943-1944
Box 1, Folder 2	Account Ledger, 1939-1942
Box 1, Folder 3	Biographical Statements, 2006, undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Sketches, undated
Box 2, Folder 1	Certificates, 1947-1957

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1973

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence includes the letters and writings of Max Leason regarding Percy Leason's artwork, membership status, and manuscripts sent to and from printers, museums, and art related organizations. Also within Max Leason's correspondence is a curriculum vitae for Percy Leason. The correspondence of Percy Leason documents his efforts to have his manuscripts published and contains letters expressing his opinions on art. Also found in correspondence are two letters from the U.S. House of Representatives, sent after Leason's death, requesting portraits of John McCormack, Overton Brooks, and James E. Van Zandt. Correspondence with the State Library of Victoria regarding an inventory of Leason's work that was deposited at the library is also included in this series.

Box 1, Folder 5 Correspondence and Writings of Max Leason Regarding Percy Leason, 1968-1973

Box 1, Folder 6 Correspondence Sent and Received by Percy Leason, 1946-1961

Box 1, Folder 7 Letters from U.S. Congressmen, 1959, 1961

Box 1, Folder 8 The State Library of Victoria, circa 1969

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Diaries, 1938-1959

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes four diaries that span over 20 years. The diaries document Leason's daily activities and thoughts. This series may include letters and news clippings that are either loose or pasted into the diaries.

Box 1, Folder 9	Diary, 1938-1939
Box 1, Folder 10	Diary, circa 1948-1951
Box 1, Folder 11	Diary, 1950, 1956
Box 1, Folder 12	Diary, 1959

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1939-2011

6 Folders (Box 1)

0.155 Gigabytes (ER01-ER02)

Scope and Contents: Found within this series are Leason's notes on *A Brief History of Painting*, Paleolithic Art, and *The Science of Appearances*. Also included are published works by Leason in the *Proceedings of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences*, *The Artist*, and *Australia*. Also included are digital versions of "Artist of Modern Times: the Biography of Percy Leason" by Max Leason and "Experience in Painting: An Analysis of the Visual Impression as Applied to Painting" by Percy Leason, edited by Max Leason.

Folder ER01 "Artist of Modern Times: The Biography of Percy Leason", by Max Leason, Digital Document, 2011
0.036 Gigabytes (One computer file)

Folder ER02 "Experience in Painting: An Analysis of the Visual Impression as Applied to Painting" by Percy Leason, edited by Max Leason, Digital Document, 2010
0.119 Gigabytes (One computer file)

Box 1, Folder 15 Notes on "A Brief History of Painting", undated

Box 1, Folder 16 Notes on Paleolithic Art, undated

Box 1, Folder 17 Notes on "The Science of Appearances", circa 1950's

Box 1, Folder 18 Published Work, 1939-1962

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, 1973, circa 1946-1973

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of news clippings about Max Meldrum, flyers from the Adams, Davidson Galleries, a framed statement about art, and a reproduction of the Dewey Short portrait by Leason with a printed program from the portrait's unveiling. The book by Max Meldrum, *The Science of Appearances*, has typed writings by Leason inserted into the book where Leason thought appropriate.

Box 1, Folder 19	Adams, Davidson Galleries, Inc., 1973
Box 1, Folder 20	News Clippings About Max Meldrum, circa 1946
Box 1, Folder 21	Framed Statement About Art, undated
Box 1, Folder 22	Reproduction of Dewey Short Portrait, 1956
Box 1, Folder 23	The Science of Appearances by Max Meldrum, 1950-1955

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Photographic Materials, circa 1929-1970s, 2010

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1, 2)

0.247 Gigabytes (ER03)

Scope and Contents: Photographic materials contains photographs and digital photographs and slides of Leason's artwork, and some personal photographs showing candid photographs of Leason, a photo of Arlene Francis with her portrait, and Leason at work. Some of the digital images may be duplicates of the slides and photographs.

Folder ER03	Paintings, Digital Photographs, 2010 0.247 Gigabytes (348 computer files)
Box 1, Folder 25	Photographs of Artwork, undated
Box 1, Folder 26	Photographs of Artwork, undated
Box 1, Folder 27	Photographs, Personal, circa 1929-1950s
Box 1, Folder 28	Slides of Artwork, circa 1950s-1970s
Box 1, Folder 29	Slides of Artwork, circa 1950s
Box 2, Folder 2	The State Library of Victoria, circa 1969

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Scrapbook, 1938-1972

0.1 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: The scrapbook contains mainly news clippings and other printed material documenting Leason's career in Australia and New York. A few pieces of correspondence and notes are also included.

Box 2

Scrapbook, 1938-1972

[Return to Table of Contents](#)