



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Abram Lerner Papers, circa  
1930-2006, in the Archives of American Art

Ryan Evans

2020 December 2

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/>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Abram Lerner papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.lernabra
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1930-2006
<b>Extent:</b>	2.3 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Lerner, Abram
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of art historian, curator and painter, Abram Lerner measure 2.3 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2006. The collection is comprised primarily of documents related to Lerner's tenure at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, including the years leading up to the museum's opening in 1974. Also included are professional files and correspondence following Abram Lerner's departure from the museum in 1984, as well as exhibition files, photographic materials and watercolor and sketchbooks reflecting his career as an artist.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Donated 2018 by Aline Libassi, Abram Lerner's daughter.

### Related Materials

Also found at the Archives of American art is an oral history interview with Abram Lerner, 1975 Dec. 9-1976 Jan. 27, conducted by Paul Cummings. The Smithsonian Institution Archives maintains the Joseph H. Hirshhorn Papers, circa 1926-1982, and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Collection Archive is maintained by the curatorial department of the museum.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Ryan Evans in 2020.

### Preferred Citation

Abram Lerner Papers, circa 1930-2006. 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. Use of audio visual recordings with no duplicate copy requires advance notice.

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## Biographical / Historical

Abram Lerner (1913-2007) was an art historian, curator, and painter in Washington, DC. Born to Russian immigrants in New York City, Lerner received a bachelor's degree in art history from New York University in 1934. Lerner worked as an apprentice muralist in the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and after pursued a career as an exhibiting artist through the 1950s. In 1955 while working as a director at an art gallery he met Joseph Hirshhorn, who he came to work for on his art collection. Eventually this relationship led to Lerner becoming the founding director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Park, Smithsonian Institution, in 1974. After ten years as director Lerner retired to his seasonal home in Southampton, NY in 1984. He lived there with his wife Pauline, who he was married to from 1943, until she passed away in 2003. Lerner passed away from heart failure in his home in Canaan, CT in 2007.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of art historian, curator and painter, Abram Lerner measure 2.3 linear feet and date from circa 1930 to 2006. The collection is comprised primarily of documents related to Lerner's tenure at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, including the years leading up to the museum's opening in 1974. Also included are professional files and correspondence following Abram Lerner's departure from the museum in 1984, as well as exhibition files, photographic materials and watercolor and sketchbooks reflecting his career as an artist.

Correspondence is primarily professional in nature and includes correspondents James T. Demetrian and Joseph and Olga Hirshhorn, as well as artists Philip Evergood, Walter Rosenblum and Raphael Soyer. Also included are notebooks with outgoing hand-written drafts from after his tenure with the museum, from 1991 to 2003. Writings include primarily lectures and tours related to the Hirshhorn collection and modern sculpture and painting, in addition to some early student and creative work, an interview with Lerner, and writings by others including an artist statement for Lerner written by Milton W. Brown. Some lectures are represented by audio recordings on sound cassette.

The professional files series includes an 1958 exhibition file related to Lerner's painting career, files related to the Hirshhorn bequest exhibition and a Henry Moore exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum, records regarding an unpublished manuscript tentatively titled *50 Sculptors*, as well as advisory roles and other professional materials including a planner from 1983. Printed material includes materials reserved for a scrapbook, especially regarding the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, various memorabilia and published audio recordings including an Acoustiguide and a Channel 13 program regarding David Smith. Photographic material includes photographs of Abram Lerner, Joseph Hirshhorn and the Hirshhorn Museum building, staff, artwork, and events during his tenure. Also included are numerous photographs of Raphael Soyer portrait paintings. Artwork includes two watercolor and sketchbooks from circa 1940 and 1954.

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## Arrangement

This collection is arranged as six series:

- Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1935-2004 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Writings, circa 1930-1984 (0.6 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Professional Files, circa 1958-2006 (0.5 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 4: Printed Material, circa 1933-1999 (0.2 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 5: Photographic Material, circa 1950-1999 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 2, 3)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1940-1959 (0.2 linear feet; Boxes 2, 3)

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Lectures  
Radio programs  
Sketchbooks  
Sound recordings

Names:

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden  
Hirshhorn, Joseph H.

Occupations:

Museum curators -- Washington (D.C.)  
Museum directors -- Washington (D.C.)  
Painters -- Washington (D.C.)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1935-2004

#### *0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)*

Correspondence is primarily professional in nature and includes correspondents James T. Demetron and Joseph and Olga Hirshhorn, as well as artists Philip Evergood, Walter Rosenblum and Raphael Soyer. Also included are notebooks with outgoing hand-written drafts from after his tenure with the museum, from 1991 to 2003.

Box 1, Folder 1	Harry N. Abrams, 1974
Box 1, Folder 2	Thomas Buechner, 1970
Box 1, Folder 3	James T. Demetron, 1985-1988
Box 1, Folder 4	Philip Evergood, 1957, 1958
Box 1, Folder 5	G, circa 1956-1988
Box 1, Folder 6	Lily Harmon, 1982
Box 1, Folder 7	Joseph and Olga Hirshhorn, circa 1969-1989
Box 1, Folder 8	Thomas Lawton, 1999
Box 1, Folder 9	Menconi and Schoelkopf Fine Art, 2004
Box 1, Folder 10	Betty C. Monk (White House Curator), 1999
Box 1, Folder 11	Walter Rosenblum, circa 1977-2001
Box 1, Folder 12	R, circa 1958-1985
Box 1, Folder 13	Raphael Soyer, 1974
Box 1, Folder 14	Unidentified/First Name Only, circa 1935-1990
Box 1, Folder 15	Outgoing Drafts (Jan. 1991-July 1993), circa 1991-1993
Box 1, Folder 16	Outgoing Drafts (Aug. 1994-Apr. 1995), circa 1994-1995
Box 1, Folder 17	Outgoing Drafts (Feb. 1996-Oct. 1996), circa 1996

Box 1, Folder 18	Outgoing Drafts (Nov. 1996-Nov. 1997), circa 1996-1997
Box 1, Folder 19	Outgoing Drafts (Nov. 1997-Mar. 1999), circa 1997-1999
Box 1, Folder 20	Outgoing Drafts (Mar. 1999-Aug. 2000), circa 1999-2000
Box 1, Folder 21	Outgoing Drafts (Sep. 2000-Jan. 2002), circa 2000-2002
Box 1, Folder 22	Outgoing Drafts (Feb. 2002-Aug. 2003), circa 2002-2003

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## Series 2: Writings, circa 1930-1984

### 0.6 Linear feet (Box 1)

Writings include primarily lectures and tours related to the Hirshhorn collection and modern sculpture and painting, in addition to some early student and creative work, an interview with Lerner, and writings by others including an artist statement for Lerner written by Milton W. Brown. Some lectures are represented by audio recordings on sound cassette.

Box 1, Folder 23	Autobiographical Essay, "Isaiah the Lion", circa 1930s
Box 1, Folder 24	"A Short Survey of the Madonna and Child Presented Through the Work of Several Artists of The Early Renaissance", circa 1930s
Box 1, Folder 25	Hirshhorn Collection Talk, circa 1959
Box 1, Folder 26	Hirshhorn Collection Talk (1963), circa 1963
Box 1, Folder 27	Sculpture Lecture at the Virginia Museum (Oct. 27, 1969), circa 1969
Box 1, Folder 28	Sculpture Lecture, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 29	Hirshhorn Collection Tour, circa 1970
Box 1, Folder 30	Painting and Sculpture Lecture, Smithsonian Associates (Mar. 13 1973), circa 1973
Box 1, Folder 31	Talk to Businessmen's Luncheon, Smithsonian (May 8, 1973, 1973)
Box 1, Folder 32	Talk to Smithsonian Regents (1973), circa 1973
Box 1, Folder 33	Corcoran Art School Commencement Address (May 1974), 1974
Box 1, Folder 34	Lecture for National Women's Democratic Club, DC (June 1974), circa 1974
Box 1, Folder 35	Lecture by Abram Lerner (June 17, 1974), Corrected Tape, 1974 <i>1 Sound cassette</i>
Box 1, Folder 36	Address at Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Opening Ceremony (Oct. 1, 1974), 1974
Box 1, Folder 37	Talk at Calder Sculpture Unveiling (Oct. 14, 1975), 1975
Box 1, Folder 38	Hirshhorn Museum Talk (Naples, FL), circa 1975
Box 1, Folder 39	Willem de Kooning Talk (July 26, 1977), 1977



- Box 1, Folder 40 Biographical Texts on Artists (Grosz, Evergood, Tobey, Prestopino), circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 41 Speech for Detroit Opening, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 42 Talk on Business Support for Museums, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 43 Hirshhorn Collection Talk , circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 44 Hirshhorn Collection Talk , circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 45 Painting in the Hirshhorn Collection Talk , circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 46 20th Century Sculpture Lecture, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 47 Modern Sculpture Lecture, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 48 Modern Sculpture Lecture, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 49 Lecture on Gregory Gillespie, circa 1976-1980
- Box 1, Folder 50 WPA Lecture with A. Lerner and Brown, Hirshhorn MSG (Jan. 27, 1982), 1982  
*2 Sound cassettes*
- Box 1, Folder 51 Lecture, with Ripley and Demetron (Feb. 9, 1984), 1984  
*1 Sound cassette*
- Box 1, Folder 52 Speeches at Dinner Honoring Abram Lerner, HMSG (June 5, 1984), 1984  
*1 Sound cassette*
- Box 1, Folder 53 Eakins Lecture, HMSG (July 18, 1984), 1984  
*1 Sound cassette*
- Box 1, Folder 54 Speeches at Hirshhorn MSG 10th Anniversary Dinner (Oct. 2, 1984), 1984  
*1 Sound cassette*
- Box 1, Folder 55 Eakins Lecture Slides, Edinburgh (Oct. 10, 1984), circa 1984
- Box 1, Folder 56-57 Lecture Slides (Right and Left), circa 1970s-1981
- Box 1, Folder 58 Statement on the Artists Abram Lerner by Milton W. Brown, circa 1958
- Box 1, Folder 59 "Inner Circles" Interview Transcript with Abram Lerner, circa 1970s

Box 1, Folder 60

"Moses and Raphael Soyer" by Ellen Caroline Marks, Smithsonian Intern, 1984

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## Series 3: Professional Files, circa 1958-2006

### *0.5 Linear feet (Box 2)*

The professional files series includes an 1958 exhibition file related to Lerner's painting career, files related to the Hirshhorn bequest exhibition and a Henry Moore exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum, records regarding an unpublished manuscript tentatively titled *50 Sculptors*, as well as advisory roles and other professional materials including a planner from 1983.

Box 2, Folder 1	Abram Lerner Exhibition at Davis Galleries (Feb.-Mar. 1958), circa 1958-1960
Box 2, Folder 2	Henry Moore Exhibition at Hirshhorn Museum, Biographical, circa 1973
Box 2, Folder 3	Henry Moore Exhibition at Hirshhorn Museum, Expenses (Hahn Bros. Estimate), circa 1971-1973
Box 2, Folder 4	<i>Paintings and Sculptures: Selections from the John H. Hirshhorn Bequest</i> (1987), circa 1986-1987
Box 2, Folder 5-6	<i>50 Sculptors</i> (Unpublished), General, circa 1982-1983
Box 2, Folder 7	<i>50 Sculptors</i> (Unpublished), Correspondence, circa 1985-1987
Box 2, Folder 8	<i>50 Sculptors</i> (Unpublished), Texts, circa 1980-1987
Box 2, Folder 9	<i>50 Sculptors</i> (Unpublished), Photographs, circa 1980-1985
Box 2, Folder 10	Guild Hall, Museum Planning Committee, circa 1985-1990
Box 2, Folder 11	Floorplan Drawings for a Home, circa 1960s-1970s
Box 2, Folder 12	1983 Planner, circa 1983
Box 2, Folder 13	Draft of Documentary Scripts for <i>The 1913 Armory Show and Art Colonies in America</i> , 2006

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## Series 4: Printed Material , circa 1933-1999

### *0.2 Linear feet (Box 2)*

Printed material includes materials reserved for a scrapbook, especially regarding the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, various memorabilia and various published audio recordings including an Acoustiguide and a Channel 13 program regarding David Smith.

Box 2, Folder 14	<i>Beta Review</i> (Mar. 1933), 1933
Box 2, Folder 15	Scrapbook Clippings, circa 1959-1987
Box 2, Folder 16	Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, circa 1968-1990s
Box 2, Folder 17	Dada Exhibition Poster at Sidney Janis Gallery (1953), 1953
Box 2, Folder 18	American Academy of Arts and Letters Ceremony Program, Autographed by Marilyn Monroe (May 20, 1959), circa 1959, 1999
Box 2, Folder 19	David Smith on Channel Thirteen A (April 20, 1969), circa 1969 <i>2 Sound cassettes</i>
Box 2, Folder 20	Radio Smithsonian "Remembering Joe Hirshhorn", circa 1981 <i>1 Sound cassette</i>
Box 2, Folder 21	Acoustiguide #789 "The Avant-Garde in Russia" Hirshhorn MSG, circa 1980s <i>1 Sound cassette</i>
Box 2, Folder 22	Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1960s-1980s

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## Series 5: Photographic Material, circa 1950-1999

*0.4 Linear feet (Boxes 2, 3)*

Photographic material includes photographs of Abram Lerner, Joseph Hirshhorn and the Hirshhorn Museum building, staff, artwork, and events during his tenure. Also included are numerous photographs of Raphael Soyer portrait paintings.

Box 2, Folder 23	Photographs of Abram Lerner, circa 1960s-1990s
Box 3, Folder 1	Photographs of Abram Lerner, circa 1970s
Box 2, Folder 24	Artwork by Abram Lerner, circa 1950s
Box 2, Folder 25	Artwork and Installation, circa 1960s-1990s
Box 3, Folder 2	Artwork and Installation, circa 1970s
Box 2, Folder 26	Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Groundbreaking (1969), 1969
Box 3, Folder 3	Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Offices, circa 1970s
Box 3, Folder 4	Photographs of People, circa 1960s-1970s
Box 3, Folder 5	Photographs of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, circa 1970s
Box 3, Folder 6	Lyndon B. Johnson with Pauline Lerner, Signed and Dedicated, 1966
Box 2, Folder 27	Mrs. (Ladybird) Johnson in Greenwich, CT, circa 1960s
Box 2, Folder 28-30	Raphael Soyer Portraits, circa 1960s-1970s

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## Series 6: Artwork, circa 1940-1959

*0.2 Linear feet (Boxes 2, 3)*

Artwork includes two watercolor and sketchbooks from circa 1940 and 1954.

Box 3, Folder 7	Watercolor and Sketchbook, circa 1940
Box 3, Folder 8	Watercolor and Sketchbook, circa 1954
Box 2, Folder 31	Artwork by Others, Ink on Photographic Portrait, circa 1950s

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