



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Maxine Seelbinder Merlino
Papers, 1928-2003, in the Archives of American Art

Pamela Conway

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Archives of American Art
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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

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Maxine Seelbinder Merlino papers
Identifier:	AAA.merlmaxi
Date:	1928-2003
Extent:	1.1 Linear feet
Creator:	Merlino, Maxine Ollie Seelbinder, 1912-
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of illustrator, muralist, theatrical set designer, and professor Maxine Seelbinder Merlino papers measure 1.1 linear feet and date from 1928-2003. The collection includes correspondence; newspaper clippings and reviews of artist's work; sketches for stage and set designs and mural decorations; federal commission contracts; exhibition brochures; theater playbills and announcements; photographs; original art work, including drawings and sketches; original lithographs; and material on the dedication of the Merlino Gallery at California State University, Long Beach.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Dr. Merlino donated her papers in 2003.

Processing Information

The papers were processed in December, 2004 by Pamela Conway.

Preferred Citation

Maxine Seelbinder Merlino papers, 1928-2003. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Maxine Ollie Seelbinder Merlino was born in Portland, Oregon in 1912. She trained at the Portland Art Museum School before venturing to New York City where she took classes at the Art Students' League with, among others, Will Barnet, Anton Refregier, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, and Harry Sternberg. Maxine Merlino worked in New York from 1936 to 1943 as a free-lance illustrator, muralist, and theatrical set designer.

In 1940 and 1942, Merlino won mural commissions for the United States Department of Interior Section of Fine Arts program. She designed and executed murals for the *S.S. Garfield*, and painted a mural that graced the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington, D.C., one of seven murals in the building celebrating the contributions of African Americans.

Relocating to Long Beach, California in 1943, she worked as a scientific illustrator for the Army Air Force during the Second World War and subsequently as a stage, set and costume designer for theater and film producer Preston Sturges. From the early 1950s until her retirement in 1976, she was affiliated with California State University, Long Beach where she served as a Professor of Art and Theater Design and then as Dean of the Art Department. In recognition of Dr. Merlino's contributions to the department, the university dedicated an art gallery in her name, in February 2003.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of illustrator, muralist, theatrical set designer, and professor, Maxine Seelbinder Merlino papers measures 1.1 linear feet and date from 1928-2003. The collection includes correspondence; newspaper clippings and reviews of artist's work; sketches for stage and set designs and mural decorations; federal commission contracts; exhibition brochures; theater playbills and announcements; photographs; original art work, including watercolor sketches; original lithographs; and material on the dedication of the Merlino Gallery at California State University, Long Beach.

Documenting Merlino's work on New Deal federal government programs are letters sent to her in the early 1940s from the Public Buildings Administration and the Section of Fine Arts of the Federal Works Agency in Washington, D.C. as well as three photographs of a mural executed by Merlino for the Recorder of Deeds Building in Washington, D.C. that depicts Benjamin Banneker, a pioneering African-American surveyor, inventor, and astronomer.

Representing Merlino's early New York period are brochures of group exhibitions and her one-woman show in a theater gallery. Among the original works of art are two original lithographs: *Franco's Destruction*, which was reproduced in a 1938 issue of *New Masses*, and *Hearst's Empire*, which appeared in the April 1938 edition of *The Fight* magazine.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as five series:

- Series 1: Biographical, 1929-2003 (Box 1; 5 folders)

- Series 2: Letters, 1936-2001 (Box 1; 6 folders)
- Series 3: Projects, 1927-2002 (Box 1-2; 26 folders)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1939-1969 (Box 1-2; 13 folders)
- Series 5: Works of Art, 1932-1957 (Box 1, 3, OV 4; 21 folders)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Study and teaching
Federal aid to the arts
Mural painting and decoration -- 20th century -- California
Set Designers -- California
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Photographs

Names:

California State University, Long Beach -- Faculty

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical, 1929-2003

(Box 1; 5 folders)

Box 1, Folder 1	Résumés, 1949-1962
Box 1, Folder 2-3	Newspaper clipping, 1929-2003
Box 1, Folder 4	Certificates and Awards, 1932-1999
Box 1, Folder 5	Photographs, 2002-2003

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Series 2: Letters, 1936-2001

(Box 1; 6 folders)

Box 1, Folder 6	Art Student's League, 1936-1940
Box 1, Folder 7	<i>The Fight</i> magazine, 1937
Box 1, Folder 8	Harry Sternberg, 1939
Box 1, Folder 9	National Art Society, New York World's Fair, 1939
Box 1, Folder 10	Federal Works Agency, 1941-1942
Box 1, Folder 11	California State University, Long Beach, 1952-2001

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Series 3: Projects, 1937-2002

(Box 1-2, 26 folders)

Box 1, Folder 12-14	S.S. <i>Garfield</i> , U.S. Maritime Commission (see also Box 2), 1940-1941
Box 1, Folder 15	Playbills, Westchester Drama Association, 1942
Box 1, Folder 16	Photographs, Westchester Drama Association, 1942
Box 1, Folder 17-22	Recorder of Deeds Building mural, Washington, D.C., 1943-2002
Box 1, Folder 23	Photocopies of mural submissions, 1939-1941
Box 1, Folder 24	Snapshots of various mural designs, 1943-1944
Box 1, Folder 25	Photographs, mural designs for Colonial Restaurant, 1943-1944
Box 1, Folder 26	Photocopies, Drawing Depot technical illustrations, 1944-1945
Box 1, Folder 27	Photographs, US Air Corps murals for Officer's Club, 1945
Box 1, Folder 28-30	Preston Sturges, The Players Theatre and Restaurant (see also Box 2), undated, 1951-1998
Box 1, Folder 31	Photographs, Set designs, 1951-1953
Box 1, Folder 32	Mural designs, Seafood restaurant in Seal Beach (photocopies), undated
Box 2, Folder 1-5	Oversized Project Files, 1937-2002

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1939-1969

(Box 1-2, 13 folders)

Box 1, Folder 33	Exhibition catalogs, 1930s-, 1941
Box 1, Folder 34	Exhibition catalog and letters, Art Institute of Chicago, 1939
Box 1, Folder 35	Magazine, <i>The Art Digest</i> , 1939
Box 1, Folder 36-38	Newspaper clippings, 1936-1969
Box 1, Folder 39-40	Academy of Ballet and Theatre Arts, 1957-1958
Box 2, Folder 6-9	Oversized Magazine articles featuring Merlino illustrations, 1930s-1969

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Series 5: Works of Art, 1932-1957

(Box 1, 3, OV 4; 21 folders)

Box 1, Folder 41	Drawings, undated-1932
Box 1, Folder 42	Sketches, <i>The 49er</i> , 1952
Box 1, Folder 43	Prints, <i>The New Yorker</i> , undated
Box 3, Folder 1-8	Oversized Illustrations with Magazines, 1937-1957
Box 3, Folder 9-16	Oversized Lithographs, undated
Box 3, Folder 17	Oversized Gouache and 2 Charcoal Drawings, 1936-1943
Oversize 4	Oversized Lithograph, <i>Munitions Magnet</i> , c. 1938

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