



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Thomas M. Messer Papers,
1949-2010, in the Archives of American Art

Hilary Price

2017 April 20

Archives of American Art
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Thomas M. Messer papers
Identifier:	AAA.messthom
Date:	1949-2010
Extent:	4.6 linear feet
Creator:	Messer, Thomas M.
Language:	English Collection is in English, French, German, and Czech English; French; German; Czech
Summary:	The papers of New York museum director and independent curator Thomas M. Messer measure 4.6 linear feet and date from 1949-2010. Material includes correspondence, a diary transcript, and printed material that reflect Messer's long career, primarily as director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Correspondence comprises the bulk of the collection and documents the relationships he built with artists, art historians, curators, and others colleagues. Notable correspondents include Francis Bacon, Will Barnet, Larry Bell, Alberto Burri, Pol Bury, Marc Chagall, Chryssa, Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, Dan Flavin, Helen Frankenthaler, Alberto Giacometti, Richard Hamilton, Jean Hélion, Grace Knowlton, Rosemarie Koczy, Jiri Kolár, Katharine Kuh, Agnes Martin, Henry Moore, George Rickey, Charles Simonds, Clyfford Still, Jack Tworok, and many others.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives of American Art in 1995 by Thomas Messer and in 2016 by the Thomas Messer estate via Adam Lehner, executor.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art are two oral history interviews with Thomas Messer conducted by Paul Cummings in 1970 and by Andrew Decker in 1994-1995.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Hilary Price in 2017.

Preferred Citation

Thomas M. Messer papers, 1949-2010. 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. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Use of electronic records requires advance notice.

Conditions Governing Use

The Thomas M. Messer 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 / Historical

Thomas Messer (1920-2013) was a museum director and independent curator in New York, New York. Born and raised in Czechoslovakia, Messer became a United States citizen in 1944 and served in the United States Army in World War II. He earned his bachelor's degree from Boston University and studied at the Sorbonne in France before returning to the United States to study art history and museology at Harvard University. After obtaining his graduate degree, Messer was the director of the Roswell Museum in Roswell, New Mexico and then of the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. In 1961, Messer became the director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, which includes the Guggenheim Museum in New York and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, Italy. Messer retired from his position there in 1988 and became a freelance curator, teacher, writer, and arts consultant.

Scope and Contents

The papers of New York museum director and independent curator Thomas M. Messer measure 4.6 linear feet and date from 1949-2010. Material includes correspondence, a diary transcript, and printed material that reflect Messer's long career, primarily as director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation. Correspondence comprises the bulk of the collection and documents the relationships he built with artists, art historians, curators, and others colleagues. Notable correspondents include Francis Bacon, Will Barnet, Larry Bell, Alberto Burri, Pol Bury, Marc Chagall, Chrysta, Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, Dan Flavin, Helen Frankenthaler, Alberto Giacometti, Richard Hamilton, Jean Hélon, Grace Knowlton, Rosemarie Koczy, Jiri Kolár, Katharine Kuh, Agnes Martin, Henry Moore, George Rickey, Charles Simonds, Clyfford Still, Jack Tworkov, and many others.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as three series

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1962-2010 (4 linear feet; Box 1-4)
- Series 2: Diary Transcript, 2007-2009 (0.02 gigabytes; ER01)
- Series 3: Printed Material, 1949-1987 (0.6 linear feet; Box 5-6)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Curators -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Diaries

Transcripts

Names:

Bacon, Francis, 1909-1992

Barnet, Will, 1911-2012

Bell, Larry, 1939-

Burri, Alberto, 1915-

Bury, Pol, 1922-2005

Chagall, Marc, 1887-

Chryssa, 1933-

Dubuffet, Jean, 1901-

Ernst, Max, 1891-1976

Flavin, Dan, 1933-

Frankenthaler, Helen, 1928-2011

Giacometti, Alberto, 1901-1966

Hamilton, Richard, 1922-

Hélion, Jean, 1904-1987

Knowlton, Grace, 1932-

Koczy, Rosemarie, 1939-2007

Kolář, Jiří, 1914-2002

Kuh, Katharine

Martin, Agnes, 1912-2004

Moore, Henry, 1898-1986

Rickey, George

Simonds, Charles, 1945-

Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

Still, Clyfford, 1904-1980

Tworkov, Jack

Occupations:

Art museum directors -- United States

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1962-2010

4 linear feet (Box 1-4)

Correspondence dates from 1962-2010 and is both personal and professional in nature. Items include letters, postcards, and greeting cards. Other materials such as clippings, writings by Messer, and reports are mixed in throughout. Folder titles refer to name of correspondent, although in a few instances the title refers to the subject, such as "Exhibitions at Guggenheim." Correspondence dating from before 1990 primarily relates to Messer's role as director at the Guggenheim Foundation. Correspondence dating after 1990 primarily reflects Messer's freelance career as a curator, lecturer, writer and art consultant. Notable correspondents include Francis Bacon, Will Barnet, Larry Bell, Alberto Burri, Pol Bury, Marc Chagall, Chryssa, Jean Dubuffet, Max Ernst, Dan Flavin, Helen Frankenthaler, Alberto Giacometti, Richard Hamilton, Jean Hélion, Grace Knowlton, Rosemarie Koczy, Jirí Kolár, Katharine Kuh, Agnes Martin, Henry Moore, George Rickey, Charles Simonds, Clyfford Still, Jack Tworkov, and many others.

Box 1, Folder 1	Abadie, Daniel, circa 1985-2000
Box 1, Folder 2	Abrams, Harry N., 1986-2001
Box 1, Folder 3	Ahlers, Jans A., 1995-1998
Box 1, Folder 4	Americas Society, 1989-1997
Box 1, Folder 5	Austin, Sally, 1996-2000
Box 1, Folder 6-7	A, General, circa 1974-2000 Includes correspondence with Edward Albee, Josef Albers, Agam, L. Alcopley, Lawrence Alloway, Carl Andre, and Karel Appel
Box 1, Folder 8	Bacon, Francis, 1970-1984
Box 1, Folder 9	Barnes, Harry B., 1976-1983
Box 1, Folder 10	Barnet, Will, 1978-1999
Box 1, Folder 11	Barnett, Vivian, 1987-1994
Box 1, Folder 12	Barnreuther, Andrea, 1992-1994
Box 1, Folder 13	Bissier, Lisbeth, 1968-1988
Box 1, Folder 14	Bell, Larry, 1977-1995
Box 1, Folder 15	Bellagio Art Gallery, 2000
Box 1, Folder 16	Beuys, Joseph, 1985-1995
Box 1, Folder 17	Bloss, Joaquim (Goethe Institute), 1991-1992

Box 1, Folder 18	Borges, Jacobo, 1986-1996
Box 1, Folder 19	Boston University, 1996-1997
Box 1, Folder 20	Brown, J. Carter, 1972-1988
Box 1, Folder 21	Burri, Alberto and Minsa, 1978-1988
Box 1, Folder 22	Bury, Pol, 1978-1994
Box 1, Folder 23	Bussman, Haus Munster, 1992-1996
Box 1, Folder 24	Byars, James Lee, 1980-1988
Box 1, Folder 25-26	B, General, circa 1970-2000
Box 1, Folder 27	Caixa Foundation, circa 1990-2000
Box 1, Folder 28	Castillo, Jorge and Foundation, 1987-1993
Box 1, Folder 29	Chagall, Marc, 1967-1980
Box 1, Folder 30	Chalupecký, Jindrich, 1974-1988
Box 1, Folder 31	Chillida, Eduardo, 1987-2000
Box 1, Folder 32	Chryssa, 1974-1997
Box 1, Folder 33	Cohen, Rudolph, 1982-1997
Box 1, Folder 34	Colin, Ralph F. (Art Dealers Association of America), 1979-1984
Box 1, Folder 35	Collado, Lisa, 1981-1986
Box 1, Folder 36	Comini, Alessandra, 1977-1989
Box 1, Folder 37	Coolidge, John, 1984-1991
Box 1, Folder 38	Cooper, Douglas, circa 1981-1982
Box 1, Folder 39	Cunningham, Priscilla and Charles, 1977-1997
Box 1, Folder 40-41	Czech Republic, circa 1988-1995
Box 1, Folder 42	Czerny, Ilonka, 1992-1996
Box 1, Folder 43-44	C, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Leo Castelli, Judy Chicago, Christo, and Joseph Cornell
Box 2, Folder 1	Davis, Douglas, 1976-1988

Box 2, Folder 2	de Duve, Thierry, 1998-1999
Box 2, Folder 3	de Staël, François, 1983-1995
Box 2, Folder 4	Dinnerstein, Simon, circa 1978-2000
Box 2, Folder 5	Dogançay, Burhan, 1997
Box 2, Folder 6	Dubuffet, Jean and Foundation, 1976-2001
Box 2, Folder 7	Dörflinger, Hans, 1977-1999
Box 2, Folder 8-9	D, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Sonia Delaunay, Walter de Maria, and Jim Dine
Box 2, Folder 10	Edwards, Sibyl, 1977-1981
Box 2, Folder 11	Ernst, Max and Family, 1974-1985
Box 2, Folder 12	Europe After the Flood, 1994-1995
Box 2, Folder 13	Exhibitions at Guggenheim Museum, circa 1970-1975
Box 2, Folder 14	Expo Vienna, 1991
Box 2, Folder 15	E, General, circa 1970-2001
Box 2, Folder 16	Finn, David, 1979-1996
Box 2, Folder 17	Flavin, Dan, 1971-1982
Box 2, Folder 18	Flinker, Karl, 1979-1986
Box 2, Folder 19	Fontana, Lucio Fondazione, 1975-1999
Box 2, Folder 20	Frank, David, 1996-1997
Box 2, Folder 21	Frankenthaler, Helen, 1975-1987
Box 2, Folder 22	Franta, 1977-1986
Box 2, Folder 23	Freudenheim, Thomas, 1980-1995
Box 2, Folder 24	F, General, circa 1967-2000
Box 2, Folder 25	Gabo, Naum and Miriam, 1975-1981
Box 2, Folder 26	Getlein, Frank, 1987
Box 2, Folder 27	Giacometti, Alberto and Family, 1964-1998
Box 2, Folder 28	Goethe University, 1994-2000

Box 2, Folder 29	Grohmann, Will, 1962-1967
Box 2, Folder 30	Guggenheim Family, circa 1965-2000
Box 2, Folder 31	Guggenheim Museum, circa 1987-1999
Box 2, Folder 32-33	G, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Isa Genzken and Philip Guston
Box 2, Folder 34	Haftmann, Werner, 1977-1985
Box 2, Folder 35	Hahl, Jelena, 1979-1995
Box 2, Folder 36	Hamilton, Richard, 1974-1986
Box 2, Folder 37	Hammacher-van den Brande, Renilde, 1980-1985
Box 2, Folder 38	Hartmann, Pia, 1992-1994
Box 2, Folder 39	Hayes, David, 1979-1986
Box 2, Folder 40	Héliion, Jean, 1967-1987
Box 2, Folder 41	Hinterreiter Foundation, 1991-1995
Box 2, Folder 42	Horgan, Paul, 1973-1987
Box 2, Folder 43	Horine, E. Field, 1976-1999
Box 2, Folder 44-45	H, General, circa 1970-2000
Box 3, Folder 1	Independent Committee on Arts Policy (ICAP), 1991-1993
Box 3, Folder 2	Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Boston, 1995-1997
Box 3, Folder 3	Institute of International Education (IIE), 1992-1999
Box 3, Folder 4	I, General, circa 1970-1999
Box 3, Folder 5	Jensen, Alfred J., 1991-1996
Box 3, Folder 6	Jensen, Knud W., 1996-1997
Box 3, Folder 7	J, General, circa 1970-1999
Box 3, Folder 8	Kandinsky (Wassily) Book, 1992-1996
Box 3, Folder 9	Karavan, Dani, 1978-1993
Box 3, Folder 10	Kiyokawa, Taiji, 1984-1987

Box 3, Folder 11	Klee, Felix, 1967-1974
Box 3, Folder 12	Klüser, Bernd, 1989
Box 3, Folder 13	Knowlton, Grace, 1974-1986
Box 3, Folder 14-15	Koczy, Rosemarie, circa 1979-1995
Box 3, Folder 16	Kokoschka, Oida, 1976-1987
Box 3, Folder 17	Kolár, Jirí , 1979-1996
Box 3, Folder 18	Kolibal, Stanislav, 1972-1997
Box 3, Folder 19	Koska, Elke, 1983-1987
Box 3, Folder 20	Kotalík, Jirí , 1992-1996
Box 3, Folder 21	Kraft, Ann, 1982-1994
Box 3, Folder 22	Kuh, Katharine, circa 1974-1994
Box 3, Folder 23	Kunst und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1994-1996
Box 3, Folder 24-25	K, General, circa 1970-1999 Includes correspondence with Alex Katz, R.B. Kitaj, and Lee Krasner
Box 3, Folder 26	Lam, Wilfredo and Lou-Laurin, 1981-1993
Box 3, Folder 27	Lawsen-Johnston, Peter, 1969-1999
Box 3, Folder 28	le Brocqy, Louis, 1978-2001
Box 3, Folder 29	Lehner, Andreas, 2009-2010
Box 3, Folder 30	Licht, Fred, 1975-2000
Box 3, Folder 31	Lipchitz, Yulla, 1976-1987
Box 3, Folder 32	Loreau, Max, 1970-1993
Box 3, Folder 33	Lowe Museum, University of Miami, 1990-1991
Box 3, Folder 34	L, General, circa 1970-2000
Box 3, Folder 35	Macku, Zdenek, 1994-1997
Box 3, Folder 36	Madlener, Jörg, 1987-1988
Box 3, Folder 37	Martin, Agnes, 1975-1985
Box 3, Folder 38	Martini, Raffaele, 1980-1986

Box 3, Folder 39	Maxero, O., 1981-1995
Box 3, Folder 40	McKinley, Hazel G., 1981-1988
Box 3, Folder 41	Miyawaki, Aiko, 1979-1984
Box 3, Folder 42	Mlynárcik, Alex , 1969-1996
Box 3, Folder 43	Moore, Henry, 1965-1982
Box 3, Folder 44	Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung, 1994
Box 3, Folder 45-46	M, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with René Magritte, Georges Mathieu, Joan Miro, and Robert Motherwell
Box 3, Folder 47	Nakamura, Nobuo, 1991-2000
Box 3, Folder 48	National Gallery in Prague (Národní galerie v Praze), circa 1993-2001
Box 3, Folder 49	Navin, Richard, circa 1977
Box 3, Folder 50	Noguchi, Isamu and Museum, 1967-2001
Box 3, Folder 51	Nordstern, circa 1990-2000
Box 3, Folder 52	Nori, Franziska, 1995-1998
Box 3, Folder 53	Norton, Ann, 1978-1980
Box 3, Folder 54	N, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Kenneth Noland
Box 4, Folder 1	Oakes, John, 1978-1993
Box 4, Folder 2	O, General, circa 1970-1999 Includes correspondence with Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfonso Ossorio
Box 4, Folder 3	Pacher, William, 1976-1977
Box 4, Folder 4	Palazzo Grassi, 1991-1997
Box 4, Folder 5	Pei, I.M. , 1976-1991
Box 4, Folder 6	Picabia, Gabrielle Buffet and Family, 1969-1978
Box 4, Folder 7	P, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Richard Pousette-Dart
Box 4, Folder 8	Raab, Josefina, 1993-2000

Box 4, Folder 9	Richards, I.A. and Dorothea, 1967-1979
Box 4, Folder 10	Rickey, George, 1980-1988
Box 4, Folder 11	Rockefeller, David, 1988-2000
Box 4, Folder 12	Roethel, Hans Konrad, 1975-1978
Box 4, Folder 13	Rothschild, Judith and Foundation, 1997-1997
Box 4, Folder 14	Rowell, Margit, 1975-1996
Box 4, Folder 15	Russell, John, 1971-1994
Box 4, Folder 16	R, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Gerhard Richter and Paul Rotterdam
Box 4, Folder 17	Schirn Kunsthalle, circa 1990-2000
Box 4, Folder 18	Schmalenbach, Werner, 1971-1994
Box 4, Folder 19	Schöffer, Nicholas, 1971-1983
Box 4, Folder 20	Segnini, Cesar, 1992-1996
Box 4, Folder 21	Seliger, Charles, 1984-1997
Box 4, Folder 22	Serrano, Pablo, 1974-1985
Box 4, Folder 23	Setlík, Jirí , 1974-1997
Box 4, Folder 24	Simonds, Charles and Bella, 1986-1992
Box 4, Folder 25	Slive, Seymour, 1974-1995
Box 4, Folder 26	Societe Kandinsky, 1991-2000
Box 4, Folder 27	Sovak, Pravoslav, 1979-1995
Box 4, Folder 28	Soto, Jesus, 1977-1984
Box 4, Folder 29	Stanislawski, Ryszard, 2000-2001, 1976
Box 4, Folder 30	Still, Clyfford, 1972-1974
Box 4, Folder 31	Sujo, Clara Diament, 1977-1994
Box 4, Folder 32-33	S, General, circa 1970-2000 Includes correspondence with Meyer Schapiro
Box 4, Folder 34	Tàpies, Antonio and Foundation, 1978-1995

Box 4, Folder 35	Tasende, José, 1987-1993
Box 4, Folder 36	Tigermann, Eric, 1996-1999
Box 4, Folder 37	Tovish, Harold, 1974-1995
Box 4, Folder 38	Tworokov, Jack, 1974-1982
Box 4, Folder 39	T, General, circa 1970-1998 Includes correspondence with James Turrell
Box 4, Folder 40	U, General, 1975-1991
Box 4, Folder 41	van der Roe, Georgia, 1976-1984
Box 4, Folder 42	Varia, Radu, 1977-1988
Box 4, Folder 43	Vasarely, Victor, 1972-1984
Box 4, Folder 44	V, General, circa 1970-2000
Box 4, Folder 45	Werner, Klaus, 1992
Box 4, Folder 46	Williams, Betty, 1981-1987
Box 4, Folder 47	Wolfe, Jack, 1981-1983
Box 4, Folder 48	W, General, circa 1973-2000
Box 4, Folder 49	Young, Mahonri, 1986-1997
Box 4, Folder 50	Y, General, circa 1970-1990 Includes correspondence with Jack Youngerman and Adja Yunkers
Box 4, Folder 51	Zweite, Armin, 1976-1999
Box 4, Folder 52	Z, General, circa 1970-2001

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Series 2: Diary Transcripts, 2007-2009

0.021 gigabytes (ER01)

This series consists of 28 digital files of transcribed diary entries from Messer's years as director of the Guggenheim Foundation, 1961-1988. The original diary was transcribed by Messer and Adam Lehner, Messer's executor, from 2007-2009. The earlier diary entries (1961-1963) are short notes about the day's tasks and meetings, while subsequent years consist of longer and more descriptive reflections about meetings, exhibitions, artists, and colleagues.

Box ER01 Diary Transcripts, "Guggenheim Years, 1961-1988", 2007-2009
0.021 gigabytes (28 computer files)

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Series 3: Printed Material, 1949-1987

0.6 linear feet (Box 5-6)

Printed material dates from 1949-1987 and includes annual reports, a book authored by Messer, bulletins, and exhibition catalogs related to the institutions Messer served as museum director.

Box 5, Folder 1-2	Annual Reports, Guggenheim Museum, 1977-1987
Box 5, Folder 3	Book, <i>100 Works by Modern Masters from the Guggenheim Museum</i> , 1984
Box 5, Folder 4	Bulletins, Roswell Museum, 1949-1952
Box 5, Folder 5	Bulletins, Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) Boston, 1957-1961
Box 6, Folder 1-4	Exhibition Catalogs, 1949-1961

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