



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts Records, 1953-1989, in the Archives of American Art

Ashley Boykins

Funding for the processing of this collection
was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Archives of American Art
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Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Arrangement.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	3
Series 1: Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts Records, 1953-1989.....	3

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts records
Date:	1953-1989
Identifier:	AAA.morgjean
Creator:	Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts records measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1953-1989. The records include clippings, a transcript of the film <i>The Towers</i> , interview transcripts with the towers' creator Simon Rodia, materials related to the Watts Towers' false restoration, photographic material, and unpublished articles by Jeanne Morgan. The records were compiled by Jeanne S. Morgan, founding member, executive director, and chair (1978-1980) of the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts records were donated to the Archives of American Art by Jeanne S. Morgan in 1997.

Location of Originals

This collection contains photocopies of photographs and artwork. The location of originals is unknown.

Processing Information

The collection received a preliminary level of processing after donation in 1997. The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared in 2018 by Ashley Boykins, supervised by Rayna Andrews, with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts records, 1953-1989. 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.

Biographical / Historical

Simon Rodia (1879-1965), a native of Serena, Italy, created the unique sculptural assemblage of the Watts Towers in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California. Reaching over 100 feet each, the seventeen interconnected sculptural towers were assembled over a thirty-three year period (1921-1954). The Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts was founded in response to plans by the city of Los Angeles to have the towers destroyed. For sixteen years the committee raised money, designed an engineering test to disprove the city's contention that the towers were unsafe. The members also ran an art center that offered free classes to the community. In 1975 the committee assigned the towers and art center to the city of Los Angeles.

Scope and Contents

The Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts records measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1953-1989. The records include clippings, a transcript of the film *The Towers*, interview transcripts with the towers' creator Simon Rodia, materials related to the Watts Towers' false restoration, photographic material, and unpublished articles by Jeanne Morgan. The records were compiled by Jeanne S. Morgan, founding member, executive director, and chair (1978-1980) of the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts.

Arrangement

Due to the small size of this collection the papers are arranged as one series.

- Series 1: Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts Records, 1953-1989 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Assemblage (Art)
Sculptors--California--Watts
Sculpture -- Conservation and restoration
Towers -- California -- Los Angeles

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Photographs
Transcripts

Names:

Morgan, Jeanne S.
Rodia, Simon, 1879-1965
Simon Rodia Towers (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Places:

Watts (Los Angeles, Calif.) -- Buildings, structures, etc

Container Listing

Series 1: Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts Records, 1953-1989

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The collection contains clippings including a 1989 letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times written by Jeanne Morgan to comment on the false restoration of the Watts Towers and the city of Los Angeles' abysmal security and tower conservation efforts, as well as a short clipping concerning Rodia's inspiration for the aesthetics of the towers.

The collection's film transcript comes from the 1953 film *The Towers*. The film focused on Simon Rodia and his creation of the Watts Towers, and was directed and photographed by committee member William (Bill) Hale, and eventually transcribed by Jeanne Morgan in 1976 from the film's soundtrack. The transcript includes direct quotes from Simon Rodia and a bibliography from research for the film.

Interview transcripts include 1953 interviews with Rodia in preparation for the movie *The Towers* by Bill Hale and Ray Wisniewski, a transcript of a 1960 report given by Jeanne Morgan to the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts, a 1961 report given to the committee by Jody Farrell following a visit with Simon Rodia, and a 1983 transcript prepared by Jeanne Morgan of an interview with Simon Rodia following his attendance at a screening of *The Towers*.

Also included is material related to the 1978 false restoration of the Watts Towers, including evaluations of restoration work by Ralph Vaughn, and documents from the resulting legal case against Vaughn for issues with his restoration work and the subsequent damage to the Towers. Deposition transcripts with Jeanne Morgan and the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts are contained within this material.

Photographic materials include photocopies of film negative strips, photocopies of images of the Watts Towers, and photocopies of portraits of Simon Rodia. Photocopies of original artwork created by Jeanne Morgan are also included. No original photographs or artwork are included.

The records also house a group of unpublished articles, containing an autobiography of Jeanne Morgan titled *My Life with the Watts Towers*, and an unpublished manuscript written by Morgan titled *Rodia's Towers in Watts Suffer Savage Restoration and Neglect*. The latter writing is about the Watts Towers, their faulty restoration, and the work of Morgan and the Committee for the Simon Rodia Towers in Watts to protect the structure.

Box 1, Folder 1	Clippings, 1989, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Film Transcript, The Towers, 1976
Box 1, Folder 3	Interview Transcripts with Simon Rodia, 1953, 1960-1964
Box 1, Folder 4	Materials Related to Watts Tower False Restoration Case, 1978
Box 1, Folder 5	Photographic Material and Artwork, undated

Box 1, Folder 6

Unpublished Articles, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)