



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Nickolas Muray Papers,  
1910-1978, in the Archives of American Art

Judy Ng

Funding for the processing and digitization of this collection  
was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

2016 August 17

Archives of American Art  
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<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>	Nickolas Muray papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.muranick
<b>Date:</b>	1910-1992
<b>Extent:</b>	1.5 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	Muray, Nickolas, 1892-1965
<b>Language:</b>	The collection is in English.
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of photographer Nickolas Muray measure 1.5 linear feet and date from 1910 to 1978. Found within the papers are biographical materials; business and personal correspondence, including a handful of letters from Frida Kahlo; writings; teaching files, primarily of photography courses taught at New York University; printed material; artwork; and photographic materials of Muray, his family and friends, and his work. There is a 0.6 linear feet Unprocessed Addition which includes biographical material, correspondence, photographs, research notes and a diary about Africa, and a subject file on the book <i>The Revealing Eye, Personalities of the 1920s</i> , written by Paul Gallico with photographs taken by Muray, 1967.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The papers were donated in 1988 and 2019 by Muray's daughter, Mimi Murray.

### Other Finding Aids

Finding aid available at Archives of American Art offices.

### Available Formats

The bulk of the collection was digitized in 2016 and is available on the Archives of American Art's website. Materials which have not been scanned include blank pages, blank versos of photographs, and duplicates. In some cases, published books and other publications have had their covers, title pages, and relevant pages scanned.

### Processing Information

Materials received a preliminary level of arrangement after donation and the collection was microfilmed onto reels 4392-4393. The collection was prepared for digitization and described by Judy Ng in 2016, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

## Preferred Citation

Nickolas Muray papers, 1910-1992. 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.

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## Biographical / Historical

Photographer Nickolas Muray (1892-1965) lived and worked in New York, New York and was known for his portrait, fashion, and advertising photography and for his mastery of the carbro color printing process.

Born in Szeged, Hungary, Muray spent time in Budapest as an engraver's apprentice and moved to Germany at the age of 16 to expand his technical knowledge of photo-engraving and photography. In 1913, Muray immigrated to America where he worked as a photo engraver at Stockinger Engraving Co. and eventually opened his own photography studio in 1920. After successfully completing a commission to photograph Broadway star Florence Reed, Muray continued to build his portfolio with regular commissions for *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vanity Fair* to photograph movie stars, artists, musicians, artists, and models. In the 1930s, Muray mastered the carbro printing process and established one of the first color labs in America. His color fashion and advertising work continued to appear regularly in *Vogue*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *McCall's* and other periodicals.

In addition to his professional work, Muray wrote reviews for *Dance* magazine and represented the United States in 1928 and 1932 as a member of the Olympic fencing team. He maintained a long distance affair with artist Frida Kahlo throughout the 1930s, eventually ending the relationship but remaining friends until her death in 1954. In 1942, Muray married his fourth wife, Margaret (Peggy) Schwab, with whom he had a daughter, Mimi. Muray died of a heart attack in 1965.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of photographer Nickolas Muray measure 1.5 linear feet and date from 1910 to 1992. Found within the papers are biographical materials; business and personal correspondence, including a handful of letters from Frida Kahlo; writings; teaching files, primarily of photography courses taught at New York University; printed material; artwork; and photographic materials of Muray, his family and friends, and his work.

There is a 0.6 linear feet Unprocessed Addition which includes biographical material, correspondence, photographs, research notes and a diary about Africa, and a subject file on the book *The Revealing Eye, Personalities of the 1920s*, written by Paul Gallico with photographs taken by Muray, 1967.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 2 series.

- Series 1: Nickolas Muray papers, 1910-1978 (0.9 linear feet; Boxes 1-2, OV 3)
  - Series 2: Unprocessed Addition, 1927-1992 (0.6 linear feet; Boxes 4-5)
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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Photographers -- United States  
Photography -- Study and teaching  
Portrait photography

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Kahlo, Frida  
New York University -- Faculty

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Nickolas Muray Papers, 1910-1978

*0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OV 3)*

Biographical materials include curriculum vitae, identification cards related to Muray's participation in Olympic fencing events, and membership related to the Circle of Confusion and the New York Coffee House Club. There is also a transcript of Muray's interview with the NY radio station WEAF regarding beauty and aesthetics, and documentation of Muray's 1961 heart attack and recovery.

Correspondence is primarily with Muray's friends, business associates, and clients, including Martha Graham, Claude Monet, Ruth St. Denis, and H.G. Wells. There are also letters related to his participation in the Olympic Games, his application to the Army Signal Corps Photographic Services, and a handful of letters from Frida Kahlo that discuss her health, impending divorce from Diego Rivera, and plans regarding the exhibition of her artwork.

Writings include an autobiographical account by Muray; lists and notes regarding celebrity portrait photo sittings; typescripts of theater performance reviews; and a mock-up of *Great Tribes of the World*, with photographs by Muray. There is also a typescript commentary of *Revealing Eye* by Paul Gallico.

Teaching files are primarily course materials relating to Muray's 1940 and 1941 New York University photography classes and a lecture series based on his travels in Africa. Printed material includes a copy of Muray's book *Celebrity Portraits of the Twenties and Thirties*, a brochure advertising Muray Studios, clippings, and miscellaneous printed material.

There are also a handful of sketches by illustrator Willy Pogany and photographic materials of Muray, his family and friends, and his work. Photographs include Muray in uniform as a member of the 1928 Olympic fencing team; carbro prints of Loretta Young, 3 models, and arrangements of food; and a photograph of Muray with Miguel Covarrubias, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo.

Box 1	Biographical Material
Box 1, Folder 1	Curriculum Vitae, circa 1950-1960 <a href="#">Image(s): Curriculum Vitae: circa 1950-1960</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	Identification Cards, Olympics, 1931-1932, 1964 <a href="#">Image(s): Identification Cards, Olympics: 1931-1932, 1964</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	Interview Transcript, WEAF-NYC Radio, 1929 <a href="#">Image(s): Interview Transcript, WEAF-NYC Radio: 1929</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	Medical History, Heart Attack, 1961-1962 <a href="#">Image(s): Medical History, Heart Attack: 1961-1962</a>
Box 1, Folder 5	Memberships, circa 1963 <a href="#">Image(s): Memberships: circa 1963</a>
Box 1	Correspondence

- Box 1, Folder 6                    A-B, 1926-1965  
[Image\(s\): A-B: 1926-1965](#)  
Includes letters from Evangeline Adams, Judith Anderson, and the secretary to the King of Belgium.
- Box 1, Folder 7                    C, 1925-1965  
[Image\(s\): C: 1925-1965](#)  
Includes letters to Hall Caine, Feodor Chaliapin, Miguel Covarrubias, and Joan Crawford, as well as a Christmas card from Frank Crowninshield decorated with an etching by Gari Melchers.
- Box 1, Folder 8                    D-G, 1926-1965  
[Image\(s\): D-G: 1926-1965](#)  
Includes letters from John Galsworthy and Martha Graham.
- Box 1, Folder 9                    H-K, 1926-1965  
[Image\(s\): H-K: 1926-1965](#)  
Includes letters from Jascha Heifetz, Joseph Hergesheimer, Hedda Hopper, and A.S. Hutchinson.
- Box 1, Folder 10                   Kahlo, Frida, 1931-1940  
[Image\(s\): Kahlo, Frida: 1931-1940](#)
- Box 1, Folder 11                   L-O, circa 1928-1960  
[Image\(s\): L-O: circa 1928-1960](#)  
Includes letters from Mary Martin, Claude Monet, and Agnes O'Neill. There are also two photographic Christmas cards of Murray in costume.
- Box 1, Folder 12                   Olympic Games, 1954-1956  
[Image\(s\): Olympic Games: 1954-1956](#)
- Box 1, Folder 13                   P, circa 1925-1960  
[Image\(s\): P: circa 1925-1960](#)  
Includes a letter from Bessie Breuer Poor.
- Box 1, Folder 14                   Parrott, Katherine Ursula, circa 1925-1945  
[Image\(s\): Parrott, Katherine Ursula: circa 1925-1945](#)  
Includes a profile of Muray by Parrott.
- Box 1, Folder 15                   Q-S, 1925-1967  
[Image\(s\): Q-S: 1925-1967](#)  
Includes letters from Ruth St. Denis, George Bernard Shaw's secretary, H. De Vere Stacpoole, and Frank Swinnerton.
- Box 1, Folder 16                   Signal Corps Photographic Center, 1942-1944

[Image\(s\): Signal Corps Photographic Center: 1942-1944](#)

- Box 1, Folder 17      T-Z, circa 1926-1962  
[Image\(s\): T-Z: circa 1926-1962](#)  
Includes letters from Carl Van Vechten, A.B. Walkley, and H.G. Wells.
- Box 1      Writings
- Box 1, Folder 18      Autobiographical Account , circa 1950-1960  
[Image\(s\): Autobiographical Account : circa 1950-1960](#)
- Box 1, Folder 19      Book Mock-Up, *Great Tribes of the World* (unpublished)  
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 20      Lists, Celebrity Portraits, 1965  
[Image\(s\): Lists, Celebrity Portraits: 1965](#)
- Box 1, Folder 21      Notes, Celebrity Photo Sitzings, circa 1920-1960  
[Image\(s\): Notes, Celebrity Photo Sitzings: circa 1920-1960](#)
- Box 1, Folder 22      Typescripts, Performance Reviews, circa 1920-1950  
[Image\(s\): Typescripts, Performance Reviews: circa 1920-1950](#)
- Box 1, Folder 23      Typescript, On *Revealing Eye* by Paul Gallico, circa 1967  
[Image\(s\): Typescript, On Revealing Eye by Paul Gallico: circa 1967](#)
- Box 2      Teaching Files
- Box 2, Folder 1      Lecture Materials, Peoples of the World, 1957-1962  
[Image\(s\): Lecture Materials, Peoples of the World: 1957-1962](#)
- Box 2, Folder 2      NYU Photography Course, 1940-1941  
[Image\(s\): NYU Photography Course: 1940-1941](#)
- Box 2, Folder 3      NYU Photography Course Notes, 1940-1941  
[Image\(s\): NYU Photography Course Notes: 1940-1941](#)
- Box 2      Printed Material
- Box 2, Folder 4      Book, *Celebrity Portraits of the Twenties and Thirties* by Nickolas Muray, 1978  
[Image\(s\): Book, Celebrity Portraits of the Twenties and Thirties by Nickolas Muray: 1978](#)
- Box 2, Folder 5      Brochure, Muray Studios, circa 1925

	<a href="#">Image(s): Brochure, Muray Studios: circa 1925</a>
Box 2, Folder 6	Clippings, 1920-1942 <a href="#">Image(s): Clippings: 1920-1942</a>
Box 2, Folder 7	Clippings, 1943-1969 <a href="#">Image(s): Clippings: 1943-1969</a>
Box 2, Folder 8	Miscellaneous, circa 1960-1970 <a href="#">Image(s): Miscellaneous: circa 1960-1970</a>
Box 2	Artwork
Box 2, Folder 9	Sketches, circa 1925 <a href="#">Image(s): Sketches: circa 1925</a>
Box 2	Photographic Materials
Box 2, Folder 10	Nickolas Muray, Family, and Friends, circa 1910-1930 <a href="#">Image(s): Nickolas Muray, Family, and Friends: circa 1910-1930</a> Oversized materials housed in OV 3.
Box 2, Folder 11	Nickolas Muray, Family, and Friends, circa 1931-1960 <a href="#">Image(s): Nickolas Muray, Family, and Friends: circa 1931-1960</a>
Box 2, Folder 12	Studio of Nickolas Muray, circa 1920-1960 <a href="#">Image(s): Studio of Nickolas Muray: circa 1920-1960</a>
Box 2, Folder 13	Advertising Work, Carbro Prints, circa 1950-1960 <a href="#">Image(s): Advertising Work, Carbro Prints: circa 1950-1960</a>
Box OV 3	Oversized Photograph scanned with Box 2, Folder 10, circa 1928

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## Series 2: Unprocessed Addition, 1927-1992

*0.6 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5)*

The Unprocessed Addition includes biographical material, correspondence, photographs, research notes and a diary about Africa, and a subject file on the book *The Revealing Eye, Personalities of the 1920s*, written by Paul Gallico with photographs taken by Muray, 1967.

Box 4                      Unprocessed Addition, 1927-1992

Box 5                      Unprocessed Addition, 1927-1992

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