



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the John Opper Papers, 1908-2013, bulk 1930-1994, in the Archives of American Art

Rachel Salzmann and Rihoko Ueno

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by Jane and Joseph Opper.

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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/>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	John Opper papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.oppejohn
<b>Date:</b>	1908-2013 (bulk 1930-1994)
<b>Creator:</b>	Opper, John
<b>Extent:</b>	1.6 Linear feet 0.057 Gigabytes
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of New York-based abstract painter and teacher John Opper measure 1.6 linear feet and 0.057 GB and are dated 1908-2013, bulk 1930-1994. The papers contain both professional and personal correspondence. Biographical materials include passports, sketches, certificates, and curriculum vitae, as well as some genealogical documents in digital format. Personal business records relate to the artist's Bowery Street and Amagansett studios, art sales through the Grace Borgenicht Gallery, and a few art inventories. A scrapbook contains newspaper clippings. Additional clippings, exhibition catalogs and announcements, and galley sheets of a children's book illustrated by Opper are included among the printed material. Photographs are of Opper, his family, friends, and paintings. Digital photographs depict the artist and relatives.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The John Opper papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by the artist's children, Jane and Joseph Opper, in 2013.

### Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview with John Opper, conducted by Irving Sandler, 1968 September 9-1969 January 3.

### Available Formats

The bulk of the collection was digitized in 2021 and is available on the Archives of American Art website.

### Processing Information

This collection was processed to a minimal level and a finding aid prepared in 2014 by Rachel Salzmann. The collection was fully processed, prepared for digitization, and the finding aid was updated by Rihoko Ueno in 2021.

Born-digital records were processed by Kirsi Ritosalmi-Kisner in 2019 with funding provided by Smithsonian Collection Care and Preservation Fund.

### Preferred Citation

John Opper papers, 1908-2013, bulk 1930-1994. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

### Terms of Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Chicago born abstract painter and teacher John Opper (1908-1994) moved to New York in the 1930s where he lived and worked for most of his career.

John Opper was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1908. He studied at Cleveland School of Art, Case Western Reserve University, and the Art Institute of Chicago. Opper moved to New York City in 1933 and became a founding member of the American Abstract Artist group in 1936. He married Estelle Rita Hausman in 1934 and they had two children, Jane and Joseph. He studied with Hans Hofmann from 1935-1936 at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts. Opper received a Master of Arts degree (1942) and a doctorate (1952) from Columbia University.

Opper taught at many different places such as Columbia University and Pratt Institute, but his longest tenure was at New York University where he was a member of the art department faculty from 1957 until he retired in 1974. He received a Guggenheim fellowship in 1969. He was represented by Grace Borgenicht Gallery. He became known for his abstract style that was influenced by both abstract expressionism and color field painting. He passed away in Amagansett, New York in 1994.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of New York-based abstract painter and teacher John Opper measure 1.6 linear feet and 0.057 GB and are dated 1908-2013, bulk 1930-1994. The papers contain both professional and personal correspondence. Biographical materials include passports, sketches, certificates, and curriculum vitae, as well as genealogical documents in digital format. Personal business records relate to the artist's Bowery Street and Amagansett studios, art sales through the Grace Borgenicht Gallery, and a few art inventories. A scrapbook contains newspaper clippings. Additional clippings, exhibition catalogs and announcements, and galley sheets of a children's book illustrated by Opper are included among the printed material. Photographs are of Opper, his family, friends, and paintings. Digital photographs depict the artist and relatives.

Biographical material contains a faculty identification card, family tree, passports, curriculum vitae, sketches, certificates, notes, and other material. Some Opper family genealogical documents are in digital format.

Correspondence includes letters from immediate family, galleries, universities, foundations, and friends and colleagues, such as Lee Hall and George McNeil.

Personal business records consist of financial and legal material as well as art inventories. Opper's Bowery and Amagansett studio files contain maintenance fees as well as records related to a legal settlement. Also included are sales records from Grace Borgenicht Gallery, a painting inventory and a list of slides.

Printed materials include a disbound scrapbook, newspaper and magazine clippings, exhibition catalogs, announcements, and the galley sheets for a children's book illustrated by Opper.

Photographs depict John Opper, Opper with friends and family, and Opper's artwork. Most of the photographic material consists of prints but there are a few slides, transparencies, and digital formats.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 5 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1908-2012 (Box 1; 6 folders, ER01)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1995 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 3: Personal Business Records, 1969-1994 (Box 1; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 4: Printed Materials, 1930-2011 (Box 1-2; 0.9 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1926-circa 2013 (Box 3; 0.2 linear feet, ER02)

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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:

Art -- Study and teaching  
Artists' studios  
Painting, Abstract

Types of Materials:

Drawings  
Photographs  
Scrapbooks

Names:

Grace Borgenicht Gallery

Occupations:

Art teachers -- New York (State) -- New York  
Painters -- New York (State)

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical Material, 1908-2012

6 Folders (Box 1)

0.049 Gigabytes (ER01)

**Scope and Contents:** This series contains a range of biographical material such as a New York University faculty identification card, a family tree, five passports, curriculum vitae; birth, naturalization, marriage, and death certificates; notes, census data, etc. Noteworthy material includes sketches by Opper, some loose and others on a printed program from the T.S. "Bremen." All sketches are of people, probably fellow passengers. Some Opper family genealogical documents are in digital format.

**Arrangement:** The material in this series is in alphabetical order.

**Available:** The bulk of the material in this series has been digitized except for some passport pages.

**Formats:** Only the covers and first two pages of the passports were digitized.

Box 1, Folder 1	<a href="#">Artist's Statement and Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1970-circa 1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 2	<a href="#">Certificates and Census Data, 1908-1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 3	<a href="#">Curriculum Vitae, circa 1975-circa 1989</a>
Box 1, Folder 4	<a href="#">Faculty Identification Card and Family Tree, 1910, circa 1975</a>
Folder ER01	Genealogical Records (1910-1930), Digital Documents, 2011-2012 0.049 Gigabytes (Five computer files)
Box 1, Folder 5	<a href="#">Passports, 1953-1979</a>
Box 1, Folder 6	<a href="#">Sketches, circa 1963</a>

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## Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1995

### 0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

**Scope and Contents:** This series consists of professional and personal correspondence. Correspondents include immediate family, galleries, universities, foundations, and friends and colleagues, such as Lee Hall and George McNeil. Also found in this series is the text of a lecture by Lee Hall delivered at Rhode Island School of Design in 1981.

**Arrangement:** Family correspondence and "first names only" correspondence (letters which are only signed with a first name) are at the beginning of the series. The rest of the series is in alphabetical order.

**Available Formats:** The bulk of the material in this series has been digitized, except for duplicates.

Box 1, Folder 7	<a href="#">Family Correspondence, circa 1953</a> Notes: Correspondence with Estelle, Jane and Joseph Opper
Box 1, Folder 8	<a href="#">Family Correspondence, circa 1963, 1991-1994</a> Notes: Correspondence with Estelle, Jane and Joseph Opper
Box 1, Folder 9	<a href="#">First Names Only Correspondence, circa 1968-circa 1993</a>
Box 1, Folder 10	<a href="#">American Academy of Arts and Letters, 1991-1993</a>
Box 1, Folder 11	<a href="#">A-B Miscellaneous, 1985-1990</a>
Box 1, Folder 12	<a href="#">C Miscellaneous, 1948-1988</a>
Box 1, Folder 13	<a href="#">Chase Manhattan Bank, 1969-1970</a>
Box 1, Folder 14	<a href="#">Cleveland Institute of Art, 1990</a>
Box 1, Folder 15	<a href="#">Grace Borgenicht Gallery, 1976-1995</a>
Box 1, Folder 16	<a href="#">Guild Hall, 1969-1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 17	<a href="#">G-H Miscellaneous, 1946-1952</a> Notes: Includes 1 letter from Hans Hofmann
Box 1, Folder 18	<a href="#">Hall, Lee, 1974-1987</a> Notes: Includes typescript draft of lecture by Lee Hall
Box 1, Folder 19	<a href="#">I-L Miscellaneous, 1969-1993</a>
Box 1, Folder 20	<a href="#">McNeil, George, 1993-1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 21	<a href="#">M-N Miscellaneous, 1964-1988</a>
Box 1, Folder 22	<a href="#">National Endowment for the Arts, 1974-1975</a>

Box 1, Folder 23	<a href="#">National Museum of American Art, 1989-1990</a>
Box 1, Folder 24	<a href="#">New York University, 1967-1976</a>
Box 1, Folder 25	<a href="#">P-S Miscellaneous, 1964-1989</a> Notes: Includes John Opper's statement on Lee Hall's paintings
Box 1, Folder 26	<a href="#">T-U Miscellaneous, 1957-1974</a>
Box 1, Folder 27	<a href="#">Vered Gallery, 1990-1992</a>
Box 1, Folder 28	<a href="#">W Miscellaneous, 1988-1994</a>

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## Series 3: Personal Business Records , 1969-1994

### 0.3 Linear feet (Box 1)

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: Personal business records consist of financial and legal material as well as inventories related to John Opper's artwork. Opper's Bowery and Amagansett studio files contain a mixture maintenance fees as well as records related to a legal settlement. Sales records are from Grace Borgenicht Gallery, which represented John Opper. Also included is a painting inventory on index cards that has measurements and dates for paintings without a corresponding list of titles and a list of slides of paintings.

Arrangement: The material in this series is arranged in alphabetical order.

Available Formats: The bulk of the material in this series has been digitized, except for blank pages and duplicates. The Bowery Studio folder was not digitized because they contain legal records.

Box 1, Folder 29	<a href="#">Amagansett Studio Maintenance Fees, 1983-1986</a>
Box 1, Folder 30	Bowery Studio Tenancy Legal Records, 1984-1992
Box 1, Folder 31	<a href="#">Grace Borgenicht Gallery Sales, 1969-1979</a>
Box 1, Folder 32	<a href="#">Grace Borgenicht Gallery Sales, 1980-1989</a>
Box 1, Folder 33	<a href="#">Grace Borgenicht Gallery Sales, 1991-1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 34	<a href="#">Painting Inventory on Index Cards, circa 1969-circa 1987</a>
Box 1, Folder 35	<a href="#">Painting Restoration Supplies and Costs, 1990-1994</a>
Box 1, Folder 36	<a href="#">Painting Slides List, circa 1986</a>

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## Series 4: Printed Material, 1930-2011

### 0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

**Scope and Contents:** The series includes a disbound scrapbook, newspaper and magazine clippings, exhibition catalogs, announcements, and the galley sheets for a children's book illustrated by Opper. The dismantled scrapbook contains newspaper and magazine clippings about Opper and his artwork.

**Arrangement:** The material in this series is grouped alphabetically by type, such as bulletins, clippings, exhibition catalogs, magazines, etc. Printed materials are arranged chronologically within each grouping.

**Available Formats:** The bulk of the material in this series has been digitized, except for duplicates. Most of the exhibition catalogs up through 1945 have been fully digitized. Exhibition catalogs and other publications after 1945 have had their covers, title pages, and relevant pages digitized. The unbound galley of the book *Roberta E. Lee* has only had the cover and title page digitized.

Box 1, Folder 37	<a href="#">Bulletins and Clippings, circa 1930-1945</a>
Box 1, Folder 38	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1933-1936</a>
Box 1, Folder 39	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1937-1939</a>
Box 1, Folder 40	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1940-1941</a>
Box 1, Folder 41	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1942-1945</a>
Box 1, Folder 42	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1946-1947</a>
Box 1, Folder 43	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1947-1949</a>
Box 1, Folder 44	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1952-1956</a>
Box 1, Folder 45	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1961-1962</a>
Box 1, Folder 46	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1962-1969</a>
Box 1, Folder 47	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1970-1973</a>
Box 1, Folder 48	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1974-1979</a>
Box 1, Folder 49	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1980-1983</a>
Box 1, Folder 50	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1984-1988</a>
Box 1, Folder 51	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1990</a>
Box 2, Folder 1	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1991-1998</a>
Box 2, Folder 2	<a href="#">Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, circa 2000-2011</a>

Box 2, Folder 3	<a href="#">Exhibition Catalog for Other Artists, 1930</a>
Box 2, Folder 4	<a href="#">Exhibition Catalog for Other Artists, 1939</a>
Box 2, Folder 5	<a href="#">Magazines and Journals, 1933-1939</a>
Box 2, Folder 6	<a href="#">Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1950-circa 1985</a>
Box 2, Folder 7	<a href="#">Roberta E. Lee by Burke Davis (Unbound Galley), 1956</a>
Box 2, Folder 8	<a href="#">Scrapbook (Disbound, Part 1 of 3), 1930-1968</a>
Box 2, Folder 9	<a href="#">Scrapbook (Disbound, Part 2 of 3), circa 1970-circa 1989</a>
Box 2, Folder 10	<a href="#">Scrapbook (Disbound, Part 3 of 3), circa 1990-2011</a>

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## Series 5: Photographs, 1926-2013

### 0.2 Linear feet (Box 3)

#### 0.008 Gigabytes (ER02)

**Scope and Contents:** This series includes photographs, slides, and digital photographs. The photographs depict John Opper, Opper with friends and family, and Opper's artwork.

**Arrangement:** Photographs of John Opper are at the beginning of the series, followed by photographs of his artwork.

**Available Formats:** The bulk of this series has been digitized except for blank versos of photographs and duplicates.

Box 3, Folder 1	<a href="#">John Opper, 1926-1961</a>
Box 3, Folder 2	<a href="#">John Opper, 1970-circa 1975</a>
Box 3, Folder 3	<a href="#">John Opper, circa 1983-circa 1994</a>
Box 3, Folder 4	<a href="#">John Opper with Family and Friends, circa 1920-1993</a>
Folder ER02	John Opper, Relatives and Artwork (1926-1965) - Digital Photographs, 2010-2013 0.008 Gigabytes (Ten computer files)
Box 3, Folder 5	<a href="#">Artwork Photographs, circa 1960-circa 1994</a>
Box 3, Folder 6	<a href="#">Artwork Polaroids, circa 1975-circa 1992</a>
Box 3, Folder 7	<a href="#">Artwork Slides and Transparencies, circa 1960-circa 2001</a>
Box 3, Folder 8	<a href="#">Artwork Snapshots, circa 1980-circa 1994</a>

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