



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Agnes Pelton Papers,
1885-1989, in the Archives of American Art

Judy Ng

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

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Agnes Pelton papers
Identifier:	AAA.peltagne
Date:	1885-1989
Extent:	1.8 Linear feet
Creator:	Pelton, Agnes, 1881-1961
Language:	The collection is in English.
Summary:	The papers of painter Agnes Pelton measure 1.8 linear feet and date from 1885-1989. Found within the papers are biographical materials; business and personal correspondence, many addressed to Jane Levington Comfort; writings; printed material; 3 mixed media scrapbooks; artwork, including loose sketches and 9 sketchbooks; and photographs of Pelton, her family and friends, and her work.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Agnes Pelton papers were assembled by Cornelia and Irving Sussman for a biography of Agnes Pelton. They were donated to the Archives by gallery director Jan Rindfleisch on behalf of the Sussmans, in 1984. In 1997, circa 162 letters from Agnes Pelton to Jane Levington Comfort, that are now part of this collection, were bequeathed to Cornelia and Irving Sussman by Jane Levington Comfort through Joan Crisci, the executor of Comfort's estate, and donated to the Archives.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 3426-3427 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

A portion of the papers received a preliminary level of arrangement after donation and were microfilmed onto reels 3426-3427. In 2015, the papers were merged with 162 letters written by Pelton to Jane Livingston Comfort. The collection was re-processed and a finding aid prepared by Judy Ng in 2015 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Agnes Pelton papers, 1885-1989. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Painter Agnes Pelton (1881-1961) lived and worked in Long Island, New York, and Cathedral City, California, and is known for her desert landscapes, portraits, and abstract paintings.

Born in Stuttgart, Germany to William and Florence Pelton, Pelton and her mother relocated to New York after her father's death in 1890. Her mother, who had studied music at the Stuttgart Conservatory, opened the Pelton School of Music in Brooklyn, which remained in operation for 30 years. Pelton began her art studies at the Pratt Institute in 1895 and continued working with one of her instructors, Arthur Dow, at his summer school in Ipswich, Massachusetts after her graduation in 1900. She later worked with William Langson Lathrop and Hamilton Field, and traveled abroad to attend the British Academy in Rome in 1910 and 1911.

In 1912, after seeing her work in an exhibition in Hamilton Field's studio in Ogunquit, Maine, Walt Kuhn invited Pelton to participate in the 1913 Armory Show. During her early career, Pelton created works that were primarily influenced by Davies's philosophy on the effect of natural light, and which she termed "Imaginative Paintings." After a visit to New Mexico in 1919, Pelton began shifting to another style of painting, focusing on Southwestern landscapes and figurative portraits, which she continued from her studios in New York City and Long Island. In 1932, Pelton moved to Cathedral City, California and began painting abstract works in a new stylistic phase, which were visual explorations of her growing interest in spirituality and philosophy. In 1938, she became a founding member of the Transcendental Painting Group, which included Raymond Jonson and Emil Bisttram. Pelton died in Cathedral City in 1961.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Agnes Pelton measure 1.8 linear feet and date from 1885-1989. Found within the papers are biographical materials; business and personal correspondence, many addressed to Jane Levington Comfort; writings; printed material; 3 mixed media scrapbooks; artwork, including loose sketches and 9 sketchbooks; and photographs of Pelton, her family and friends, and her work.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1898-1989 (2 folders; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1930-1980 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Writings, 1913-1956 (8 folders; Box 1)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1913-1955 (6 folders; Box 1)
- Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1911-1950 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 6: Artwork, 1885-1957 (0.5 linear feet; Boxes 2-3)
- Series 7: Photographic Material, 1886-1955 (0.4 linear feet; Box 3)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Women artists -- California

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks
Sketches

Names:

Annixter, Jane

Occupations:

Painters -- California

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1898-1989

2 Folders (Box 1)

Biographical materials consist of curriculum vitae and letters, notes, and printed material from Florence Pelton, Agnes's mother.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 1 Curriculum Vitae, circa 1930-1989

Box 1, Folder 2 Florence Pelton Papers (mother), circa 1898-1921

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1930-1980

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Correspondence includes letters to business colleagues and friends, including Raymond Jonson, Dane Rudhyar, and Jane Levington Comfort. Letters to Jonson and Rudhyar relate to their affiliation and work as officers of the Transcendental Painting Group. 162 letters to Comfort date from 1930 to 1960 and include descriptions of Pelton's work, upcoming exhibitions, travels, life in the desert, and relationships with friends and family. There are also partial typed transcriptions of the Comfort letters completed by Pelton's biographer Cornelia Sussman.

Materials are arranged chronologically by recipient.

Box 1, Folder 3	Comfort, Jane Levington, circa 1930-1960
Box 1, Folder 4	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1930-1932 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 5	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1933-1934 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 6	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1935 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 7	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1936-1939 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 8	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1940-1941 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 9	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1942-1943 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 10	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1944-1946 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 11	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1947-1949 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 12	Comfort, Jane Levington, 1957-1960 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 13	Transcriptions of Letters to Jane Comfort, by Cornelia Sussman, 1980
Box 1, Folder 14	Letters to Others, circa 1938-1958

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Series 3: Writings, 1913-1956

8 Folders (Box 1)

Writings include price lists for works of art, poetry, a notebook annotating exhibitions and other events dating from 1913 to 1915, and organizational information on the Transcendental Painting Group.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 15	Lists of Artwork, circa 1934-1956
Box 1, Folder 16	Notebook, Activities and Exhibitions, 1913-1915 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 17	Items Inserted in Notebook, 1913-1915
Box 1, Folder 18	On Abstract Painting, circa 1930-1940 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 19	"Poetic Introductions", 1934
Box 1, Folder 20	"Poetic Introductions" (drafts), circa 1934
Box 1, Folder 21	Transcendental Painting Group, circa 1938 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 22	Miscellaneous, circa 1935-1950

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1913-1955

6 Folders (Box 1)

Printed material consists of clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and reproductions of artwork.

Materials are arranged by document type.

Box 1, Folder 23	Clippings, circa 1924-1951 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 24	Clippings, circa 1924-1951 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 25	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, circa 1913-1929 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 26	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1930-1955 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 27	Reproductions of Artwork, circa 1924-1951
Box 1, Folder 28	Miscellaneous, circa 1935-1950

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Series 5: Scrapbooks, 1911-1950

0.4 Folders (Box 1)

The three mixed media scrapbooks include newspaper and magazine clippings, exhibition programs, correspondence, original photographs, and other miscellany relating to Pelton and her career.

Materials are arranged in chronological order.

Box 1, Folder 29	Scrapbook I, 1911-1931
Box 1, Folder 30-33	Items Removed from Scrapbook I, 1911-1931
Box 1, Folder 34	Scrapbook II, 1931-1950
Box 1, Folder 35-36	Items Removed from Scrapbook II, 1931-1950
Box 1, Folder 37	Scrapbook III, circa 1924-1939

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Series 6: Artwork, 1885-1957

0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-3)

Artwork consists of loose sketches of figures and abstract forms. The 9 sketchbooks are of childhood drawings, landscapes, figures, and flowers. Annotated notebook/sketchbooks include notes, thoughts, and dated entries with some accompanying illustrations and sketches.

Materials are arranged chronologically by document type.

Box 2, Folder 1-2	Loose Sketches, circa 1935-1950
Box 2, Folder 3	Sketchbook I, Childhood Drawings, 1885-1886
Box 2, Folder 4	Sketchbook II, 1911-1922
Box 2, Folder 5	Sketchbook III, circa 1938
Box 2, Folder 6	Notebook/Sketchbook IV, circa 1917-1929 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 7	Notebook/Sketchbook V, 1929-1931 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 8	Notebook/Sketchbook VI, 1930-1935 Image(s)
Box 2, Folder 9	Notebook/Sketchbook VII, circa 1931
Box 3, Folder 1	Notebook/Sketchbook VIII, circa 1936-1943
Box 3, Folder 2	Notebook/Sketchbook IX, 1942-1957

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Series 7: Photographic Material, 1886-1955

0.4 Linear feet (Box 3)

Photographs are of Pelton, her family and friends, and her work. They include images taken from her home and studio, as well as artist models and photos from her travels.

Materials are arranged by subject and document type.

Box 3, Folder 3	Agnes Pelton and Family, circa 1890-1950
Box 3, Folder 4	Family and Friends, circa 1886-1940
Box 3, Folder 5	Artist Models, circa 1920-1930
Box 3, Folder 6	Farmhouse, Windmill, Travel Scenes, circa 1935-1950
Box 3, Folder 7	Miscellaneous, circa 1920-1950
Box 3, Folder 8	Works of Art, Abstracts, circa 1940-1955
Box 3, Folder 9	Works of Art, Figurative, circa 1940-1955
Box 3, Folder 10	Works of Art, Landscapes, circa 1940-1955
Box 3, Folder 11	Works of Art, Portraits, circa 1940-1955
Box 3, Folder 12	Works of Art, On Display, circa 1940-1955
Box 3, Folder 13	Works of Art, Negatives, circa 1940-1955

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