



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Irving Petlin papers, 1952-2014,
bulk 1970-1990, in the Archives of American Art

Jennifer E. Neal

2021/08/23

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Irving Petlin papers
Date:	1952-2014 (bulk 1970-1990)
Identifier:	AAA.peltirvi
Creator:	Petlin, Irving, 1934-2018
Extent:	3 Linear feet
Language:	English , French , Italian .
Summary:	The papers of painter Irving Petlin measure 3.0 linear feet and date from 1952-2014. Materials include correspondence with other artists and collaborators, galleries, friends, and family; notes by Petlin related to his artistic process; exhibition and project files regarding the war in Vietnam and other projects; exhibition catalogs, announcements, and clippings related to Petlin's work and group and solo museum and gallery shows; periodicals related to the art world; books featuring Petlin as an illustrator or inscribed by author or editor friends of Petlin's; sketches by Petlin; an Italian contemporary art award; a piece of the Peace Tower collaboration with Mark di Suvero and other artists; and photographs of Petlin's works, installations, and Petlin in a studio.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated in 2019 by Sarah Petlin.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview with Irving Petlin conducted by James McElhinney September 13 and 15, 2016.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Jennifer E. Neal and Lewis Tio in 2021.

Preferred Citation

Irving Petlin papers, 1952-2014. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Irving Petlin (1934-2018) was a painter in Paris, France; New York, New York; and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Petlin was born in Chicago to Polish Jewish immigrants, attended the Art Institute of Chicago, and earned a MFA from Yale University. Petlin specialized in the medium of pastel, first gaining recognition in Paris after his service in the United States army. From there he went to Los Angeles, where he was principal organizer of the "Artists Protest Movement Against the War in Vietnam," and the 1966 "Peace Tower," with Mark di Suvero and other artists. Petlin and his wife, Sarah, a poet, moved to New York City for 28 years before returning to Paris. Petlin was heavily influenced by the political landscape around him and was an active member of the Art Workers' Coalition. He used allegory, mythology, and symbolism to illustrate politics and the human condition. He often collaborated on projects with other artists and was inspired by writers and poets. In the last decades of his life, Petlin split his time between his studio in Paris and his family's 18th century farmhouse in Martha's Vineyard continuing his work as an artist and activist.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Irving Petlin measure 3.0 linear feet and date from 1952-2014. Materials include correspondence with other artists and collaborators, galleries, friends, and family; notes by Petlin related to his artistic process; exhibition and project files regarding the war in Vietnam and other projects; exhibition catalogs, announcements, and clippings related to Petlin's work and group and solo museum and gallery shows; periodicals related to the art world; books featuring Petlin as an illustrator or inscribed by author or editor friends of Petlin's; sketches by Petlin; an Italian contemporary art award; a piece of the Peace Tower collaboration with Mark di Suvero and other artists; and photographs of Petlin's works, installations, and Petlin in a studio.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1968-2002 (0.25 linear feet, Box 1)
- Series 2: Writings, 1952-1984 (0.18 linear feet) Box 1)
- Series 3: Exhibition Files, 1974-1988 (0.20 linear feet, Box 1)
- Series 4: Project Files, 1980-1984, 2007 (0.17 linear feet, Box 1)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1962-2014 (2.09 linear feet Box 1, 2, 3)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1966-1974 (0.07 linear feet, box 3, 4)
- Series 7: Photographic Material, circa 1970s-1978 (0.04 linear feet, Box 4)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art and war
Vietnam War, 1961-1975 -- Protest Movements -- United States

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Sketchbooks

Names:

Golub, Leon, 1922-2004
Kitaj, R. B.
Selz, Peter Howard, 1919-2019

Occupations:

Painters -- France -- Paris
Painters -- Massachusetts -- Martha's Vineyard
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1968-2002

0.25 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically and includes letters to and from other artists and collaborators, and galleries, including Dore Ashton, Yoko Ono, Gerson Cohen of the Jewish Theologian Society, James Speyer, Gallerie Du Dragon and various galleries in America, Israel, Italy, and France; and friends including Clayton Eshleman, Leon Golub, Peter Saul, Peter Selz, Gilbert Lloyd, Paul Cummings, Rolf Nelson, R. B. Kitaj, Franz Schulz, and Red Grooms; and postcards to and from family while Petlin was abroad. The bulk of the correspondence dates from the 1970s and 1980s and discusses Petlin's works, exhibitions, and publications related to Petlin. Some letters are written in Italian and French.

Box 1, Folder 1	A, 1977-1990 Notes: (includes letters from Ann Agee and Dore Ashton)
Box 1, Folder 2	B, 1976-2000 Notes: (includes letters from Godula Buchholz of Galerie Buchholz)
Box 1, Folder 3	C, 1973-1992 Notes: (includes letters from Noma Copley and Paul Cummings)
Box 1, Folder 4	D, 1980-1986
Box 1, Folder 5	E, 1985
Box 1, Folder 6	F, 1986-2011
Box 1, Folder 7	Family, 1974-1989
Box 1, Folder 8	G, 1974-1975 Notes: (includes letters from the Galleria Odyssea and Leon Golub)
Box 1, Folder 9	Gallerie Du Dragon, Cecilia Ayala, 1968-1987
Box 1, Folder 10	H, 1976-1984 Notes: (includes letters from Hans Haacke and Jon Hendricks)
Box 1, Folder 11	J, 2002
Box 1, Folder 12	K, 1979-1997
Box 1, Folder 13	R.B. Kitaj, 1970-1984
Box 1, Folder 14	L, 1968-1989

	Notes:	(includes letter from Gilbert Lloyd)
Box 1, Folder 15	M, 1968-2002	
Box 1, Folder 16	N, 1974-1988	Notes: (includes letters from Rolf G. Nelson)
Box 1, Folder 17	O, 1997	Notes: (includes letter from Yoko Ono)
Box 1, Folder 18	P, 1973, 1978	
Box 1, Folder 19	Q, 1974	Notes: (includes letters from Frederico Quadrani)
Box 1, Folder 20	R, 1968-1997	Notes: (includes a holiday card from Red Grooms and letters from Mario Roncaglia)
Box 1, Folder 21	S, 1973-1989	Notes: (includes a letter from Peter Selz and correspondence with James Speyer)
Box 1, Folder 22	Sulfur, 1980-1998	Notes: (includes letters from Clayton Eschleman, editor of <i>Sulfur</i>)
Box 1, Folder 23	V, 1984	
Box 1, Folder 24	W, 1973-1993	Notes: (includes letters from Ben E. Watkins and Joanna Beall Westermann)
Box 1, Folder 25	Z, circa 1970	

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Series 2: Writings, 1952-1984

0.18 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Writings include drafts of letters regarding Petlin's use of the pastel and to the 1975 New York Times editor, Hilton Kramer; a Eulogy for Petlin's friend, Sam; a draft and final copy of Petlin's juror response to the Art Institute of Chicago's 76th Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity; lists of names and address for petitions and statements, and lists of Petlin's paintings and professional activities from 1952-1971; a 1981 manuscript for Michael Palmer's "Notes for Echo Lake" that included an illustration by Petlin; notes and notebooks detailing Petlin's artistic process; a 1975 notebook entitled, "Drawings for the August Tide;" a 1984 notebook entitled, "Notes for the Double Life;" a petition calling for Picasso to remove his work, "Guernica" from MoMA in 1970; petitions and statements regarding Art Forum and the Whitney Museum; and an undated statement on Israel and Palestine.

Box 1, Folder 26	Drafts of Letters about "the pastel" and to NY Times Editor, Hilton Kramer, 1975
Box 1, Folder 27	Eulogy for Sam, undated
Box 1, Folder 28	Juror, The Art Institute of Chicago 76th Exhibition by Artists of Chicago and Vicinity, 1977
Box 1, Folder 29	Lists of Names and Addresses for Petitions and Statements, circa 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 30	Lists of Paintings and Professional Activities, 1952-1979
Box 1, Folder 31	Manuscript, "Notes for Echo Lake" by Michael Palmer, 1981
Box 1, Folder 32	Notebook and Notes Detailing Artistic Process, 1970-1971
Box 1, Folder 33	Notebook, "Drawings for the August Tide", 1970
Box 1, Folder 34	Notebook, "Notes for the Double Life", 1984
Box 1, Folder 35	Petition for Picasso to Remove "Guernica" from MOMA, 1970
Box 1, Folder 36	Petitions and Statements, Art Forum and Whitney Museum, 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 37	Statement on Israel and Palestine, undated

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Series 3: Exhibition Files, 1974-1988

0.21 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Exhibition files include materials documenting two exhibitions that demonstrate Petlin's lifelong work as an artist and activist. Files related to 1984's collaborative exhibition, "Artists' Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America," include notes; draft artists' statements; correspondence; clippings; a mock up donation receipt and final donation receipts; Marcus Ratliff's business card; contact lists; and a 1974 affidavit from Thomas M. Fortuin related to the United States of America vs. Jean avier Van Imschoot aka Jean Toche, who was arrested for threatening to kidnap the Metropolitan Museum of Art's trustees until Tony Shrafazi was released from jail for defacing Picasso's "Guernica." Also included are a hand written list of artists; a 1975 press release from the Jean Toche Defense Committee; exhibition announcements; a 1983 financial report; press releases about the exhibition; draft letters; and Petlin's original, annotated exhibition file folders. Collaborators include Doug Ashford, Coosje van Bruggen, Leon Golub, Kate Linker, Lucy R. Lippard, and others.

Files related to the 1988 exhibition, "It's Possible: 24 Israeli and Palestinian Artists Unite for Peace," include the exhibition catalog; correspondence; notes; annotated lists of artists; contact lists; Yesh Gvul There is a Limit stickers; exhibition announcements; protest and event flyers; clippings regarding Palestine and Israel; Larry Ledermean's business card; press releases; an exhibition floor plan; a progress report; an out of pocket expense list and financial report; Shulamith Koenig's artist bio; 1984 open letters to the Israeli government and members of the Israeli government from Leon Golub and Nancy Spero and Leonard and Debora Wolf; and Petlin's original, annotated exhibition file folders. Collaborators include Dore Ashton, Kamal Boullata, Yona Fisher, Nitz Gadish, Shulamith Koenig, Suleiman Mansour, Matti Megged, Jerry Ordover, Grace Paley, and Sam Weiner.

Box 1, Folder 38	The Cooper Union, Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America (01/16/1984 - 01/30/1984), 1983-1984
Box 1, Folder 39	The Cooper Union, Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America (01/16/1984 - 01/30/1984), 1974-1984
Box 1, Folder 40	The Cooper Union, Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America (01/16/1984 - 01/30/1984), 1983-1984
Box 1, Folder 41	The Cooper Union, It's Possible: 24 Israeli and Palestinian Artists Unite for Peace (10/12/1988 - 11/20/1988), 1988
Box 1, Folder 42	The Cooper Union, It's Possible: 24 Israeli and Palestinian Artists Unite for Peace (10/12/1988 - 11/20/1988), 1988

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Series 4: Project Files, 1980-1984, 2007

0.17 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Project files include materials documenting two projects. The first project, 2007 poster designs protesting George Bush and the Iraq War, include sketches and photocopied photographs, printed emails, and notes. Some of the sketches were drawn on cocktail napkins. The second project, "The Double Life of Amphibians," documents a play by Morton Subtonic with paintings and visual supervision by Petlin. Included are annotated stage and visual directions; annotated sketches of the stage; and Petlin's handwritten notes with sketches.

Box 1, Folder 43	Poster Designs Protesting George Bush and the Iraq War, 2007
Box 1, Folder 44	The Double Life of Amphibians, 1980-1984

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1962-2014

2.09 Linear feet (Box 1, 2, 3)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes blank postcards collected by Petlin; published books that feature illustrations by Petlin, mention Petlin's works, or were given to and inscribed by Petlin's friends, including a signed copy of Peter Selz's, "Fantastic Images: Chicago Art since 1945;" clippings reviewing Petlin's work and exhibitions, and documenting the violence in Central America in the late 1970s and early 1980s; photocopied clippings saved by Hayden Gallery from 1970-1980 and saved by Kent Fine Art from 1960-1991; exhibition announcements between 1970 and 2014; group and solo exhibition catalogs that document Petlin's career from 1962-2014; two sets of 10 licenses in envelopes created by the Guerilla Action Group (GAAG); periodicals that include articles about Petlin's work from 1970-1987; a press release from a 1979 Odyssia Gallery exhibition of pastels; 1976 exhibition and protest posters; and a 1988 United States Supreme Court brief in Support of Gregory Lee Johnson by Petlin and other artists.

Box 1, Folder 45	Blank Postcards, undated
Box 1, Folder 46	Books, "Caterpillar 5", 1968
Box 1, Folder 47	Books, "Caterpillar Anthology", 1971
Box 1, Folder 48	Books, "Fantastic Images: Chicago Art Since 1945", 1972
Box 1, Folder 49	Books, "The Art of Seymour Rosofsky", 1981
Box 1, Folder 50	Books, "Hades in Manganese", 1981
Box 1, Folder 51	Books, "Notes for Echo Lake", 1981
Box 1, Folder 52	Books, "Antonin Artaud: Four Texts", 1982
Box 2, Folder 1	Books, "Sappho", 1982
Box 2, Folder 2	Books, "The Name Encanyoned River, Selected Poems 1960-1985", 1986
Box 2, Folder 3	Books, "Hotel Cro-Magnon", 1989
Box 2, Folder 4	Books, "A Different War: Vietnam in Art", 1990
Box 2, Folder 5	Books, "La Pensée: Nouvelle et Pièce", 1990
Box 2, Folder 6	Books, "The Aranea Constellation", 1998
Box 2, Folder 7	Clippings, 1960-1965
Box 2, Folder 8	Clippings, 1971-1979

Box 2, Folder 9	Clippings, 1980-1987
Box 2, Folder 10	Clippings of Reviews from Chicago and New York, 1972-1976
Box 2, Folder 11	Clippings, Photocopies Saved by Hayden Gallery Registrar, Gary Garrels, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 12	Clippings, Photocopies Saved by Kent Fine Art, Inc., 1960-1991
Box 2, Folder 13	Clippings re Violence in Central America, 1976, 1982
Box 2, Folder 14	Exhibition Announcements, 1970-1988
Box 2, Folder 15	Exhibition Announcements, 1989-2014
Box 2, Folder 16	Exhibition Announcements, 1970-2014
Box 2, Folder 17	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1962-1965
Box 2, Folder 18	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1965-1970
Box 2, Folder 19	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1972-1973
Box 2, Folder 20	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1974
Box 2, Folder 21	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1974-1975
Box 2, Folder 22	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1975-1976
Box 2, Folder 23	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, circa 1977
Box 2, Folder 24	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1978
Box 2, Folder 25	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1979-1980
Box 3, Folder 1	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1982-1984
Box 3, Folder 2	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1984-1987
Box 3, Folder 3	Exhibition Catalogs, Group Exhibitions, 1989
Box 3, Folder 4	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, circa 1958-1969
Box 3, Folder 5	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 1962-1972
Box 3, Folder 6	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 1974-1986

Box 3, Folder 7	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 1987-1994
Box 3, Folder 8	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 1988
Box 3, Folder 9	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 1997-1999
Box 3, Folder 10	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 2001-2002
Box 3, Folder 11	Exhibition Catalogs, Solo Exhibitions, 2012-2014
Box 3, Folder 12	Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG) Sets of 10 Licenses in Envelopes, 1981
Box 3, Folder 13	Periodicals, 1970-1984
Box 3, Folder 14	Periodicals, 1986-1987
Box 3, Folder 15	Press Release, Odyssea Gallery exhibition of pastels, 1979
Box 3, Folder 16	Posters, Exhibitions and Protests, 1976
Box 3, Folder 17	Supreme Court Brief in Support of Gregory Lee Johnson, 1988

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1966-1974

0.07 Linear feet (Box 3, 4)

Scope and Contents: Artwork includes pencil sketches; a 1968 sketchbook entitled, "Drawings and Studies for 'The Garden of Mille,'" a piece of the circa 1968 Peace Tower collaboration with Mark di Suvero and other artists; and the 1974 Premio Campigna award for modern art.

Box 3, Folder 18	Pencil Sketches, 1979, undated
Box 3, Folder 19	Sketchbook, "Drawings and Studies for 'The Garden of Mille'", 1968
Box 4, Item 1	A Piece of "The Peace Tower", circa 1966
Box 4, Item 2	Premio Campigna (Campaign Award for Modern Art), 1974

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Series 7: Photographic Material, circa 1970s-1978

0.04 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: Photographic material includes black and white installation images from Gallery Rebecca Cooper in 1976 and Neuberger Museum in 1978; a color snapshot of Petlin in a studio in circa 1977; and a black and white photograph and two negatives of Petlin's work from the circa 1970s.

Box 3, Folder 20 Installation Photographs, Gallery Rebecca Cooper, 1976

Box 3, Folder 21 Installation Photographs, Neuberger Museum, 1978

Box 3, Folder 22 [Snapshot of Petlin in a Studio, circa 1977](#)

Box 3, Folder 23 Works of Art, circa 1970s

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