



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Isabel Peterson Papers, circa 1940-1980, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

Processing of this collection received support from
the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

2023/09/12

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Isabel Peterson papers
Date:	circa 1940-1980
Identifier:	AAA.peteisab
Creator:	Peterson, Isabel
Extent:	0.7 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of curator Isabel Peterson measure 0.7 linear feet and date from circa 1940 to 1980. The collection documents Peterson's work as United Seamen's Service, Inc., art exhibition director curating the annual <i>Art Exhibition by Merchant Seamen of the United Nations</i> . Found are biographical materials on Peterson, correspondence, interview transcripts, photographs, printed material, a mixed-media scrapbook, and writings.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated 1983 by Isabel Peterson.

Available Formats

The collection is available on 35mm microfilm roll 3770 at 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

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2023 with support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

Preferred Citation

Isabel Peterson papers, circa 1940-1980. 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

New York curator Isabel Peterson, began her full-time career during World War II. As art exhibition director for the United Seamen's Service, Inc., her primary responsibility was the annual *Art Exhibition by Merchant Seamen of the United Nations*.

After founding the Music Box Canteen for United States Service men and women in 1941, Peterson was asked by Vice Admiral Emory S. Land of the War Shipping Administration, to establish a recreation department for wartime merchant seamen. Peterson developed, organized, and directed the annual exhibition of paintings by merchant seamen of the United Nations from 1943 to 1946. The exhibitions were shown in the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. and in other museums throughout the United States.

Scope and Contents

The papers of curator Isabel Peterson measure 0.7 linear feet and date from circa 1940 to 1980. The collection documents Peterson's work as United Seamen's Service, Inc., art exhibition director curating the annual *Art Exhibition by Merchant Seamen of the United Nations*. Found are biographical materials on Peterson, correspondence, interview transcripts, photographs, printed material, a mixed-media scrapbook, and writings.

Arrangement

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

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Scrapbooks

Types of Materials:

Interviews

Occupations:

Curators -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Isabel Peterson Papers, circa 1940-1980

0.7 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2)

Scope and Contents: Biographical materials include a biographical note regarding Peterson's involvement with the *Art Exhibition by Merchant Seamen of the United Nations*, and rough drafts of her curriculum vitae and resume. Correspondence is with museum directors, government agencies, artists, and those who purchased works at the exhibitions. Found are letters from John Taylor Arms, Leon Kroll, Philip Kappel, Vincent Price, Edward G. Robins, Mrs. Kermit (Belle) Roosevelt, and others. Two transcripts are from radio interviews of Peterson describing and publicizing the exhibition. Photographs are of the exhibitions and of works of art. Printed materials include a copy of *Art in the Armed Forces*, edited by Aimee Crane, clippings, exhibition announcements and catalogs. Of note is an original illustrated booklet advocating for the Merchant Marines and their artwork. Other writings include a report and remarks given at the exhibition. Also found is a mixed-media scrapbook containing scattered photographs of judges at exhibitions and clippings.

Box 1, Folder 1 Biographical Material, circa 1940-1950

Box 1, Folder 2 Correspondence, 1942-1978

Box 1, Folder 3 Interviews, Transcripts, 1943-1946

Box 1, Folder 4-5 Photographs, 1944-1945

Box 1, Folder 6-7 Printed Material, 1943-1980

Box 2 Scrapbook, 1944

Box 1, Folder 8 Writings, circa 1940-1945

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