



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Horace Pippin Notebooks and Letters, circa 1920, 1943, in the Archives of American Art

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was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Horace Pippin notebooks and letters
Date:	circa 1920, 1943
Identifier:	AAA.pipphora
Creator:	Pippin, Horace, 1888-1946
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The collection measures 0.2 linear feet and consists of three notebooks, notebook fragments, and two letters written by African American primitive painter Horace Pippin. The three notebooks and notebook fragments contain Pippin's World War I memoirs written in the 1920s, one of which is illustrated by Pippin with six drawings of war scenes. Two letters are dated 1943 and circa 1943. One of the letters is written to "Dear Friends" and begins with "life story of art."; the other is written to dealer Robert Carlen about showing his painting Domino [Game] Players.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Horace Pippin's war memiors/notebooks and one letter were purchased from Robert Carlen, Pippin's dealer, in 1956. The 1943 letter from Pippin to Carlen was donated by Dr. and Mrs. Matthew Moore in 1983.

Alternative Forms Available

The notebooks and letters of **Horace Pippin** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2006, and total 114 images.

Processing Information

The Horace Pippin notebooks and letters were microfilmed in the order that they were donated on reels 138 and 4306. The collection was digitized in 2006 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Horace Pippin notebooks and letters, circa 1920, 1943. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection has been digitized and is available online via AAA's website.

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Biographical Note

Horace Pippin (1888 -1946) was a self-taught painter from West Chester, Pennsylvania. Pippin was inspired to paint by his experiences in France during World War I. He lost the use of his right arm when wounded during the war and, when painting, had to use his left hand to guide his right. He gained a national reputation as "a true American primitive" in the 1940s for his paintings depicting childhood memories, war experiences, heroes, and religious subjects.

Scope and Content Note

The collection measures 0.2 linear feet and consists of three notebooks, notebook fragments, and two letters created by African American primitive painter Horace Pippin. The notebooks recount Pippin's World War I experiences, including his being wounded. One of the notebooks is illustrated.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into one series.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Horace Pippin Notebooks and Letters, circa 1920s, 1943; 8 items
-

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

African American artists
African American military personnel
African American painters
Folk art
Painting -- United States
Self-taught artists
World War, 1914-1918

Types of Materials:

Diaries

Names:

Carlen, Robert, 1906-1990

Occupations:

Painters -- Pennsylvania -- Philadelphia

Container Listing

Series 1: Horace Pippin Notebooks and Letters, circa 1920s, 1943

8 Items (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This small collection consists of three notebooks and notebook fragments written by Pippin in the 1920s about his World War I experiences while serving in the 15th New York Infantry and as a corporal in the 369th Colored Infantry Regiment at Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, the Argonne, and elsewhere in France. One of the notebooks is illustrated by Pippin with six pencil and crayon drawings of war scenes. Also found are two letters written by Pippin in 1943 and circa 1943. One of the letters is written to Dear Friends and is entitled "life story of art"; the other is written to dealer Robert Carlen.

Box 1, Folder 1

[Handwritten and Illustrated Notebook entitled, "Horace Pippin's Autobiography, First World War", \(illustrated\), circa 1920s](#)

(62 numbered pages, pages 37-40 have been cut out)

Notes:

Pippin recounts his World War I experiences in detail from the time he left the United States on November 17th, 1917 with the 15th N.Y. Infantry for France. Pippin writes of life in the trenches and dug-outs, night forays and traveling through enemy territory, details of days and nights of battles and getting shelled, gassed, and machine gun fire by the Germans, and his perceptions of fighting alongside French and Algerian soldiers. He also recounts the details of getting shot in the shoulder and right arm, lying in the trench too weak to get up, having a French soldier get shot and fall upon him dead and not being able to move out from under the dead man, getting some bread and water from the dead body, and finally being rescued and moved around in the field until being loaded onto an ambulance and taken to one hospital and being transferred to another one.

Illustrated with six pencil and crayon drawings of marching and battle scenes.

Box 1, Folder 2

[Handwritten Notebook, October 4, 1920](#)

(50 numbered pages)

Notes:

A second handwritten account of Pippin's World War I experiences in France. In this notebook, Pippin recounts arriving in France, the cold and the snow, and his perception of the feelings of the French civilians. He also recounts an intense battle with the Germans, apparently the same battle as in the first notebook, but ending before he is shot.

Box 1, Folder 3

[Handwritten Notebook entitled, "\[t. Mihiel, Heaviest Champagne Argonne, Hear\]", circa 1920](#)

(18 numbered pages)

Notes:

A third handwritten account of Pippin's World War I experiences in France. In this notebook, Pippin again recounts a battle with the Germans in France, most probably the same battle as in the other two notebooks. Note, however, that he spells Argonne as Oregon in this notebook, which differs from the writing on the

cover. In this account, he recalls more conversations with fellow soldiers and orders from his officers. Again, this notebook ends before his injury occurs.

Box 1, Folder 4

[Notebook Fragments, circa 1920](#)

(3 loose pages)

Notes: Handwritten fragments, possibly from another notebook, recalling the same intense World War I battle in France but prefaced with some of his thoughts on war and soldiering.

Box 1, Folder 5

[Letters, circa 1943, 1943](#)

Notes: One letter, circa 1943, is addressed to "My Dear Friends" and begins with "my life story of art. that is my art, and no one el[c]...." wherein Pippin recounts a childhood memory of creating artwork for a Sunday school sale and how the "war of 1917... brought out all of the art in me" and how he paints from it today.

A second letter dated February 1, 1943 is to Robert Carlen, his dealer. Pippin apologizes for Mr. Carlen thinking that he does not treat his friends or Mr. Carlen's friends "right, in my home, if anyone comes in to [see me] art." Pippin will see to it that Mrs. John D. Hamilton is treated as nice as possible. He goes on to say that he wants Carlen to send his Domino game painting to a show so Dr. Albert C. Barnes can see it.

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