



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Bernard J. Reis Papers,
circa 1913-1983, in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Bernard J. Reis papers
Date:	circa 1913-1983
Identifier:	AAA.reisbern
Creator:	Reis, Bernard J.
Extent:	2.1 Linear feet
Language:	English
Summary:	The papers of New York accountant and art collector Bernard J. Reis measure 2.1 linear feet and date from circa 1913 to 1983. The papers document his friendships with artists, his role as accountant for Art of This Century and the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, and executor of the Mark Rothko Estate. Included are biographical and family papers, correspondence, professional files, scrapbooks, printed material, and photographs.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers were donated in 1979 and 1980 by Bernard J. Reis's widow, Rebecca G. Reis.

Related Materials

Also found at the Archives of American Art is an interview of Bernard Reis conducted June 3-10, 1976, by Paul Cummings. Bernard and Rebecca Reis papers, circa 1924-1985, are also located at the Getty Research Institute in California.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and described in a finding aid by Rebecca McCormick in 2017.

Preferred Citation

Bernard J. Reis papers, circa 1913-1983. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical / Historical

Bernard J. Reis (1895-1978) was an accountant and art collector in New York, as well as the executor of Mark Rothko's estate.

Reis was born in New York City, in 1895. He received a degree in Commercial Science from New York University in 1915 and graduated from the New York University School of Law in 1918. He passed the New York State Bar Examination but was unable to complete the required one year clerkship as he was supporting his parents financially, and subsequently became a Certified Public Accountant in 1921.

Reis and his wife, Rebecca, built a collection of art in their home, which they opened for charity tours starting in 1948. During this time, Reis became acquainted with many individuals involved in the art world. He developed friendships with art collector Peggy Guggenheim and artists Marc Chagall and Mark Rothko. Reis served as a director for Art of This Century Films and the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, as well as Guggenheim's personal financial advisor and confidant.

Following the death of Mark Rothko in 1970, Reis was named one of the executors of his estate. The estate was largely managed by the Mark Rothko Foundation, of which Reis was a director. Reis and the other executors entered into an agreement with Marlborough Gallery to sell Rothko's paintings, and in 1971, Mark Rothko's daughter, Kate, accused the estate and gallery of fraudulent practices and sued to release the estate from the sale agreement. The case was not fully resolved until after Reis's death in 1978.

Scope and Contents

The papers of New York accountant and art collector Bernard J. Reis measure 2.1 linear feet and date from circa 1913 to 1983. The papers document his friendships with artists, his role as accountant for Art of This Century and the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation, and executor of the Mark Rothko Estate. Included are biographical and family papers, correspondence, professional files, scrapbooks, printed material, and photographs.

Biographical and family papers includes a biographical essay, a caricature of Bernard Reis by Abe Birnbaum, documents regarding Rebecca Reis's 1963 cookbook and Barbara Reis Poe's art career, as well as memorabilia from tours of the Reis house and art collection.

Correspondence is with family, friends, and artists, such as Marc Chagall, Sir Herbert Read, and Robert Motherwell. Also found is correspondence with art organizations, galleries, and museums, including the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Modern Art.

A small set of professional files include copies of others' correspondence, miscellaneous legal documents and reports, Marlborough Gallery records from Reis's time as a New York Director, and copies of wills drawn up by Reis, including those of Edward Albee, Willem De Kooning, Peggy Guggenheim, Beverly Pepper, Abraham Rattner, Man Ray, and Larry Rivers.

Art of This Century and Peggy Guggenheim Foundation records are comprised of accountant's reports, an architect's essay, papers concerning exhibitions and films, a catalog of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Foundation dissolution documents, meeting minutes, gift agreements, and news clippings. Also included is correspondence between Peggy Guggenheim and Bernard and Rebecca Reis, correspondence between Peggy Guggenheim and her son, Sindbad Vail, and financial correspondence.

Mark Rothko Estate papers include administrative records, financial documents, inventories, sales records, papers concerning the Mary Alice "Mell" Rothko Estate, news clippings, and two scrapbooks. Also found are Mark Rothko's correspondence and estate correspondence. Of note are papers related to the Rothko estate trial.

Printed material consists of exhibition announcements and catalogs, copies of articles by Reis, news and magazine clippings, and printed materials regarding Marc Chagall.

Photographs depict Bernard Reis, Reis with wife Rebecca and friends, the Reis home and collection, and Reis at events. Also found are photographs of Peggy Guggenheim's Palazzo in Venice.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series:

- Series 1: Biographical and Family Papers, circa 1943-1975 (Box 1; 8 folders)
 - Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1935-1979 (Box 1, OV 3; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 3: Professional Files, circa 1947-1975 (Box 1; 9 folders)
 - Series 4: Art of This Century and Peggy Guggenheim Foundation Records, circa 1942-1978 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
 - Series 5: Mark Rothko Estate Papers, circa 1958-1983 (Box 1-2; 0.9 linear feet)
 - Series 6: Printed Material, circa 1913-1978 (Box 2, OV 3; 0.3 linear feet)
 - Series 7: Photographs, circa 1920-1975 (Box 2, OV 3; 0.3 linear feet)
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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:

Accountants
Art -- Collectors and collecting

Types of Materials:

Drawings
Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Albee, Edward, 1928-
Birnbaum, Abe, 1899-1966
Chagall, Marc, 1887-1985
Dallas Museum of Fine Arts
De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997
Guggenheim, Peggy, 1898-1979
Marlborough Gallery
Motherwell, Robert
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)
Peggy Guggenheim Foundation
Pepper, Beverly
Poe, Barbara Reis
Rattner, Abraham
Ray, Man, 1890-1976
Read, Herbert Edward, Sir, 1893-1968
Reis, Rebecca G., 1896-1988
Rivers, Larry, 1925-2002
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970
Rothko, Mary Alice

Vail, Sinbad

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical and Family Papers, circa 1943-1975

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains scattered biographical material and family papers. Found here are a biographical essay written by Reis, a birthday "report" given to him by friends and coworkers, and a caricature of Reis by Abe Birnbaum. Also included are clippings and correspondence associated with Rebecca Reis's 1963 cookbook, *The Unharried Hostess*, clippings and exhibition announcements regarding the art career of their daughter, Barbara Reis Poe, and memorabilia from tours of the Reis house and art collection.

Box 1, Folder 1	Bernard Reis Biographical Information, circa 1970-1975
Box 1, Folder 2	Birthday "Report", 1955
Box 1, Folder 3	Caricature of Bernard Reis by Abe Birnbaum, undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Rebecca Reis Cookbook Clippings, 1963-1965
Box 1, Folder 5	Rebecca Reis Cookbook Correspondence, circa 1963-1965
Box 1, Folder 6	Barbara Reis Poe Clippings, circa 1943-1970
Box 1, Folder 7	Barbara Reis Poe Exhibition Announcements, circa 1945-1976
Box 1, Folder 8	Tours of Reis House and Collection, circa 1948-1978

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1935-1979

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 3)

Arrangement: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by last name. Persons with three or fewer pieces of correspondence are filed in the miscellaneous folders, which are also arranged alphabetically.

Scope and Contents: Reis's correspondence is with friends, colleagues, art associations, museums, and galleries. Also found are letters sent to Rebecca Reis after Bernard's death. Researchers should note that additional letters of significance are located in Art of This Century and Peggy Guggenheim Foundation records, Mark Rothko Estate papers, and the "Letters from Artists" scrapbook.

Of note is correspondence with friends and artists, including Marc Chagall, William Congdon, Philip Guston, Robert Motherwell, and Laurence Vail, as well as other notable members of the art world, such as Sir Herbert Read. This series also contains correspondence from art organizations, art associations, museums, and galleries, including the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Fogg Museum, Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, and Walters Art Gallery.

Box 1, Folder 9	Albee, Edward, 1967
Box 1, Folder 10	Campigli, Massimo, circa 1935-1964
Box 1, Folder 11	Chagall, Ida and Meyer, Franz, circa 1949-1961 Notes: (Oversized item housed in OV 3)
Box 1, Folder 12	Chagall, Marc and Haggard, Virginia, circa 1946-1952
Box 1, Folder 13	Chagall, Marc and Valentina "Vava", 1953-1964
Box 1, Folder 14	Condolence Letters, 1978-1979
Box 1, Folder 15	Congdon, William "Bill", circa 1963-1978
Box 1, Folder 16	Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1950-1961
Box 1, Folder 17	Fogg Art Museum, 1954-1975
Box 1, Folder 18	Guston, Philip, circa 1968
Box 1, Folder 19	Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, 1977
Box 1, Folder 20	Lasker, Mary and Albert, circa 1951-1966
Box 1, Folder 21	Lipchitz, Jacques, circa 1936-1978
Box 1, Folder 22	Pierre Matisse Gallery, 1951
Box 1, Folder 23	Matta, Roberto, circa 1950-1959
Box 1, Folder 24	Motherwell, Robert "Bob", circa 1965

Box 1, Folder 25	The Museum of Modern Art, circa 1950-1970
Box 1, Folder 26	Read, Herbert, circa 1960-1968
Box 1, Folder 27	Sert, Josep Lluís "Jose Luis", circa 1975-1978
Box 1, Folder 28	Vail, Laurence, 1967
Box 1, Folder 29	Van Doesburg, Nelly and Theo, 1951-1952
Box 1, Folder 30	Walters Art Gallery, 1958
Box 1, Folder 31	Whitney Museum of American Art, 1976-1977
Box 1, Folder 32	Miscellaneous Correspondence: A-H, circa 1950-1978 Notes: (Includes Joseph and Jean (Erdman) Campbell)
Box 1, Folder 33	Miscellaneous Correspondence: J-T, circa 1947-1979 Notes: (Includes Paul Jenkins, Frederick J. Kiesler, Franz Kline, Abraham Rattner, Larry Rivers, Peter Selz)
Box 1, Folder 34	Miscellaneous Correspondence: V-Y, circa 1960-1978 Notes: (Includes Gore Vidal)
Oversize 3	Oversize Correspondence, Ida Chagall, 1949 Notes: (Oversized item from Box 1, Folder 11)

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Series 3: Professional Files, circa 1947-1975

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains documentation of Reis's professional career, including copies of Walter De Maria and William Randolph Hearst's correspondence, a file on Cambridge art gallery Kettle's Yard, miscellaneous legal documents and reports, and Marlborough Gallery records from Reis's time as the New York director.

Also found are copies of wills drawn up by Reis. Included are the wills of Edward Albee, Willem de Kooning, Alexander Eliot, Jane Winslow Eliot, Peggy Guggenheim, Adele M. Hatfield, William R.H. Hatfield, Josephine Johnson, Lester Johnson, Ludwig L. Lawrence, Conrad Marca-Relli, Edward Meneeley, Ray Parker, Beverly Pepper, Curtis G. Pepper, James Donald Prendergast, Abraham Rattner, Esther Rattner, Man Ray, Larry Rivers, and Albert Vanderburg.

Box 1, Folder 35	Walter De Maria Letters with Museum of Contemporary Art, 1967-1968
Box 1, Folder 36	William Randolph Hearst Letters to George Hearst, circa 1885
Box 1, Folder 37	Kettle's Yard, 1962-1968
Box 1, Folder 38	Franz Kline Interview and Speech, 1954-1961
Box 1, Folder 39	Legal Documents, circa 1974-1975
Box 1, Folder 40	Marlborough Gallery Records, 1965-1974
Box 1, Folder 41	Report on Lawrence Rubin, 1974
Box 1, Folder 42	Wills, A-P, 1959-1968
Box 1, Folder 43	Wills, R-V, 1947-1970

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Series 4: Art of This Century and Peggy Guggenheim Foundation Records, circa 1942-1978

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series includes documentation of Reis's friendship with Peggy Guggenheim, his involvement with her gallery, Art of This Century, and with the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation. It is comprised of Art of This Century accountant's reports, an essay by Art of This Century architect Frederick J. Kiesler, papers concerning Art of This Century exhibitions and films, a catalog of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Peggy Guggenheim Foundation dissolution documents, foundation meeting minutes, papers concerning the transfer of the foundation's holdings to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, papers referencing gifts to museums, and news and magazine clippings. Also found are correspondence between Peggy Guggenheim and Bernard and Rebecca Reis, correspondence between Peggy Guggenheim and her son, Sindbad Vail, and assorted financial correspondence.

Box 1, Folder 44	Art of This Century Accountants' Reports, 1942-1943
Box 1, Folder 45	Art of This Century Accountants' Reports, 1944-1946
Box 1, Folder 46	Art of This Century Architect's Essay, circa 1942-1947
Box 1, Folder 47	Art of This Century Exhibitions, circa 1942-1947
Box 1, Folder 48	Art of This Century Films, 1948-1952
Box 1, Folder 49	Collection Catalog, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 50	Correspondence, Peggy Guggenheim and Bernard & Rebecca Reis, circa 1947-1951
Box 1, Folder 51	Correspondence, Peggy Guggenheim and Bernard & Rebecca Reis, circa 1951-1958
Box 1, Folder 52	Correspondence, Peggy Guggenheim and Bernard & Rebecca Reis, circa 1959-1976
Box 1, Folder 53	Correspondence, Peggy Guggenheim and Sindbad Vail, circa 1958
Box 1, Folder 54	Financial Correspondence, 1948-1952
Box 1, Folder 55	Foundation Dissolution Documents, 1977
Box 1, Folder 56	Foundation Special Meeting Minutes, 1977
Box 1, Folder 57	Foundation Transfer to Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1969-1978
Box 1, Folder 58	Gifts to Museums, 1953-1960

Box 1, Folder 59

News and Magazine Clippings, circa 1946-1969

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Series 5: Mark Rothko Estate Papers, circa 1958-1983

0.9 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: This series contains incorporation documents, by-laws, meeting minutes, and treasurer's reports for the Mark Rothko Foundation, bills, receipts, contracts, financial reports, inventories, sales records, papers concerning the Mary Alice "Mell" Rothko Estate, medical, insurance, and social security records, tax documents for the estate and Rothko family, news and magazine clippings, and two mixed media scrapbooks. Also found in this series are Mark Rothko's correspondence, correspondence regarding the Rothko Chapel and gift to the Tate Gallery, and general estate correspondence. Of note are papers related to the Rothko trial, including appendix, briefs, the court's ruling, exhibits, injunction opposition and motion to stay documents, memoranda and notes, and a transcript of Rebecca Reis's testimony.

Box 1, Folder 60	Bills and Receipts, 1968-1974
Box 1, Folder 61	Contracts, 1958-1969
Box 1, Folder 62	Mark Rothko Correspondence, circa 1963-1966
Box 1, Folder 63	Rothko Chapel Correspondence, circa 1965-1972 Notes: (Includes letters from Mark Rothko)
Box 1, Folder 64	Tate Gallery Gift Correspondence, 1967-1971 Notes: (Includes letters from Mark Rothko)
Box 1, Folder 65	Estate Correspondence, 1970-1971
Box 1, Folder 66-67	Estate Correspondence, 1972
Box 1, Folder 68	Estate Correspondence, 1973
Box 1, Folder 69	Estate Correspondence, 1974
Box 1, Folder 70	Estate Correspondence, 1974-1975
Box 1, Folder 71	Estate Correspondence, 1976-1978
Box 1, Folder 72	Financial Reports, 1970-1973
Box 1, Folder 73	Financial Reports, 1970-1975
Box 1, Folder 74	Foundation, Incorporation and By-Laws, 1969-1970
Box 1, Folder 75	Foundation, Meeting Minutes and Notes, 1974-1977
Box 1, Folder 76	Foundation, Treasurer's Reports, 1969-1977

Box 1, Folder 77	Interview, Bernard and Rebecca Reis, 1971
Box 1, Folder 78	Inventories, 1970-1974
Box 1, Folder 79	Mary Alice "Mell" Rothko Estate, 1959-1972
Box 1, Folder 80	Medical Records and Insurance, 1968-1970
Box 1, Folder 81	News and Magazine Clippings, circa 1970-1974
Box 2, Folder 1	News and Magazine Clippings, circa 1975-1977
Box 2, Folder 2	Sales Records, circa 1963-1983
Box 2, Folder 3	Scrapbook, Rothko Chapel, 1970-1976
Box 2, Folder 4	Scrapbook, "Letters from Artists", 1969-1972
Box 2, Folder 5	Mark Rothko Social Security, 1968
Box 2, Folder 6	Taxes, Rothko Estate, 1969-1973
Box 2, Folder 7	Taxes, Rothko Estate, 1974
Box 2, Folder 8	Taxes, Rothko Family, 1963
Box 2, Folder 9	Trial Papers, Appendix, 1972
Box 2, Folder 10	Trial Papers, Briefs, 1972-1974
Box 2, Folder 11	Trial Papers, Court's Ruling, 1975
Box 2, Folder 12	Trial Papers, Exhibits, 1972-1974
Box 2, Folder 13	Trial Papers, Injunction Opposition, 1972
Box 2, Folder 14	Trial Papers, Memoranda, circa 1970-1974
Box 2, Folder 15	Trial Papers, Motion to Stay, 1976
Box 2, Folder 16	Trial Papers, Notes, circa 1970-1973
Box 2, Folder 17	Trial Papers, Post-Trial Memorandum, 1975
Box 2, Folder 18	Trial Papers, Rebecca Reis Testimony, 1974

Box 2, Folder 19

Trial Papers, Timelines, circa 1970-1972

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Series 6: Printed Material, circa 1913-1978

0.3 Linear feet (Box 2, OV 3)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of exhibition announcements and catalogs, including a folder of catalogs from Marc Chagall's exhibitions. Also found are copies of articles by Reis, news and magazine clippings, printed materials regarding Marc Chagall, and miscellaneous printed material, such as festival schedules and book excerpts.

Box 2, Folder 20	Exhibition Announcements, 1949-1976
Box 2, Folder 21	Exhibition Catalogs, 1913-1934 Notes: (Oversized item housed in OV 3)
Box 2, Folder 22	Exhibition Catalogs, 1940-1944
Box 2, Folder 23	Exhibition Catalogs, 1946-1951
Box 2, Folder 24	Exhibition Catalogs, 1953-1957
Box 2, Folder 25	Exhibition Catalogs, 1958-1977
Box 2, Folder 26	Exhibition Catalogs, Marc Chagall, 1942-1964
Box 2, Folder 27	The New Republic with Articles by Bernard Reis, 1931-1932
Box 2, Folder 28	News and Magazine Clippings, circa 1929-1964
Box 2, Folder 29	News and Magazine Clippings, circa 1965-1977
Box 2, Folder 30	Printed Material, Marc Chagall, circa 1950-1965
Box 2, Folder 31	Printed Material, Marc Chagall, 1959-1964
Box 2, Folder 32	Printed Material, Marc Chagall, 1964
Box 2, Folder 33	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1929-1978
Oversize 3	Oversize Printed Material, Exhibition Catalog, 1932 Notes: (Oversized item from Box 2, Folder 21)

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Series 7: Photographs, circa 1920-1975

0.3 Linear feet (Box 2-OV 3)

Scope and Contents: Photographs depict Bernard Reis, the Reis home and collection, and Reis with his wife Rebecca and friends, many of whom were well-known figures in the art world. Included are photographs of Reis at art conferences, exhibition openings, and meeting President Lyndon B. Johnson. Of note are photographs of Bernard and Rebecca Reis's trips to Italy and to Peggy Guggenheim's Palazzo in Venice.

Box 2, Folder 34	Bernard Reis, circa 1934-1975
Box 2, Folder 35	Bernard and Rebecca Reis, circa 1920-1970
Box 2, Folder 36	Bernard Reis at Art Conferences, circa 1951
Box 2, Folder 37	Bernard Reis meeting President Lyndon B. Johnson, circa 1963-1969 Notes: (Oversized item housed in OV 3)
Box 2, Folder 38	Bernard and Rebecca Reis at Exhibition Openings, circa 1961-1965 Notes: (Includes Max Ernst, Amédée Ozenfant)
Box 2, Folder 39	Bernard and Rebecca Reis Cookbook Dinner Party, circa 1963 Notes: (Includes Mark Rothko, Theodoros Stamos)
Box 2, Folder 40	Bernard and Rebecca Reis at Peggy Guggenheim's Palazzo in Venice, circa 1954-1968 Notes: (Includes Helen Frankenthaler, Clement Greenberg)
Box 2, Folder 41	Bernard and Rebecca Reis in Italy, 1966 Notes: (Includes Beverly Pepper)
Box 2, Folder 42	Bernard and Rebecca Reis with Philip Guston, 1969
Box 2, Folder 43	Bernard and Rebecca Reis with Robert Motherwell and Helen Frankenthaler, circa 1957-1968
Box 2, Folder 44	Bernard and Rebecca Reis with Theodoros Stamos, circa 1967-1968
Box 2, Folder 45	Bernard and Rebecca Reis with Others, circa 1934-1969 Notes: (Includes Piero Dorazio, Julie Ray, Barbara Reis Poe, Arlette Seligmann, Laurence Vail, Adja Yunkers; Oversized items housed in OV 3)
Box 2, Folder 46	William "Bill" Congdon, circa 1964
Box 2, Folder 47	Miscellaneous Photos of Others, circa 1941-1970 Notes: (Includes Albert Lasker, Jacques Lipchitz, Frank and Susan Lloyd, Beverly Pepper, Kurt Seligmann, Jean Varda)

Box 2, Folder 48	Reis House and Collection, circa 1966 Notes: (Oversized items housed in OV 3)
Box 2, Folder 49	Barbara Reis Poe Artwork, 1965-1968
Box 2, Folder 50	Miscellaneous Photographs, undated
Oversize 3	Oversize Photographs, circa 1963-1969 Notes: (Oversized items from Box 2, Folders 37, 45, and 48)

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