



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Harold and
May Tabak Rosenberg Papers,
circa 1880-1985, bulk 1940s-1970s.

Stephanie Ashley

2018 October 23

Archives of American Art
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Collection Overview | 1 |
| Administrative Information | 1 |
| Arrangement..... | 3 |
| Biographical / Historical..... | 2 |
| Scope and Contents..... | 2 |
| Names and Subjects | 3 |
| Container Listing | 5 |
| Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1930s-circa 1980s..... | 5 |
| Series 2: Letters, 1936-1985..... | 6 |
| Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1940s-1984..... | 8 |
| Series 4: Personal Business Records, circa 1950-1984..... | 11 |
| Series 5: Printed Material, 1918-1982..... | 12 |
| Series 6: Photographs, circa 1880s-circa 1981..... | 13 |

Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Harold and May Tabak Rosenberg papers |
| Date: | circa 1880-1985 (bulk 1940s-1970s) |
| Identifier: | AAA.roseharo |
| Creator: | Rosenberg, Harold, 1906-1978 |
| Extent: | 4 Linear feet |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | The papers of New York author, art critic, and teacher Harold Rosenberg, and writer May Tabak Rosenberg, measure 4.0 linear feet and date from circa 1880-1985, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1940s to the late 1970s. Records primarily document May Rosenberg's writing career and, to a lesser degree, her husband's career, through address books and calendars, letters, writings and notes, scattered business records, printed material, and photographs. Harold Rosenberg is documented most fully in the photographs, which include individual and family portraits, photographs of the Rosenbergs with family and friends, including artists and writers, and photographs taken in Springs, New York, where the Rosenbergs were part of the summer art colony in East Hampton. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated in 1999 via the Ridgway Public Library in Ridgway, Colorado. The collection had come to the library from one of its trustees, an acquaintance of the Rosenbergs.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview with Harold Rosenberg, conducted by Paul Cummings in 1970-1973.

The Getty Research Institute is the primary repository of Harold Rosenberg's papers.

Processing Information

Half of the collection received some minimal processing shortly after receipt. The entire collection was processed and a finding aid was prepared by Stephanie Ashley in 2018.

Preferred Citation

Harold and May Tabak Rosenberg papers, circa 1880-1985, bulk 1940s-1970s. 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.

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Biographical / Historical

Author, critic, and teacher, Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978), was one of the leading New York art intellectuals, and one of the most influential art critics of his generation. Author May Tabak Rosenberg (1910-1993) wrote books, articles, and short stories about artists, writers, and musicians.

May Tabak Rosenberg was born in Manhattan and educated at the University of Chicago. She married Harold Rosenberg in 1932, and the couple had a daughter, Patia, in 1943. In 1944, the Rosenbergs became the first people associated with the New York art scene to purchase property in the East Hampton area of Long Island which grew to become a summer art colony in the years after World War II. Friends Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock bought a house close by to the Rosenberg's Neck Path summer home in Springs, New York, in 1945. May Tabak Rosenberg chose to discontinue her writing after her daughter was born, but she returned to writing short stories and novels in the 1950s. The Long Island artist community provided rich source material for her writing, and her 1960 novel, *But Not For Love*, is thought to include surrogates for Jackson Pollock, Peggy Guggenheim, and Willem and Elaine de Kooning, among others.

May Tabak Rosenberg wrote several articles for the Tamarind Lithography Workshop established by June Wayne in 1960. She was invited to cover Louise Nevelson's fellowship there in 1968.

During the 1950s Harold Rosenberg was influential in bringing attention to the work of the New York Abstract Expressionists including Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, and Arshile Gorky. He was credited with coining the term "Action Painting" to describe their work, stating that what they created was "not a picture but an event." Rosenberg was an art critic for the *New Yorker* from 1966 until his death, commenting on the contemporary art scene. His later criticism revealed his distaste for Pop Art and other art movements of the time.

Harold Rosenberg wrote many books including *The Anxious Object: Art Today and Its Audience* (1964), *Artworks and Packages* (1969), *The De-Definition of Art: Action to Pop and Earthworks* (1972), *Discovering the Present: Three Decades in Art, Culture, and Politics* (1973), and *De Kooning* (1974). In addition to authoring books and articles, Rosenberg lectured at the School for Social Research from 1953 to 1954, and taught at the University of Chicago from 1966 until his death in 1978.

Scope and Contents

The papers of New York author, art critic, and teacher Harold Rosenberg, and writer May Tabak Rosenberg, measure 4.0 linear feet and date from circa 1880-1985, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1940s to the late 1970s. Records primarily document May Rosenberg's writing career and, to a lesser degree, her husband's career, through address books and calendars, letters, writings and notes, scattered business records, printed material, and photographs. Harold Rosenberg is documented most fully in the photographs, which include individual and family portraits, photographs of the Rosenbergs with family and

friends, including artists and writers, and photographs taken in Springs, New York, where the Rosenbergs were part of the summer art colony in East Hampton.

The papers include biographical material consisting of address books, and letters written primarily to May Tabak Rosenberg regarding writing submitted to publishing companies including Russell & Volkening, Inc., MacMillan Publishing Company, and Mc-Graw Hill Book Company. Letters also document Rosenberg's friendship with June Wayne and her involvement, through Wayne, in the Tamarind Lithography Workshop.

Writings and notes consist primarily of manuscript drafts, notes, and published copies of work by May Rosenberg, including articles for *Craft Horizons*, a 1960 novel *But Not For Love*, her 1959 children's book *A Fish Is Not A Pet*, and many other stories, fragments and literary sketches of ideas. The collection also includes a small number of writings by Harold Rosenberg, including seven notebooks and two published articles.

Personal business records are scattered and routine but include a few invoices and records of royalties for both May and Harold Rosenberg, and a will, handwritten by May Rosenberg.

Printed material includes one article each on Harold and May Rosenberg, news clippings on feminism presumably collected by May Rosenberg, and a map of East Hampton which shows the location of the house purchased by the Rosenbergs in Springs, New York, in 1944.

Photographs include multiple portraits of Harold, May, and Patia Rosenberg which date from circa 1930s to the 1980s, many of which were taken by Maurice Berezov. There are also photographs of the Rosenbergs with family and friends including Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner at their home in Springs, and artists Perle Fine, Françoise Gilot, Barnett Newman, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Milton Resnick, and others. There are photos of May Rosenberg and June Wayne in June Wayne's studio, and photos of Louise Nevelson working on lithography at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in 1968.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as six series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1930s-circa 1980s (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Letters, 1936-1985 (0.4 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1940s-1984 (1.6 linear feet; Boxes 1-3)
- Series 4: Personal Business Records, circa 1950-1984 (0.25 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 5: Printed Material, 1918-1982 (0.35 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 6: Photographs, circa 1880s-circa 1981 (1 linear foot; Box 4)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Abstract expressionism
Authors
Women art critics
Women authors
Women educators

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Rosenberg, May Tabek, 1910-1993
Tamarind Lithography Workshop
Wayne, June, 1918-2011

Occupations:

Art critics -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1930s-circa 1980s

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of nine address books and address cards in two Zephyr America Corporation rolodex address holders with addresses of acquaintances, friends, and colleagues of the Rosenbergs. It is not clear if the books and rolodexes belonged to Harold or May Rosenberg, or to both. Also found are several empty annotated envelopes and other enclosures from the collection.

Box 1, Folder 1-4 Address Books, circa 1930s-circa 1980s

Box 1, Folder 5 Addresses in Zephyr America Corp Rolodexes, circa 1950s

Box 1, Folder 6 Collection Enclosures, circa 1950s-circa 1980s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Letters, 1936-1985

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Letters are almost all incoming and are written almost exclusively to May Rosenberg. The bulk of the letters are from publishers regarding writing submitted by May Rosenberg for publication, with Henry Volkening of Russell & Volkening, Inc., being most prominently represented. They reveal details about the market for Rosenberg's work and hence the tastes and sensitivities of audiences at that time.

Also of significance are letters from June Wayne relating to the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Inc., which Wayne established in 1960 with funding from the Ford Foundation. These three folders of letters document May Rosenberg's friendship with Wayne, and her involvement with the workshop. They record Wayne's request that Rosenberg write in a freelance capacity for the organization, as it's occasional "esthetic spokesman," and her request that Rosenberg write about Louise Nevelson's fellowhip, which took place at the workshop in 1968. The letters also document how Rosenberg was invited to appear in a KCET Television segment as a guest of June Wayne at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in 1972. Also found are letters relating to Rosenberg's writing about the workshop published in *Craft Horizons*.

Copies of only a handful of letters written by May Rosenberg which are found in the collection, are housed with Wayne's letters. In addition to providing details about the Tamarind Lithography Workshop, these four letters also reveal some of the opinions of the two correspondents on general matters including art, writing, and feminism. One letter from Rosenberg reveals how she drew on her social experiences in the art world as source material, and delivers an incisive criticism of the "round of boredom" that constituted Rosenberg's Fourth (of July?) experience. She describes introducing newcomers to her friends in the art community and how they quickly come to feel like entitled insiders and begin to patronize her: "I intend to use this material which is very curious—the swift progression from being a social responsibility to being a condescending patronizing insider is a part of the art scene which must be reckoned with. These characters consider themselves the real artists and they no longer need the practicing writer or painters beyond the preliminary stage." Rosenberg's commentary provides witty and razor sharp insights from a writer who moved in the orbit of some of the most successful artists of the time, in addition to the commanding physical and intellectual presence of her art critic and theorist husband.

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| Box 1, Folder 7 | General, circa 1950s-circa 1985 |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | General, 1950s |
| Box 1, Folder 9-10 | General, 1960s |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | General, 1970s |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | General, 1980-1985 |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977-1979 |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | Russell & Volkening, Inc., circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 1, Folder 15-18 | Russell & Volkening, Inc., 1950s |

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| Box 1, Folder 19 | Russell & Volkening, Inc., 1960s |
| Box 1, Folder 20-22 | Wayne, June and Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Inc., 1967-1984 |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | Works Progress Administration, 1936, 1977 |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1940s-1984

1.6 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Arrangement: This series is arranged as four subseries.

- 3.1: Annotated Calendars, 1951-1984
- 3.2: Writings by Harold Rosenberg, circa 1940s-1976
- 3.3: Writings by May Tabak Rosenberg, circa 1950s-circa 1980s
- 3.4: Writings by Others, circa 1950s-1981

3.1: Annotated Calendars, 1951-1984

Scope and Contents: This subseries includes five annotated calendars from 1951, 1958, 1982, 1984 (two calendars), and several pages from a 1974 calendar, which appear to have belonged to May Rosenberg. The calendars contain many annotations related to meetings and events with artists, friends, family, and colleagues.

Box 1, Folder 24-26 Annotated Calendars, 1951-1984

Box 2, Folder 1 Annotated Calendar, 1984

3.2: Writings by Harold Rosenberg, circa 1940s-1976

Scope and Contents: This subseries includes a small number of writings by Harold Rosenberg, primarily on art, including circa three manuscript drafts of essays, seven notebooks, one folder of loose notes, a copy of a 1939 article, and an issue of the publication *Commentary*, containing a submission by Rosenberg on the subject "What is a Liberal? Who is a Conservative?"

Box 2, Folder 2 Manuscript Drafts, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

Box 2, Folder 3-6 Notebooks, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

Box 2, Folder 7 Notes, circa 1950s-circa 1970s

Box 2, Folder 8 Published Article, "Myth and History", 1939

Box 2, Folder 9 Published Article, "What is a Liberal? Who is a Conservative?", 1976

3.3: Writings by May Tabak Rosenberg, circa 1950s-circa 1980s

Scope and Contents: May Tabak Rosenberg's writings and notes form the bulk of this subseries which includes drafts of, and notes for, multiple manuscripts, including articles, short stories, and her novel *But Not For Love*, as well as writings and notes on subjects such as marriage and writer Mary McCarthy, and articles written for the publication *Craft Horizons*. Also found are published copies of *But Not For Love*, and Rosenberg's children's book *A Fish Is Not A Pet*.

Box 2, Folder 10-14 Drafts and Notes, circa 1950s-circa 1970s

Box 2, Folder 15-23 Manuscript Drafts, circa 1950s-circa 1970s

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| Box 2, Folder 24 | Manuscript Draft, "All Anyone Wants is Everything", circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 2, Folder 25-27 | Manuscript Draft, "But Not For Love", circa 1950s |
| Box 2, Folder 28 | Manuscript Draft, "Christmas Book" of the Unit Series, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 2, Folder 29 | Manuscript Drafts for Craft Horizons, 1970 |
| Box 2, Folder 30 | Manuscript Draft of Play, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 2, Folder 31 | Manuscripts, "The Chippy Chasers," "Line Up," and "The Trouble Maker", 1959 |
| Box 2, Folder 32 | Notebooks, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 3, Folder 1-2 | Notebooks, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Notes and Fragments, Marriage, circa 1960s |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Notes and Fragments, Mary McCarthy, circa 1950s-circa 970s |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | Notes, Index Cards, circa 1950s-circa 1980s |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Notes, Miscellaneous, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Outline for Novel, "Freedom", circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Published Book, Manuscript, and Printer's Mark for A Fish Is Not A Pet, 1959 |
| Box 3, Folder 9 | Published Book, But Not For Love, 1960 |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | Published Manuscripts in Craft Horizons, 1970s |

3.4: Writings by Others, circa 1950s-1981

Scope and Contents: Writings by others include typescripts of a speech delivered by Hans Hofmann at Dartmouth College in 1962, a lecture delivered by Lee Hall at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1981, and a 1973 essay with a cover letter asking May Rosenberg to look at her essay, by actress and journalist Gaby Rodgers entitled "Where Have All the Husbands Gone? (A New York Saga of Love and Despair)." Rodgers and her husband, lyricist Jerry Lieber, were fellow summer residents of East Hampton.

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| Box 3, Folder 11 | By Others, circa 1960s-circa 1970s |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | Aristophanes, "The Birds", circa 1950s |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | Hall, Lee, RISD Summer Lecture, 1981 |

Box 3, Folder 14

Silverman, Deborah Leah, 1970

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Personal Business Records, circa 1950-1984

0.25 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: The business records found here are mostly routine but do include a small amount of documentation relating to the administration of Harold Rosenberg's estate, such as a list of royalties for his writings from the Whitney Museum of American Art, a will handwritten by May Rosenberg, and some records relating to royalties for *A Fish Is Not A Pet* from McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Box 3, Folder 15-17 Accounts and Statements, 1970s-1980s

Box 3, Folder 18 Accounts and Statements, 1980-1984

Box 3, Folder 19 Cancelled Checks, 1980-1981

Box 3, Folder 20 Harold Rosenberg Estate, 1980-1981

Box 3, Folder 21 McGraw-Hill Book Company Invoices and Royalties, 1960s

Box 3, Folder 22 Miscellaneous, circa 1950-circa 1980

Box 3, Folder 23 Will, Handwritten by May T. Rosenberg, 1978

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, 1918-1982

0.35 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes a 1956 article about May Rosenberg and the November 1978 issue of *Commentary* containing an article entitled "Remembering Harold Rosenberg" by Seymour Krim. Also found is a folder of announcements and catalogs for exhibitions and events featuring various artists, including Willem de Kooning, Betty Parsons, and Saul Steinberg. There are also news clippings grouped by subject, including feminism, and several booklets and articles sent to Harold Rosenberg and inscribed by the authors.

A circa 1940s map of East Hampton, Long Island, shows properties in the area, including one which is circled in pencil and is presumably the one purchased by the Rosenbergs.

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| Box 3, Folder 24 | About Alice Barber, 1963-1974 |
| Box 3, Folder 25 | About George Bernard Shaw, 1925-1952 |
| Box 3, Folder 26 | About the Rosenbergs, 1956, 1978 |
| Box 3, Folder 27 | Announcements and Catalogs, 1964-1983 |
| Box 3, Folder 28 | Articles and Booklets Inscribed to Harold Rosenberg, 1948-1978 |
| Box 3, Folder 29 | Map of East Hampton, NY, Showing Springs, circa 1940s |
| Box 3, Folder 30 | Miscellaneous, 1946-1982 |
| Box 3, Folder 31 | News Clippings, 1918 |
| Box 3, Folder 32 | News Clippings, circa 1970s-circa 1980s |
| Box 3, Folder 33-34 | News Clippings on Feminism, 1968-1974 |
| Box 3, Folder 35 | Newsletters and Reports, 1966-1976 |
| Box 3, Folder 36 | Reproductions of Artwork, circa 1950s-circa 1960s |
| Box 3, Folder 37 | "Women and the Arts" Packet, circa 1974 |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Photographs, circa 1880s-circa 1981

1 Linear foot (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Photographs include portraits of Harold, May, and Patia Rosenberg, passport and photo booth photos of Harold Rosenberg, and photos of the Rosenbergs with family and friends at events including parties and exhibition openings. Many of the portraits of Harold and May Rosenberg were taken by Maurice Berezov. There is also a portrait of him by Lee Hall.

Photos of artists include nine snapshots which appear to have been taken at Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner's home, and possibly the Rosenberg's home, in Springs, New York. There are two snapshots of Pollock, including one with Patia Rosenberg and his dog, and one snapshot that appears to picture Lee Krasner with another child. Other artists pictured in the photos include Perle Fine, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, and Barnett Newman. There is a 1981 photo of May Rosenberg with Milton Resnick, a photo of June Wayne with Jonas Salk and Françoise Gilot, and photos of Harold Rosenberg receiving an honorary degree from Southampton College in 1976 with Betty Parsons.

Also found are three folders of photos and contact sheets taken during Louise Nevelson's fellowship at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in 1968, showing Nevelson with others working on lithography, and photos of May Rosenberg's visit to June Wayne's studio in 1972 during filming by KCET TV.

There are also thirteen photos of Rosenberg family members, and possibly family friends, dating from circa 1880, which include multiple vintage studio portraits.

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| Box 4, Folder 1 | Harold Rosenberg, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 2 | Harold Rosenberg, circa 1920s-circa 1930s |
| Box 4, Folder 3 | Harold Rosenberg, circa 1920s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 4-6 | Harold Rosenberg, by Maurice Berezov, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 7 | Harold Rosenberg, by Lee Hall, 1972 |
| Box 4, Folder 8 | Harold Rosenberg, Receiving Degree, 1976 |
| Box 4, Folder 9 | Harold Rosenberg with Others, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 10 | Harold Rosenberg with U. S. Navy, circa 1944 |
| Box 4, Folder 11 | May Tabak Rosenberg, circa 1940s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 12 | May Tabak Rosenberg in June Wayne's Studio, 1972 |
| Box 4, Folder 13 | May Tabak Rosenberg with Others, circa 1970s-circa 1981 |
| Box 4, Folder 14 | Rosenbergs with Patia Rosenberg, 1940s-1950s |
| Box 4, Folder 15 | Rosenbergs with Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, 1940s |

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| Box 4, Folder 16 | Rosenbergs with Others, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 17 | Patia Rosenberg, 1940s-1950s |
| Box 4, Folder 18 | Patia Rosenberg, 1940s-1960s |
| Box 4, Folder 19 | Patia Rosenberg, 1940s-1950s |
| Box 4, Folder 20 | Others, 1930s-1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 21-32 | Family and Friends, circa 1880s-circa 1900 |
| Box 4, Folder 33 | Family and Friends, circa 1920-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 34-36 | Tamarind Lithography Workshop, Inc., Louise Nevelson Fellowship, 1968 |
| Box 4, Folder 37 | Artwork, circa 1950s-circa 1970s |
| Box 4, Folder 38 | Artwork Lent to Exhibition Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Paintings from the U.S.S.R., 1973 |
| Box 4, Folder 39 | Copies of Photos from "Bibliografia e Iconografia del Futurismo, Falqui", circa 1959 |
| Box 4, Folder 40 | Miscellaneous, circa 1960s-circa 1970s |

[Return to Table of Contents](#)