A Finding Aid to the *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition records, 1966-2007 in the Archives of American Art

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September 29, 2010
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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art
Title: Harlem on My Mind exhibition records
Identifier: AAA.schoallo
Date: 1966-2007
Extent: 3 Linear feet
0.371 Gigabytes
Creator: Schoener, Allon
Language: English
Summary: The Harlem on My Mind exhibition records measure 3.0 linear feet and 0.371 GB and date from 1966-2007. The records contain exhibition and book files, correspondence, research material, printed and digital material and photographs from the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition. Also included is material documenting additional exhibitions, conferences and events relating to the original exhibition.

Administrative Information

Provenance
The papers were donated to the Archives of American Art in 2009 by Allon Schoener.

Processing Information
The papers were processed by Justin Brancato in 2010. Born-digital materials were processed by Kirsi Ritosalmi-Kisner in 2019 with funding provided by Smithsonian Collection Care and Preservation Fund.

Preferred Citation

Restrictions on Access
Use of original material requires an appointment.

Ownership and Literary Rights
The Harlem on My Mind exhibition records are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.
Biographical Note

Allon Schoener (b.1926) is a writer, cultural historian, consultant, and organizer of exhibitions that focus on topics such as African Americans, Italian Americans, Jewish Americans, and the history of the Lower East Side. His best known exhibition was the highly controversial show "Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America." A graduate of Yale University, he currently lives in Los Angeles.

"Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968" was a 1969 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized by Allon Schoener. The exhibition documented life in Harlem through the use of photographs, film and audio recordings. It was created under the directorship of Thomas Hoving and contributed to the exhibition model commonly known as the "blockbuster" show.

At the time, the exhibition was much reviled, having received harsh criticism from critics, politicians, and the public alike. The initial spark was an essay in the accompanying book by 17-year-old Harlem high school student Candice Van Ellison. The essay contained prejudicial remarks about members of the Jewish, Irish and Puerto Rican communities. The book was quickly removed from the Museum and pulled from bookshelves by the publisher.

Additional criticism focused on several key issues, including the exhibition's multimedia platform; the lack of paintings and sculptures, particularly by African-American artists; and a thematic presentation that used documentary techniques that focused on sociological and cultural issues. Such criticism was compounded by the Harlem Cultural Council's withdrawal of support.

Schoener wrote that the objective of the exhibition was to "demonstrate that the black community in Harlem is a major cultural environment with enormous strength and potential? that this community has made major contributions to the mainstream of American culture in music, theater and literature." The exhibition documented Harlem from its beginnings in the early 20th century as a prosperous white neighborhood, through the influx of southern African-Americans, up to the civil rights movements of the late 1960s.

After the original exhibition ended, Schoener spent the next several decades working intermittently on re-creations of the exhibition, some of which failed to see fruition. Others succeeded, culminating as shows at Columbia University and the I. P. Stanback Museum. Schoener participated in numerous panel discussions, events and conferences, including the Schomburg Center and Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM).

His book, Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America, was reissued after a prolonged struggle to obtain the rights from its original publisher. Editions were published in 1979, 1995 and 2007, with forewords by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and U.S. Congressman Charles B. Rangel.

Scope and Content Note

The "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition records measure 3.0 linear feet and 0.371 GB and date from 1966-2007. The records contain exhibition and book files, correspondence, research material, printed and digital material and photographs from the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition. Also included is material documenting additional exhibitions, conferences and events relating to the original exhibition.

Correspondence, 1967-2007, concerns all aspects of production and coordination of the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition, the public's response to the controversial Candice Van Ellison catalog introduction, letters of support, the 10th Anniversary celebration, and a letter from U.S. Representative Charles B. Rangel.
Exhibition files for the original "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968-1969, include awards, budgets, construction and installation notes, floor plans, an installation log, invoices, notes, photographs, public relations, schedules, research, statistics, printed material and audio relating to the exhibition.


**Arrangement**

Most material is arranged chronologically unless noted otherwise in the series description.

The _Harlem on My Mind_ exhibition records are organized into 6 series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1967-2007 (Box 1; 0.4 linear feet)
- Series 2: Exhibition Files, _Harlem on My Mind_, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1967-1969 (Box 1; 0.9 linear feet, ER01; 0.371 GB)
- Series 3: _Harlem on My Mind_ Re-creation, 1978-2007 (Box 1-2; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 4: _Harlem on My Mind_ Book, 1967-2007 (Box 2; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 5: Conferences and Events, 1978-2007 (Box 2-3; 0.8 linear feet)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1968-2007 (Box 3; 0.3 linear feet)

**Names and Subject Terms**

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

Subjects:
- Exhibitions

Types of Materials:
- Awards
- Notes
- Photographs
- Scrapbooks
Sound recordings

Names:
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)
Rangel, Charles B.
Van Ellison, Candace

Occupations:
Authors
Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1967-2007

(Box 1; 0.4 linear feet)

Allon Schoener’s correspondence includes all aspects of production and coordination of the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition, including managerial, procedural and curatorial issues. Correspondence also documents the public’s response to the controversial Candice Van Ellison catalog introduction and includes letters of support for the exhibition. Notable correspondents include photographer Todd Webb and Thomas Hoving, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; as well as correspondence from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York State Council on the Arts, Library of Congress, Life Magazine, and Underwood and Underwood News Photos, Inc. Also included are memoranda from Metropolitan Museum of Art and New York State Council on the Arts, and a letter of congratulations from U.S. Representative Charles B. Rangel, author of the foreword to the 2007 edition of Harlem on My Mind.

Box 1, Folder 1-3  General, 1967-1969  
(3 folders)

Box 1, Folder 4  In Response to Candice Van Ellison’s Introduction, 1969

Box 1, Folder 5  In Support of Exhibition, 1969  
(photocopies)

Box 1, Folder 6  Tenth Anniversary of Exhibition, 1978-1979

Box 1, Folder 7  Susan Cahan, 2001

Box 1, Folder 8  Stephen Dubin, 1998-1999

Box 1, Folder 9  George Magazine, 1998-1999,

Box 1, Folder 10  Charles B. Rangel, 2007

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0.371 Gigabytes (ER01)  
(Box 1; 0.9 linear feet)

Exhibition files for the original "Harlem on My Mind" exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1968-1969, document awards, budgets, construction and installation notes, floor plans, installation logs, interview and photographic topics, invoices, notes, photographs, progress reports, public relations schedules, research, scheduling, slide projections, sound script, statistics, titles, printed material and audio for exhibition.

The file on the exhibition's budget includes correspondence, budget reports, lists of materials and resources, and notes for the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 1969 exhibition.

Photographs include images that were either used or considered for the 1969 exhibition, as well as oversized contact sheets of the exhibition's installation.

Invoices are filed numerically, using Schoener's numbering system.

Box 1, Folder 11  
Award undated

Box 1, Folder 12  
Budget, 1967-1969

Box 1, Folder 13  
Closed Circuit Television Facility, 1968

Box 1, Folder 14  
Community Advisory Committee, 1968

Box 1, Folder 15  
Construction and Installation Notes, 1968-1969

Box 1, Folder 16  
Floor Plan, 1968  
(oversized material housed in OV 6)

Box 1, Folder 17  
Installation Log, 1969

Box 1, Folder 18  
Interview and Photographic Topics, 1968

Box 1, Folder 19  
Invoices, 1968-1969  
(original collation retained)

Box 1, Folder 20  
Notes, undated

Box 1, Folder 21  
Photograph and Slide List, 1968

Box 1, Folder 22  
Photographs, undated

Box 1, Folder 23  
Installation Photographs, undated  
(oversized material housed in Box 5)
Box 1, Folder 24  Photography Research, 1967-1968

Box 1, Folder 25-26  Harlem on My Mind Exhibition, 1968-1969
(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 27  Bill Miles Notebooks, undated

Box 1, Folder 28  New York Public Library, undated

Box 1, Folder 29  Progress Report, 1968

Box 1, Folder 30  Public Relations Schedule, 1968

Box 1, Folder 31  Research

Box 1, Folder 32  Historical Note and Chronology, undated

Box 1, Folder 33  Printed Material, Harlem: A Study in Depth, undated

Box 1, Folder 34  Scheduling, 1968

Box 1, Folder 35  Slide Projections, 1968

Box 1, Folder 36  Sound Script, 1968

Box 1, Folder 37  Statistics, 1968

Box 1, Folder 38  Titles, 1968

Box 1, Folder 39  Printed Material

Box 1, Folder 40  Poster for "Harlem on My Mind" Exhibition, undated

Box 1, Folder 41  Audio for Exhibition, undated
(cassette tape and 33 1/3 rpm vinyl record; oversized material housed in Box 5)
Includes born-digital records, see ER01.
Folder ER01

Audio for Exhibition (Undated), Digital Audio Recording, 2019
0.371 Gigabytes (Two computer files)

Box 5, Folder

Installation Photographs, 1969

Box 5, Folder

Audio for Exhibition, undated
(33 1/3 rpm vinyl record)

Oversize 6, Folder

Floor Plan, 1968

(Box 1-2; 0.3 linear feet)


The correspondence concerns various versions of planned re-creations of "Harlem on My Mind," some of which never came to fruition.

Box 1, Folder 42-44  Correspondence, 1978-1995  
(3 folders)

Box 2, Folder 1-2  Correspondence, 1995-1996, undated  
(2 folders)

Box 2, Folder 3  Project Outline for New Exhibition, 1995, undated

Box 2, Folder 4  Harlem: USA/International Traveling Exhibition and Cultural Festival, 1985-1987

Box 2, Folder 5  Columbia University Exhibition, 2006-2007

Box 2, Folder 6  I. P. Stanback Museum Exhibition, 2006-2007

Box 2, Folder 7  Photography List, undated
Series 4: *Harlem on My Mind* Book, 1967-2007,

*Box 2; 0.3 linear feet*

*Harlem on My Mind* book files consist of correspondence and documents including: New Press, invoices, outline, payments, permissions, royalty statements, notes and writings. Correspondence documents the challenges of publishing several editions with different publishers over three decades, and includes book contracts from Random House and Dell Publishing (Delacorte Press). There is correspondence with Random House and Grove Press regarding disputed ownership rights to *Harlem on My Mind*. Among the notable correspondents are Thomas Hoving, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and photographer James Van Der Zee, known for his portraits of African-American New Yorkers.

- **Box 2, Folder** Correspondence
- Box 2, Folder 8-9 General, 1967-1999, undated
- Box 2, Folder 10 William J. Clinton, 2002
- Box 2, Folder 11 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., 1993-1995
- Box 2, Folder 12 New Press, 1993-2007
- Box 2, Folder 13 Invoices, 1968-1969
- Box 2, Folder 14 Outline, undated
- Box 2, Folder 15 Payments, undated
- Box 2, Folder 16-17 Permissions and Reproduction Rights, 1968-1979, undated *(2 folders; oversized material housed in Box 5)*
- Box 2, Folder 18 Royalty Statements, 1969-1982
- **Box 2, Folder** Notes
- Box 2, Folder 19 Budget, undated
- Box 2, Folder 20 Chronology of African-American History, undated
- Box 2, Folder 21 Miscellaneous, 1977-1978
- **Box 2, Folder** Writings
- Box 2, Folder 22 Introduction Statements, 1969
- Box 2, Folder 23 Forewords and Introduction, 1995, undated
Box 2, Folder 24  
*From Pariah to Hero* by Allon Schoener, 2007

Box 5, Folder  
Permissions and Reproduction Rights, 1968-1979, undated

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Series 5: Conferences and Events, 1978-2007,

(Box 2-3; 0.8 linear feet)


Box 2, Folder 25  *Harlem: The Last Ten Years*, International Center of Photography, 1978-1979

Box 2, Folder  Post Modernism Conference, Brooklyn Academy of Music

Box 2, Folder 26-27  Correspondence, 1985-1988

(2 folders)

Box 2, Folder 28  Program Committee, 1985-1987

Box 2, Folder 29  Proposal and Outline, 1985-1986


Box 2, Folder 31  Floor Plans, 1986

(oversized material housed in OV 6)

Box 2, Folder  Writings

Box 2, Folder 32  *Impasse Post-Moderne et Transition Post-Media*, undated

Box 2, Folder 33  Une Critique de l'Exposition *Les Immatériaux*,", undated

Box 2, Folder 34  Printed Material, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, 1985-1987

Box 2, Folder 35  Photographs, Polaroids of Theater, undated

Box 2, Folder  Global Cities Event

Box 2, Folder 36  Correspondence, 1985-1992

Box 2, Folder 37  Proposal, 1987-1988

Box 2, Folder 38  Budget, 1990

Box 2, Folder 39  Notes and Printed Material, undated
Box 3, Folder 1-2  Schomburg Conference, 1993-1999, undated
Box 3, Folder 3  A Walk Through Harlem, Schomburg Center, 1999
Box 3, Folder 4  The (Un)making of the Black Cultural Mecca, The New School, 2003
Box 3, Folder 5  "Harlem Displaced" and "Harlem in Our Eyes," Steven L. Newman Real Estate Institute, 1999-2006
Box 3, Folder 6  "Harlem Then and Now," Schomburg Center, 2007
Oversize 6, Folder  Post Modernism Conference, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Floor Plans, 1986

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(Box 3; 0.3 linear feet)

Printed material includes newspaper and magazine clippings about the original exhibition and its impact over the years, as well as material researched by Schoener. Also found are three editions of *Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1968* (1979, 1995 and 2007), and a book jacket for the 1968 edition.


Box 4, Folder   Newspapers and Magazine Clippings

Box 4, Folder 1   *Harlem on My Mind*, circa 1967-2007

Box 4, Folder 2   Research, circa 1966-1993

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