



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Mary Shaffer Papers, 1969-2002, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

January, 2003

Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	2
Arrangement.....	3
Names and Subjects .....	3
Container Listing .....	4
Series 1: Correspondence, 1973-1998, undated.....	4
Series 2: Subject Files, 1969-1997, undated.....	5
Series 3: Center-Light Project, 1985-1993.....	8
Series 4: Printed Material, 1973-2002, undated.....	10
Series 5: Photographs, circa 1970-1990.....	11

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Mary Shaffer papers
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.shafmary
<b>Date:</b>	1969-2002
<b>Creator:</b>	Shaffer, Mary
<b>Extent:</b>	4.2 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of internationally renowned glass artist and sculptor, Mary Shaffer, measure 4.2 linear feet and date from 1969 to 2002. Through correspondence, subject files, printed material and photographs the collection provides an overview of many aspects of Shaffer's career, including commissions, exhibitions, her teaching appointments, and the day-to-day administration of her affairs.

---

## Administrative Information

### Provenance

The collection was donated to the Archives of American Art by Mary Shaffer in 2002.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed by Stephanie Ashley in December 2002 and January 2003 with funding provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

### Preferred Citation

Mary Shaffer papers, 1969-2002. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment.

### Terms of Use

The Archives of American Art makes its archival collections available for non-commercial, educational and personal use unless restricted by copyright and/or donor restrictions, including but not limited to access and publication restrictions. AAA makes no representations concerning such rights and restrictions and it is the user's responsibility to determine whether rights or restrictions exist and to obtain any necessary permission to access, use, reproduce and publish the collections. Please refer to the [Smithsonian's Terms of Use](#) for additional information.

---

## Biographical Note

Sculptor and glass artist Mary Shaffer was born in Walterboro, South Carolina, in 1947. As a child she lived in South America and her first language was Spanish. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design where she studied illustration and minored in painting. Having a mother who believed strongly in the value of travel as education, she also attended the Ecole d'Humanite in Goldern, Switzerland, for several years.

Shaffer is recognized worldwide as one of the founding artists of the American Studio Glass Movement. In the early 1970s she adapted an auto industry technique for shaping windshield glass into a "mid-air slumping," process which allowed her to move glass in a particular way as it was heated. She then began mixing glass and metal tools, casting, dipping and slumping glass from objects found in flea markets and junk yards, and innovatively extending her materials to include "light, bronze, steel, stone and glass, water and sound."

In the 1970s and 1980s Shaffer taught at the Rhode Island School of Design, Wellesley College, and New York University where she was Director of the Crafts Program in the Department of Art and Art Education. She also managed the Art Center at the University of Maryland in the 1980s. From 1975 on she exhibited her work at O.K. Harris Gallery in New York (a gallery primarily devoted to painting and non craft sculpture), and has also shown in glass-specific or craft venues such as Habatat Galleries in Michigan and Boca Raton, Florida, Hellery Gallery in New York, and Anne O'Brien Gallery in Washington, DC. In 1992 Shaffer completed the installation of her largest sculpture to date, *Center-Light*, a luminous column of glass and bronze in the three-story open stairwell of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, a building designed by architects Cesare Pelli and Associates.

Shaffer's work can be found in the collections of nearly twenty major museums worldwide including the American Craft Museum, the Corning Glass Museum, the Kyoto Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Decorative Arts in Lausanne, Switzerland, and the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution. She has received numerous honors and awards for her work, and has been honored by the American Craft Museum as a Visionary.

Shaffer moved to Marfa, Texas, in 2001 after having been a long-time resident of Bethesda, Maryland, and having studios in Maryland and, later, New York.

---

## Scope and Content Note

The papers of internationally renowned glass artist and sculptor, Mary Shaffer, measure 4.2 linear feet and date from 1969 to 2002. Through correspondence, subject files, printed material and photographs the collection provides an overview of many aspects of Shaffer's career, including commissions, exhibitions, her teaching appointments, and the day-to-day administration of her affairs.

Correspondence files (Series 1) cross-referenced with records organized by subject (Series 2) provide insight into Shaffer's artistic aspirations and techniques, and represent a good overview of Shaffer's important contribution to the American Studio Glass Movement. These two series document her interaction with galleries, museums, and individual clients, her work as an educator, and her participation in glass and sculpture-related conferences and programs both at home and abroad. The collection provides solid documentation of specific methods used by Shaffer in her work, particularly in Series 3: *Center-Light Project*, which details her choice and designs for glass notching tubes, plate glass, fiber optics, and other materials. Additional commissions and techniques are documented in Series 1 and 2.

Series 4: Printed Material provides a good overview of the progress of Shaffer's career and an understanding of the significance of her work.

---

## Arrangement

In general, files are arranged either chronologically or alphabetically by subject. Within files material is generally arranged chronologically. Every effort was made to retain Shaffer's original arrangement as it provided context for the records, but some re-arrangement of unfiled material and re-naming of subject headings for clarification was necessary during processing. The collection is arranged as five series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1973-1998, undated (box 1, OV 5, 0.8 linear ft.)
- Series 2: Subject Files, 1969-1997, undated (box 1-3, OV 5, 1.5 linear ft.)
- Series 3: *Center-Light* Project, 1985-1993 (box 3, OV 5, 0.7 linear ft.)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1973-2002, undated (box 4, OV 5-6, 0.8 linear ft.)
- Series 5: Photographs, circa 1970-1990 (box 4, 3 folders)

---

## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Study and teaching  
Glass art -- United States -- 20th century  
Glass sculpture  
Sculptors  
Women sculptors

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America

Occupations:

Glass artists

---

## Container Listing

### Series 1: Correspondence, 1973-1998, undated

(box 1, OV 5, 0.8 linear ft.)

**Scope and Contents:** This series primarily contains Shaffer's outgoing correspondence, the bulk of which dates from 1990-1993, when Shaffer maintained files chronologically and by subject. The series also contains both incoming and outgoing correspondence dating from 1973 to 1998.

The material documents Shaffer's day-to-day management of her affairs and includes administrative records, routine inquiries and responses to requests for information about her work, in addition to information about specific commissions and sales, such as her *Hanging Series* for Iowa City Hospitals, her commission for the Honolulu Police Headquarters, and her relationship with Habatat Galleries in the early 1990s. Some of Shaffer's letters contain preliminary sketches of planned work. Researchers should be aware that this series should be checked for additional information on any subject in Series 2: Subject Files.

**Arrangement:** The bulk of the correspondence is arranged chronologically. There are also several folders of correspondence organized by subject and arranged in chronological order within folders.

Box 1, Folder 1-26	Correspondence, 1973-1998, undated
Box 1, Folder 27	Correspondence, Europe, 1990-1992
Box 1, Folder 28	Correspondence, Habatat Galleries, Inc., 1990-1992
Box 1, Folder 29	Correspondence, Honolulu Police Headquarters, Hawaii, Pukana-Wai (see also OV 5), 1989-1992
Box 1, Folder 30	Correspondence, Iowa City Hospital Project, 1991-1993
Box 1, Folder 31	Correspondence, Personal, 1980, undated
Box OV 5	Oversized Material from Series 1

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Series 2: Subject Files, 1969-1997, undated

(box 1-3, OV 5, 1.4 linear ft.)

**Scope and Contents:** This series contains records relating to many aspects of Shaffer's career which are organized by subject, rather than as a chronological file. The series documents three commissions undertaken by Shaffer; exhibitions in which she participated throughout the 1980s and 1990s; inventory lists of artwork, slides and articles written about her; grant and job applications she pursued; teaching appointments including student evaluations; and her design for the Sara Lee Frontrunner Awards. The series also contains several articles written by and about Shaffer, notes and notebooks, plans and sketches for various projects, résumés, a transcript of an interview with Shaffer, and miscellany.

Many of the folders, such as that documenting Shaffer's commission for Huntington Galleries, include sketches in addition to those found in the folder entitled "Plans and Sketches." One folder of material on Shaffer's Czechoslovakian trip, which she recounted in an article for *Craft International* (found here) includes an illustrated letter from E. Eishih and a print by J. Brychtova and S. Libensky.

**Arrangement:** Files are arranged alphabetically by subject. Material within each folder is generally chronological.

Box 1, Folder 32	Art and Craft Bibliography, undated
Box 1, Folder 33	Articles About Shaffer, Drafts, 1997, undated
Box 1, Folder 34	Articles by Shaffer, 1977-1979, undated
Box 1, Folder 35	Calendar, 1992
Box 1, Folder 36	Class Assignments, Notes and Required Texts, circa 1976-1980
Box 2, Folder 1	Commission for Ron Abramson, 1989
Box 2, Folder 2	Commission for Huntington Galleries, Water-Way (see also OV 5), 1981-1983
Box 2, Folder 3	Commission for Anna and Joseph Mendel, 1991-1992
Box 2, Folder 4	Consignment Records, 1992-1994
Box 2, Folder 5	Contract, Oliver Carr Company, 1987-1989
Box 2, Folder 6	Corning Museum of Glass, 1978-1980
Box 2, Folder 7	Czechoslovakian Glass Work, 1980-1984
Box 2, Folder 8	Czechoslovakian Trip, 1979-circa 1983
Box 2, Folder 9	Damaged Artwork, Claims Information, 1987-1990
Box 2, Folder 10	Exhibition, American Craft Museum, Point of View Sculpture, 1993

Box 2, Folder 11	Exhibition, Exposition Internationale de Verre Contemporain, 1991
Box 2, Folder 12	Exhibition, Habatat Galleries, Aspen, 1994
Box 2, Folder 13	Exhibition, Hadler/Rodriguez Galleries, 1979-1980
Box 2, Folder 14	Exhibition, Honolulu Academy of Arts, 1980-1981
Box 2, Folder 15-16	Exhibitions, 1989-1997
Box 2, Folder 17	Film on Glass Artists, 1980-circa 1984
Box 2, Folder 18-19	Grant Applications, 1971-1994
Box 2, Folder 20	Grant, DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, 1986-1987
Box 2, Folder 21	Insurance Records, 1990-1992
Box 2, Folder 22	Inventory List, circa 1997
Box 2, Folder 23	Inventory Lists, Articles and Postcards, circa 1992, 1995
Box 2, Folder 24	Inventory Lists, Slides, 1996
Box 2, Folder 25	Kunthaus Am Museum, Carola Van Ham, 1987-1989
Box 2, Folder 26-27	Letters of Recommendation and Job Applications, 1975-1987
Box 2, Folder 28	Letters of Recommendation Given By Shaffer, 1983, 1991, undated
Box 2, Folder 29-30	Mailing Lists and Business Cards, circa 1980s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 31	Master's Thesis and Notes, 1984-1986
Box 2, Folder 32	New York University, 1980-1982
Box 2, Folder 33	New York University, Course Material, 1980-1982
Box 2, Folder 34	New York University, Student Evaluations, 1980-1981
Box 2, Folder 35	Notebooks, undated
Box 2, Folder 36	Notes, circa 1970s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 37	Other Artists, circa 1983-1990, undated
Box 2, Folder 38	Plans and Sketches (see also OV 5), circa 1970s-1990s



Box 2, Folder 39	Press Releases, circa 1970s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 40	Proposal, South Carolina History Center, 1996-1997
Box 2, Folder 41	Résumés, circa 1978-1997
Box 2, Folder 42-43	Sales Records, 1986-1995
Box 2, Folder 44-45	Sara Lee Frontrunner Awards, 1969, 1981-1996, undated
Box 2, Folder 46-47	Sara Lee Frontrunner Awards, Programs, 1989-1996
Box 2, Folder 48	Shipping Records, 1982-1994
Box 3, Folder 1	Student Publicity, 1980-1983
Box 3, Folder 2	Tax Records, 1987, 1991
Box 3, Folder 3	Transcript of Interview with Shaffer, Karen Chambers, and Kip Eagan, 1994
Box 3, Folder 4	University of Maryland Art Center, 1986-1987, 1994
Box 3, Folder 5	Wellesley College, 1979-1980
Box 3, Folder 6	Wellesley College, Student Evaluations, 1979-1980
Box 3, Folder 7	What Cheer Arts, Inc., Publicity Material, 1972-1976
Box 3, Folder 8	What Cheer Arts, Inc., Bills and Receipts, 1974-1978
Box OV 5	Oversized Material from Series 2

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

**Series 3: *Center-Light* Project, 1985-1993***(box 3, OV 5, 0.7 linear ft.)*

**Scope and Contents:** This series documents Shaffer's project to build and install a sixty-foot "tower" of tubular glass in the three-story stairwell of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center (PAC) in Charlotte, North Carolina. The entire process, from Shaffer's selection for the commission, to installation of the sculpture is recorded here in correspondence with project personnel and material suppliers and fabricators, notes of meetings, publicity material including artist statements on the work, architectural plans of the PAC, and Shaffer's sketches and designs. The series documents details of the installation such as how the sculpture was suspended from the ceiling with stainless steel rods and lit from within by fiber optics.

At the end of the project, Shaffer took legal action against the PAC due to their failure to pay her the final sum due under the contract. Records of this action are also included here.

Box 3, Folder 9	Background on Charlotte, Printed Material, 1985-1990
Box 3, Folder 10	Background on Charlotte, Notes on Contacts, 1988-1990
Box 3, Folder 11-12	Baker Metal Products, Inc., 1991-1992
Box 3, Folder 13	Bills and Budget, 1990-1992
Box 3, Folder 14	City Council Material, 1988-1989
Box 3, Folder 15	Conversation Log, 1989-1991
Box 3, Folder 16-22	Correspondence, 1988-1993
Box 3, Folder 23-24	Glass and Notching Tubes, 1991-1992
Box 3, Folder 25	Lawsuit, 1990-1993
Box 3, Folder 26	Meeting Notes, 1991
Box 3, Folder 27	Middleton McMillan Architects, Carole Hoefener, 1990-1991
Box 3, Folder 28	Notes, circa 1990-1993
Box 3, Folder 29	Optics, 1991-1992
Box 3, Folder 30	Orders and Specifications for Title of Sculpture, 1992
Box 3, Folder 31-32	Plans and Sketches (see also OV 5), circa 1990-1992
Box 3, Folder 33	Plate Glass, 1990-1992
Box 3, Folder 34	Press Releases, 1992-1993

Box 3, Folder 35	Printed Material, Material Resources, circa 1980s
Box 3, Folder 36	Publicity, circa 1990-1992
Box 3, Folder 37	Shipping and Installation of Sculpture, 1992
Box OV 5	Oversized Material from Series 3

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*

## Series 4: Printed Material, 1973-2002, undated

*(box 4, OV 5-6, 0.8 linear ft.)*

Scope and Contents: This series contains exhibition announcements and catalogs for some of Shaffer's solo and group exhibitions, news clippings about Shaffer and others, and publications in which Shaffer and her work are featured, including a copy of a hard-cover book *Glass: State of the Art 1984* (Elliot Johnston Publishers, 1984), and magazines such as *American Craft*.

Box 4	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs
Box 4, Folder 1-6	Group Exhibitions Featuring Shaffer, 1973-1998 (See also OV 5-6)
Box 4, Folder 7	Other Artists (see also OV 6), 1978-1994, undated
Box 4, Folder 8-10	Shaffer Exhibitions, 1976-2002, undated (See also OV 5-6)
Box 4, Folder 11-12	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1978-1997, undated
Box 4, Folder 13-14	News Clippings About Shaffer, 1975-2001
Box 4, Folder 15	News Clippings About Other Artists, 1975-1983
Box 4, Folder 16-21	Publications Featuring Shaffer, 1979-2001 (See also OV 6)
Box 4, Folder 22	Publicity Postcards, Shaffer and Other Artists, circa 1975-1999
Box OV 5	Oversized Exhibition Announcements from Box 4, 1974-1982
Box OV 6	Oversized Exhibition Announcements and Publications from Box 4, 1976-2001, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Series 5: Photographs, circa 1970-1990

*(box 4, 3 folders)*

Scope and Contents: This small series contains two folders of photographs of Shaffer's artwork and four photographs of Shaffer attending various events. One photograph shows Shaffer talking with Elizabeth Dole at the Sara Lee Frontrunner Awards lunch in 1990. Lena Horne can be seen in the background.

Box 4, Folder 23-24 Photographs of Artwork, circa 1970s-1980s

Box 4, Folder 25 Photographs of Shaffer, 1986-1990

*[Return to Table of Contents](#)*