



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Benjamin K. Smith papers
relating to O'Brien Galleries

Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
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<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Benjamin K. Smith papers relating to O'Brien Galleries
Date:	1912-1941
Identifier:	AAA.smitbenj
Creator:	Smith, Benjamin K., 1872-1973
Extent:	1 Item (partial microfilm reel)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated by Barton Smith, 1986, son of Benjamin K. Smith (1872-1973), was an employee of the gallery from 1912 to 1922 prior to opening his own art appraisal business.

Available Formats

35mm microfilm reels 4065 & 4181 available at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center. Microfilmed materials must be consulted on microfilm. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Art gallery; Chicago, Ill. and Scottsdale, Az. Chicago's first art gallery and one of the oldest family owned and operated gallery in the United States. It opened in 1855 as a frame shop, offering a variety of services to both artists and collectors. It was called by several names, including O'Brien's Art Emporium, O'Brien Art Galleries, O'Brien Galleries, House of O'Brien, and M. O'Brien & Sons. The gallery remained in Chicago until 1941, closed during the war, and resumed operation in Scottsdale, Arizona in the 1950s. Three generations of O'Briens (Martin, William, and William Jr.) ran the gallery before it moved to Arizona; all were committed to bringing culture and the visual arts to Chicago.

Scope and Contents

Papers kept by Benjamin K. Smith, an employee of the O'Brien Galleries (1912-1922), including: handwritten lists concerning paintings from the Samuel Nickerson collection on consignment from the Chicago Art Institute (1920-1921) and furniture bought for the O'Brien Galleries (photographs of furniture microfilmed on reel 4181); a December 1912 issue of ART, a monthly magazine published by the Galleries; sales catalogs and announcements for the O'Brien Art Galleries, the House of O'Brien, and M. O'Brien & Sons; a 1922

exhibition announcement for paintings by Helen West Heller at the Walden Book Shop with pencil sketches of a table "Spanish early 17th cent." on its reverse; a newspaper advertisement and an article (1941) "Gallery Fading from Picture as Art Declines in Chicago."

Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Drawings

Names:

Heller, Helen West, d. 1955 -- Exhibitions
House of O'Brien
M. O'Brien & Son
Nickerson, Samuel Mayo, 1830-1909 -- Art collections
O'Brien Art Galleries
O'Brien Galleries (Chicago, Ill.)
O'Brien's Art Emporium
O'Brien, Martin, 1834-1917
O'Brien, William Vincent, 1859-1952
O'Brien, William Vincent, 1902-1972

Functions:

Art galleries, Commercial -- Illinois