



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Harry Sternberg Papers, 1927-2000, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

Funding for the processing of this collection was
provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Harry Sternberg papers
Date:	1927-2000
Identifier:	AAA.sterharr
Creator:	Sternberg, Harry, 1904-2001
Extent:	3.4 Linear feet 0.553 Gigabytes
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of New York City and California painter, printmaker, and teacher Harry Sternberg date from 1927 to 2000 and measure 3.4 linear feet and 0.553 GB. The collection documents Sternberg's career as an artist and art instructor through scattered biographical material, correspondence with friends, artists, collectors, curators, art organizations, universities, and galleries, writings by Sternberg and others, exhibition catalogs and announcements, news clippings, and other printed and digital material. Also found are photographs of Sternberg and his artwork, two sketchbooks and three loose drawings by Sternberg, audio visual recordings, and one scrapbook.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Harry Sternberg papers were donated by Sternberg in several installments from 1967 to 2001.

Related Material

Also found in the Archives of American Art are the May Konheim papers concerning Harry Sternberg, 1934-1981, and an oral history interview of Harry Sternberg, conducted March 19, 1999, October 8, 1999, and January 7, 2000, by Sally Yard for the Archives of American Art

Processing Information

Portions of the collection received a preliminary level of processing at some point after donation. Portions of the papers were microfilmed on reels D339, 138, and 146; later donations were not microfilmed. The microfilm reels are no longer in circulation as they do not represent the entire collection. All accretions were integrated and fully processed, arranged, and described by Erin Corley in 2008 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Born-digital materials were processed by Kirsi Ritosalmi-Kisner in 2019 with funding provided by Smithsonian Collection Care and Preservation Fund.

Preferred Citation

Harry Sternberg papers, 1927-2008. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Harry Sternberg (1904-2001) was a New York painter, muralist, printmaker, etcher, teacher, and political activist who relocated to California in 1957.

Harry Sternberg was born in 1904 in the Lower East Side of New York City and grew up in Brooklyn. As a child he attended his school art club where he met and became lifelong friends with artists Peter Blume and Philip Reisman. He took free Saturday art classes at the Brooklyn Museum of Art for two years and attended the Art Students League part time from 1922 to 1927 where he studied with George Bridgman. In 1926 he shared a studio with Philip Reisman where they received private instruction in etching from Harry Wickey. Sternberg began exhibiting his etchings and intermittently had drawings published in *New Masses*, a prominent American Marxist publication. In the late 1920s he became friends with Hudson Walker who also became a major collector of his work. In 1933 Sternberg was hired as instructor of etching, lithography, and composition at the Art Students League and continued teaching there for the next 33 years. Also around this time he became politically active in artist rights organizations, serving on the planning committee to create the American Artists' Congress and later serving as an active member of the Artists Equity Association. In 1935 he became the technical advisor of the Graphic Art Division of the Federal Art Project. From 1937 to 1939 he completed three federal mural commissions. His first mural *Carrying the Mail* was created for the Sellersville, Pennsylvania post office in 1937. His most famous mural *Chicago: Epoch of a Great City* was painted for the Lakeview post office in Chicago. It depicts the history of the city and its workers, particularly life for the workers in Chicago's stockyards and steel mills.

During the 1940s Sternberg remained very active in arts organizations, as one of the founders of the National Serigraph Society and a member of the Committee on Art and Education in Society. In 1942 he published the first of five books on printing. Sternberg had his first retrospective in 1953 at ACA Galleries, and in 1957 he taught summer painting courses at the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts in California. He continued teaching in the summers there from 1960 to 1967 and 1981 to 1989. Suffering from lung disease, Sternberg moved with his wife, Mary, to Escondido, California in 1966 in hopes that the climate would improve his health. In 1972 he was elected to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. During the 1970s and 1980s Sternberg traveled extensively throughout the US and Mexico where he found new inspiration for his artwork. He continued teaching, exhibiting, and creating new work until his death in 2001.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of New York City and California painter, printmaker, and teacher Harry Sternberg date from 1927 to 2000 and measure 3.4 linear feet and 0.553 GB. The collection documents Sternberg's career as an artist and art instructor through scattered biographical material, correspondence with friends, artists, collectors, curators, art organizations, universities, and galleries, writings by Sternberg and others, exhibition catalogs and announcements, news clippings, and other printed and digital material. Also found are photographs of Sternberg and his artwork, two sketchbooks and three loose drawings by Sternberg, audio visual recordings, and one scrapbook.

Biographical material includes an interview of Sternberg conducted by art curator Malcolm Warner, two ledgers documenting business activities, scattered financial and legal documents, and files regarding a few of his projects, including the film "Many Worlds of Art". Sternberg's personal and professional correspondence is with friends, artists, including Harry Wickey, Rockwell Kent, Philip Evergood, and Peter Blume, collectors and curators such as Hudson Walker and Carl Zigrosser, and art organizations, universities, and galleries.

The small number of writings by Sternberg in this collection includes drafts of articles and lectures, a manuscript for a book on etching, and notes. Writings by others consists of draft writings about Sternberg, draft exhibition catalogs, and writings by the artists Arthur Secunda and David Alfaro Siqueiros. Over one-third of this collection is printed material, including exhibition catalogs and announcements, news clippings, books written by Sternberg, school publications, and material regarding art events.

Also found are photographs of Sternberg in his studio, with students, with his wife Mary, and at the Idyllwild School. Other photographs include group photographs of Art Students League faculty as well as photographs of exhibitions, murals, and artwork. The collection also contains original artwork including two sketchbooks and three loose drawings by Sternberg and one scrapbook of news clippings and exhibition materials. Audio and video materials include several interviews of Sternberg and a video copy of his film "Many Worlds of Art".

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 8 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1927-2000 (Box 1, OV 5; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1928-2000 (Box 1; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1940s-2000 (Box 1, 4; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1933-2000 (Box 1-3; 1.2 linear feet)
- Series 5: Photographs, circa 1930s-1998 (Box 3, 4; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1928-1980s (Box 3, OV 5; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 7: Audio Visual Material, circa 1980s-2000 (Box 3; 0.5 linear feet, ER01; 0.553 GB)
- Series 8: Scrapbook, 1929-1958 (Box 4; 0.2 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Artists' studios -- Photographs
Educators -- California
Educators -- New York (State) -- New York
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Painting, American
Printmakers -- California
Printmakers -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Drafts (documents)
Drawings
Interviews
Manuscripts
Notes

Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks
Sound recordings
Video recordings

Names:

Art Students League (New York, N.Y.) -- Faculty
Blume, Peter, 1906-1992
Evergood, Philip, 1901-1973
Idyllwild School and Museum for the Arts -- Faculty
Kent, Rockwell, 1882-1971
Secunda, Arthur
Siqueiros, David Alfaro, 1896-1974
Walker, Hudson D. (Hudson Dean), 1907-1976
Warner, Malcolm, 1953-
Wickey, Harry
Zigrosser, Carl, 1891-

Occupations:

Painters -- California

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1927-2000

(Box 1, OV 5; 0.3 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Biographical materials include career summaries and lists of his achievements, a transcript of an interview with Sternberg by art curator Malcolm Warner, and two ledgers containing price lists for etchings, sale records, dealer lists, and address lists. Other items found here include scattered financial documents and business contracts for the publishing of his books and teaching jobs. Sternberg also maintained files for certain activities he identified as "business ventures" including the design and production of Prest-Glass, a corrugated fiberglass. Also found is a file on his design and production of an easel seat, including original drawings for the design, and a file regarding the film, "The Many Worlds of Art", which he produced and directed. This file includes contracts, program notes, correspondence, and printed material about the project. Audio recordings of interviews with Sternberg are found in Series 7.

Arrangement: Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 1, Folder 1	Career Summaries, 1960s-1990s
Box 1, Folder 2	Transcript, Interview with Malcolm Warner, 1994 (See also audio cassettes in Series 7, Box 3)
Box 1, Folder 3	City Patrol Corps Discharge Certificate, 1944
Box 1, Folder 4	Ledger, 1927-1936
Box 1, Folder 5	Ledger, 1927-1947
Box 1, Folder 6	Financial Documents & Receipts, 1944-1947, 1984, undated
Box 1, Folder 7	Business Contracts, 1941-1957
Box 1, Folder 8	File Regarding "Business Ventures", 1932, 1947
Box 1, Folder 9	File Regarding Easel Seat Design, circa 1950s (Oversized materials also filed in OV 5)
Box 1, Folder 10	File Regarding the Film "The Many Worlds of Art", 1960-1967
Box 1, Folder 11	File Regarding Committee on Art Education, 2000
Box 1, Folder 12	Sternberg Business Card, 1966
Box 1, Folder 13	Exhibition Label, 1976
Box OV 5, Folder	File Regarding Easel Seat Design, circa 1950s

(From Box 1, F9)

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1928-2000

(Box 1; 0.3 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Sternberg's personal and professional correspondence includes correspondence with friends and fellow artists Rockwell Kent, Philip Evergood, and Peter Blume; art collector Hudson Walker; curator Carl Zigrosser, and author and friend Erle Stanley Gardner. Also found is correspondence with art organizations, art galleries and museums regarding the loan, sale, and exhibition of his artwork, and with colleges and universities regarding the exhibition of his work and teaching and lecture opportunities. Additional correspondence includes letters from former students and art scholars as well as letters of congratulations. This series also includes a large number of letters written by Sternberg to his friend William Karp, letters to Sternberg from his former teacher Harry Wickey, and holiday cards designed by Sternberg.

Arrangement: General correspondence is arranged in chronological order followed by undated correspondence which is arranged in alphabetical order.

Box 1, Folder 14	General Correspondence, 1932-1960
Box 1, Folder 15	General Correspondence, 1961-1970
Box 1, Folder 16-17	General Correspondence, 1971-1980 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 18-19	General Correspondence, 1981-1995 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 20	General Correspondence, 1997-2000
Box 1, Folder 21	Undated General Correspondence, circa 1932-2000
Box 1, Folder 22-26	Correspondence with William & Mina Karp, 1946-1961, 1966-1983 (5 folders)
Box 1, Folder 27	Correspondence with Harry Wickey, 1928-1930, 1948-1953
Box 1, Folder 28	Holiday Cards, circa 1940s-1980s, 1998

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Series 3: Writings, circa 1940s-2000

(Box 1, 4; 0.2 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Writings by Sternberg include draft typescripts and manuscripts for a book on etching, a draft of a lecture "Art as Skilled Activity", a guide on buying art written with Verna Small for the Artists Equity Association, and other miscellaneous drafts of essays, talks, and autobiographical writings. Writings by others include a homemade newsletter written by artist Arthur Secunda, a statement written and signed by artist and political activist David Alfaro Siqueiros, and a thesis about Sternberg's work. Among the miscellaneous writings about Sternberg is an article by gallery owner Harry Salpeter. The author of a talk entitled "The Lost Island" is unidentified, but may have been written by Sternberg.

Box 1, Folder 29	Harry Sternberg, Draft Article about Poster as Art Medium, circa 1940s (Oversized item housed in Box 4)
Box 1, Folder 30	Harry Sternberg, Drafts of Book on Etching, circa 1949
Box 1, Folder 31	Harry Sternberg, "Art As Skilled Activity", 1952
Box 1, Folder 32	Harry Sternberg & Verna Small, "Art That Belongs to You", 1953
Box 1, Folder 33	Harry Sternberg, Miscellaneous Writings & Notes, circa 1940s-1970s
Box 1, Folder 34	Arthur Secunda, "The L. A. Bugle", 2000
Box 1, Folder 35	David Alfaro Siqueiros, "To All Those Who Struggled for My Liberty, With My Most Profound Acknowledgement", 1964
Box 1, Folder 36	Anne Suydam, Masters Thesis, "Social Consciousness in American Graphic Art and Its Reflection in the Prints of Harry Sternberg, 1929-1940", 1969
Box 1, Folder 37	Various Authors, Miscellaneous Writings about Harry Sternberg, 1945, 1950, circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 38	Unknown Author, "The Lost Island - A Travelogue", circa 1990s
Box 1, Folder 39	Draft Exhibition Catalog, "The Prints of Harry Sternberg", 1994
Box 1, Folder 40	Draft Exhibition Checklist, California Centre for the Arts Exhibition, 2000
Box 4, Folder	Harry Sternberg, Draft Article about Poster as Art Medium, circa 1940s (From Box 1, F29)

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1933-2000

(Box 1-3; 1.2 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: There is a wide variety of printed materials, including academic catalogs and brochures, mostly from the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts; publications from the Art Students League, such as catalogs, brochures, and newsletters; and several books written by Sternberg and others. Also found are exhibition announcements, invitations, and catalogs for exhibitions of Sternberg and others including several of his former students. News Clippings, magazines, and journals consist of articles about Sternberg, exhibitions of his work, reproductions of his artwork, and art-related events. Other items found here which document significant events during his career include newsletters, press releases, and programs.

Arrangement: Folders are arranged by type of material and items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 1, Folder 41	Academic Catalogs & Brochures, 1967, 1981-1994
Box 1, Folder 42-43	Art Students League Publications, circa 1940-1968, 1981-1994 (2 folders)
Box 2, Folder 1	Book, Harry Sternberg, Silk Screen Color Printing, 1942
Box 2, Folder 2	Book, Harry Sternberg, Composition: The Anatomy of Picture Making, 1958
Box 2, Folder 3	Book, Harry Sternberg, Realistic Abstract Art, 1959
Box 2, Folder 4	Book, Julian Levy, Modern Art: An Introduction, 1961
Box 2, Folder 5	Book, Hudson Walker, Gaul Was Divided into 3 Parts, 1975
Box 2, Folder 6	Book Publication Announcements, 1938, 1975, 1988, 1992
Box 2, Folder 7-10	Exhibition Announcements & Invitations, 1963-2000 (4 folders)
Box 2, Folder 11	Undated Exhibition Announcements & Invitations, circa 1963-2000
Box 2, Folder 12-14	Exhibition Catalogs, 1943, 1953-1981 (3 folders)
Box 2, Folder 15-22	Exhibition Catalogs, 1982-2000 (8 folders)
Box 2, Folder 23	Undated Exhibition Catalogs, circa 1950s-1990s
Box 2, Folder 24	Magazines & Journals, 1954, 1978
Box 2, Folder 25-26	Magazines & Journals, 1986-2000

	(2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 1-4	News Clippings, 1933-1956, 1967-1989 (4 folders)
Box 3, Folder 5-6	News Clippings, 1990-2000 (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 7	Undated News Clippings, circa 1933-2000
Box 3, Folder 8	Newsletters, 1954, 1981-1998
Box 3, Folder 9	Press Releases, 1939-1998
Box 3, Folder 10	Programs, 1980, 1997
Box 3, Folder 11	Reproductions of Artwork, circa 1930s-1990s
Box 3, Folder 12	Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1940s-1990s

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Series 5: Photographs, circa 1930s-1998

(Box 3, 4; 0.3 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Photographs include those which depict Harry Sternberg posing with his artwork, in his studio, at the Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts, with students, and with his wife Mary. Also found are two group photographs of faculty at the Art Students League, including Sternberg. Additional photographs are of his murals and other artwork and designs; exhibitions, including a 1949 exhibition at the Carnegie Institute and an unidentified exhibition.

Arrangement: Photographs are arranged by subject.

Box 3, Folder 13	Photographs of Harry Sternberg, circa 1930s-1979, 2000 (Oversized items housed in Box 4)
Box 3, Folder 14	Photographs of Harry Sternberg in Idyllwild, California, 1958-1963
Box 3, Folder 15	Photographs of Harry and Mary Sternberg in Escondido, California, circa 1970s
Box 3, Folder 16	Group Photographs of Art Students League Instructors, 1952, circa 1960
Box 3, Folder 17	Photographs of Murals, 1930s-1940s
Box 3, Folder 18	Photographs of Exhibitions, 1949, circa 1990s
Box 3, Folder 19-21	Photographs of Artwork, circa 1970s-1980s (3 folders)
Box 3, Folder 22	Photographs of Artwork, 1998
Box 3, Folder 23	Photostat Copies of Artwork, circa 1930s
Box 3, Folder 24	Negatives of Photographs of Artwork, undated
Box 4, Folder	Photographs of Harry Sternberg, circa 1930s-1979, 2000 (From Box 3, F13)

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1928-1980s

(Box 3, OV 5; 0.2 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: Artwork in this series includes two sketchbooks belonging to Sternberg. The sketchbook from circa 1928 contains sketches in pencil and ink of subway riders, including many close-ups of their faces. The second sketchbook of a later date contains annotated ink drawings of Sternberg's design ideas for art tools, furniture, and other functional objects. Also found in this series are two loose drawings of subway riders and a drawing of a tugboat all by Sternberg and a Poster depicting Sternberg created by his students for his birthday party at the Idyllwild School.

Box 3, Folder 25	Sketchbook, circa 1928
Box 3, Folder 26	Sketchbook, circa 1940s-1950s
Box 3, Folder 27	Drawings by Sternberg, circa 1930s (Oversized, housed in OV 5)
Box 3, Folder 28	Birthday Poster for Sternberg, circa 1960s-1980s (See OV 5)
Box OV 5, Folder	Drawings by Sternberg, circa 1930s (See Box 3, F27)
Box OV 5, Folder	Birthday Poster for Sternberg, circa 1960s-1980s (From Box 3, F28)

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Series 7: Audio Visual Material, circa 1980s-2000

(Box 3; 0.5 linear feet, ER01; 0.553 GB)

Scope and Contents: This series contains audio and video recordings documenting Sternberg's career as an artist. Included are audio recordings of Sternberg's interview with art curator Malcolm Warner, and three video interviews of Sternberg conducted by the Felicita Foundation, Tony di Gesu for KUSI-TV in San Diego, and by the television program "Made in America." Also found is a videocassette copy of the film "Many Worlds of Art" directed and produced by Sternberg.

Box 3, Folder 29 Sternberg Interview with Malcolm Warner, 1994
(2 sound cassettes; see also Interview Transcript, Box 1, F2)

Box 3, Folder 30 "Many Worlds of Art", circa early 1980s
(1 videocassette, VHS)

Box 3, Folder 31 Felicita Foundation: "Touch & See" and "Harry Sternberg", circa 1980s
(1 videocassette, VHS)

Box 3, Folder 32-33 Sternberg Interview with Tony di Gesu, 1983-1984
(2 videocassettes, VHS; 2 folders)

Folder ER01 Interview of Harry Sternberg by John Haynes, Sundays at Seven, KSFJ Radio, San Diego, CA (October 1, 2000), Digital Audio Recording, 2019
0.553 Gigabytes (Two computer files)

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Series 8: Scrapbook, 1929-1958

(Box 4; 0.2 linear feet)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of one disbound scrapbook containing newspaper and magazine clippings and a few exhibition printed materials documenting Harry Sternberg's career as an artist.

Box 4, Folder Scrapbook, 1929-1958

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