A Finding Aid to the Hedda Sterne Papers in the Archives of American Art

Judy Ng

Processing of this collection was funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Digitization of this collection was funded by the Hedda Sterne Foundation.

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Collection Overview

Repository: Archives of American Art
Title: Hedda Sterne papers
Identifier: AAA.sterhedd
Date: 1939-1977
Creator: Sterne, Hedda, 1910-
Extent: 1.3 Linear feet
Language: The collection is in English and French.

Summary: The papers of painter Hedda Sterne measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1939 to 1977. Found within the papers are biographical material; personal and professional correspondence, including extensive correspondence from Sterne's second husband Saul Steinberg, the artist known for his New Yorker drawings; writings; exhibition files; printed material; drawings and 3 sketchbooks; photographs and slides of Sterne, her family, and her work; and originals of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's work Lettre A Leon Werth and 4 drawings Saint-Exupéry sent to Sterne.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Related Materials
Also found in the Archives is an oral history interview with Hedda Sterne conducted by Phyllis Tuchman, December 17, 1981, for the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project. Additional correspondence and photographs of Sterne are located in the Saul Steinberg papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

Available Formats
The collection was digitized in its entirety in 2016 and is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Processing Information
Portions of the papers were microfilmed on reels 144-145 and reel 5028 shortly after their receipt. Previously microfilmed and unmicrofilmed papers were merged, processed, and described by Judy Ng in 2013 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. The collection was digitized in 2016 with funding provided by the Hedda Sterne Foundation.

Preferred Citation
Biographical / Historical

Painter Hedda Sterne (1910-2011) lived in New York City and was known for working in many artistic styles, including surrealism and abstract expressionism. She was the only woman in the group of abstract expressionists known as "The Irascibles."

Sterne was born in Bucharest, Romania to Simon Lindenberg, a high school language teacher, and his wife Eugenie. Her early interest in art was encouraged by her family and, after graduating from high school at the age of seventeen, she traveled to Vienna to study art. In 1932, she married childhood friend and businessman Frederick Stern. Through the 1930s, she continued to develop as an artist, traveling between Bucharest and Paris, where she attended Fernand Léger's atelier for a time. In 1938, her work with torn paper collages at that year's Paris Salon caught the eye of Hans Arp, who convinced her to exhibit at Peggy Guggenheim's London gallery. The chaos and persecution of Jews during World War II precipitated Sterne’s arrival in America, where she joined her husband in New York City.

In New York, Peggy Guggenheim welcomed Sterne into her circle of artist friends and invited her to exhibit in Guggenheim's gallery in New York City, Art of This Century. In 1944, Sterne married Saul Steinberg, the artist known for his *New Yorker* drawings, and became a U.S. citizen. Through the 1940s, Sterne created works in realist and surrealist styles, but by the late 1940s, she began exploring abstract expressionism. In 1943, Sterne exhibited at the Wakefield Gallery, where she met the gallery manager Betty Parsons and where she received her first one woman show in 1945. After Betty Parsons opened her own gallery in 1946, Sterne joined Parsons' stable and continued to meet and befriend other prominent abstract artists. In 1950, she signed an open letter along with 14 other artists protesting the Metropolitan Museum's conservatism towards abstract art. This led to a feature article in *Life* magazine where she was the only woman to be photographed alongside "The Irascibles." This group included Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Ad Reinhardt, among others. Through the 1950s, Sterne continued to explore new avenues of art by painting cityscapes, abstract mechanical structures, portraits, and faces, and by using mediums ranging from oil, spray paint, pen and ink, pencil, and diary/text reproductions on stretched canvas.

In 1960, Sterne and Steinberg separated but remained friends until his death in 1999. The recipient of numerous awards and one woman shows, retrospectives of her work were exhibited at the Montclair Art Museum (1977), Queens Museum of Art (1985), and the Krannert Art Museum (2006). Sterne died in her home in Manhattan in 2011 at the age of 100.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Hedda Sterne measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1939 to 1977. Found within the papers are biographical material; personal and professional correspondence, including extensive correspondence from Sterne’s second husband Saul Steinberg, the artist known for his *New Yorker* drawings; writings; exhibition files; printed material; drawings and 3 sketchbooks; photographs and slides.
of Sterne, her family, and her work; and originals of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's work *Lettre A Leon Werth* and 4 drawings Saint-Exupéry sent to Sterne.

Biographical material includes certificates, curriculum vitae, a Fulbright application, lists of artworks, and Saul Steinberg's fingerprints. Correspondence is primarily with Sterne's friends, and business associates. There is significant correspondence from the artist Georges Mathieu and from her second husband Saul Steinberg.

Writings consist of numerous miscellaneous handwritten and typescript notes on art. Exhibition files include an article, interview transcript, and press release for Sterne's 1970 exhibition *Everyone* at the Betty Parsons Gallery. Printed material includes cards, clippings, exhibition announcements, and an exhibition catalog.

Artwork consists of drawings and 3 sketchbooks. Photographs are of Sterne, her family and friends, and her artwork. Materials related to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry include copies of his *Lettre A Leon Werth* and 4 drawings Saint-Exupéry sent to Sterne.

### Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 8 series.

**Missing Title:**
- Series 1: Biographical materials, 1941-1970 (8 folders; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1943-1965 (0.5 linear feet; Box 1-2)
- Series 3: Writings, circa 1945-1965 (5 folders; Box 1)
- Series 4: Exhibitions, 1970 (3 folders; Box 1)
- Series 5: Printed material, 1946-1977 (3 folders; Box 1)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1945-1965 (4 folders; Box 1)
- Series 7: Photographic Materials, 1939-1969 (0.3 linear feet; Box 1-2)
- Series 8: Antoine de Saint Exupéry, circa 1942 (4 folders; Box 1)

### Names and Subject Terms

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

**Subjects:**
- Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
- Painting, Modern -- 20th century -- New York (State) -- New York
- Women artists
- Women painters

**Types of Materials:**
- Drawings
- Interviews
- Photographs
- Sketchbooks
- Transcripts

**Names:**
- Mathieu, Georges, 1921 -- Photographs
- Saint-Exupéry, Antoine de, 1900-1944
- Steinberg, Saul
- Werth, Léon, 1878-1955
## Container Listing

### Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1941-1970

*8 Folders (Box 1)*

**Scope and Contents:** Biographical material consists of educational and medical travel certificates and identification, curriculum vitae, employment contracts, customs forms, a Fulbright application, lists of artwork from 1952-1954, and Saul Steinberg's fingerprints.

**Arrangement:** Materials are arranged by document type.

**Available Formats:** This series has been scanned in its entirety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 1</th>
<th>Certificates, 1941-1957</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 2</td>
<td>Curriculum Vitae, 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 3</td>
<td>Customs Forms, 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 4</td>
<td>Employment Contract, 1968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 5</td>
<td>Fulbright Application, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 6</td>
<td>Identification Card, 1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 7</td>
<td>Lists of Artwork, 1952-1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 8</td>
<td>Saul Steinberg Fingerprints, 1952</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1943-1965

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence is primarily with Sterne's business associates and friends, including limited correspondence with Ad Reinhardt and Eugene Berman. Art related correspondence is with galleries, museums, and art institutions. The series also includes significant correspondence from the artist Georges Mathieu and from her second husband, the artist and New Yorker illustrator Saul Steinberg.

The letters from Mathieu are written in French. Letters from Steinberg date from 1943 to 1962 and include love letters, illustrated letters, notes, drawings, and descriptions of his work and daily life while traveling abroad or separately from Sterne. They include detail of Steinberg's Navy service in Italy, North Africa, and China during World War II, publication of work in Vogue and the New Yorker, updates on work acquaintances and family members, and progress on art projects by Sterne and Steinberg.

Arrangement: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 9</td>
<td>A-Z Miscellaneous, circa 1949-1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 10</td>
<td>Mathieu, Georges, circa 1961-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes: Oversized correspondence housed in Box 2, Folder 1.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 11</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, circa 1943-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes: Includes two letters to Saul Steinberg from Gump's Gallery (1952) and Bill Whitney (circa 1943-1963).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 12</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul (drawings), circa 1943-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 13</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 14</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, circa 1944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 15</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1944 January-February</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1944</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 16</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1944 March-June</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947</td>
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<td>Box 1, Folder 17</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1944 July-September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 18</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1947-1948</td>
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<tr>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1947-1949</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 19</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1949 March-May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 20</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 21</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 22</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 23</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 24</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 25</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1956</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1956-1958</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 26</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 27</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 28</td>
<td>Steinberg, Saul, 1959-1962</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 29</td>
<td>Illegible and Unknown, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 2, Folder 1</td>
<td>Oversized Correspondence scanned with Box 1, Folder 10, circa 1961-1962</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Series 3: Writings, circa 1945-1965

5 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Writings consist of numerous miscellaneous handwritten and typescript notes on art with references to art theory, literature, philosophy, biology, and psychiatry.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 30</th>
<th>Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 31</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 32</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 33</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Notes (collated), circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 34</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Notes (collated), circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Series 4: Exhibitions, 1970

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Exhibition files consist of materials related to Sterne’s 1970 exhibition Everyone at the Betty Parsons Gallery. There is an exhibition press release, a typescript article by Walter Abish, and two copies of an interview transcript.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

| Box 1, Folder 35 | Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Article by Walter Abish, 1970 |
| Box 1, Folder 36 | Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Interview Transcript, 1970 |
| Box 1, Folder 37 | Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Press Release, 1970 |

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Series 5: Printed Material, 1946-1977

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of postcards, greeting card samples, clippings on Sterne and Saul Steinberg, exhibition announcements and the exhibition catalog for Sterne's 1977 retrospective exhibition at the Montclair Art Museum.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type.

Available Formats:

| Box 1, Folder 38 | Cards, circa 1960-1969 |
| Box 1, Folder 39 | Clippings, circa 1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 40 | Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1946-1977 |

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1945-1965

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Artwork consists of drawings and 3 sketchbooks of Sterne's abstract and figurative ink sketches and notes.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type.

Available Formats:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 41</th>
<th>Drawings, circa 1953</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 42</td>
<td>Sketchbook #1, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 43</td>
<td>Sketchbook #2, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 1, Folder 44</td>
<td>Sketchbook #3, circa 1945-1965</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

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Series 7: Photographic Materials, 1939-1969

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Scope and Contents: Photographs are of Sterne, Sterne with Saul Steinberg and others, and of artwork. Two of the photographs of Sterne and Steinberg were taken by fashion photographers Irving Penn and George Platt Lynes respectively, two photos of Sterne were taken by Evelyn Hofer, and a color photo of Sterne was taken by Margaret Bourke White.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type and subject matter.

Available Formats: This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 45  Photographs of Hedda Sterne, circa 1947-1969
Notes: Includes a photo of Sterne dancing with Alexander Calder. Oversized photograph housed in Box 2, Folder 2.

Box 1, Folder 46  Photographs of Hedda Sterne and Saul Steinberg, 1944-1969
Notes: Oversized photographs housed in Box 2, Folder 3.

Box 1, Folder 47  Photographs of Artwork, Early Paintings, 1939-1949

Box 1, Folder 48  Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Abstract Paintings, 1952-1955

Box 1, Folder 49  Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Figurative Paintings, 1950-1952

Box 1, Folder 50  Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Faces, circa 1969
Notes: Oversized photograph housed in Box 2, Folder 4.

Box 1, Folder 51  Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Ink Washes, circa 1960-1969

Box 1, Folder 52  Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Lines, circa 1961

Box 1, Folder 53  Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Pen and Ink, circa 1966

Box 1, Folder 54  Photographs of Artwork, Sculptures, 1937-1949

Box 1, Folder 55  Slides of Artwork, circa 1958-1968

Box 2, Folder 2  Oversized photograph scanned with Box 1, Folder 45, circa 1947-1969

Box 2, Folder 3  Oversized photographs scanned with Box 1, Folder 46, circa 1944-1950

Box 2, Folder 4  Oversized photograph scanned with Box 1, Folder 50, circa 1969
Series 8: Antoine de Saint Exupéry, circa 1942

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Materials include a manuscript, typescript, and gallery proof of Saint-Exupéry's *Lettre A Leon Werth*, Saint-Exupéry's introduction to his friend Leon Werth's memoir *33 Jours*. Documents are in French and the manuscript has been revised and hand corrected by Saint-Exupéry throughout. The gallery proof includes a brief inscription by Saint-Exupéry to Sterne and occasional corrections in his hand and an unidentified hand. This series also includes 4 pen and ink drawings of "Little Prince" like characters Saint-Exupéry sent to Sterne.

Arrangement: Materials are arranged by document type. The manuscript copy of *Lettre A Leon Werth* retains the existing order at the time of processing.

Available Formats:

- **Box 1, Folder 56**  
  Writings, *Lettre A Leon Werth* (manuscript), circa 1942

- **Box 1, Folder 57**  
  Writings, *Lettre A Leon Werth* (typescript), circa 1942

- **Box 1, Folder 58**  
  Writings, *Lettre A Leon Werth* (gallery proof), circa 1942

- **Box 1, Folder 59**  
  Artwork, Drawings, circa 1942

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