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
Extent: 1.3 Linear feet
Creator: Sterne, Hedda, 1910-
Language: Multiple languages

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


Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archvies' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Conditions Governing Use

The Hedda Sterne papers 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 / 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.

- 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 painters -- New York (State) -- New York

**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)

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.

Materials are arranged by document type.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 1       Certificates, 1941-1957
                        Image(s): Certificates: 1941-1957
Box 1, Folder 2       Curriculum Vitae, 1970
                        Image(s): Curriculum Vitae: 1970
Box 1, Folder 3       Customs Forms, 1953
                        Image(s): Customs Forms: 1953
Box 1, Folder 4       Employment Contract, 1968
                        Image(s): Employment Contract: 1968
Box 1, Folder 5       Fulbright Application, 1963
                        Image(s): Fulbright Application: 1963
Box 1, Folder 6       Identification Card, 1946
                        Image(s): Identification Card: 1946
Box 1, Folder 7       Lists of Artwork, 1952-1954
                        Image(s): Lists of Artwork: 1952-1954
Box 1, Folder 8       Saul Steinberg Fingerprints, 1952
                        Image(s): Saul Steinberg Fingerprints: 1952
Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1943-1965

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

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.

Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 9  A-Z Miscellaneous, circa 1949-1970
Image(s): A-Z Miscellaneous: circa 1949-1970

Box 1, Folder 10  Mathieu, Georges, circa 1961-1962
Image(s): Mathieu, Georges: circa 1961-1962
Oversized correspondence housed in Box 2, Folder 1.

Box 1, Folder 11  Steinberg, Saul, circa 1943-1962
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1943-1962
Includes two letters to Saul Steinberg from Gump's Gallery (1952) and Bill Whitney (circa 1943-1963).

Box 1, Folder 12  Steinberg, Saul (drawings), circa 1943-1962
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul (drawings): circa 1943-1962

Box 1, Folder 13  Steinberg, Saul, 1943
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1943

Box 1, Folder 14  Steinberg, Saul, circa 1944
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947

Box 1, Folder 15  Steinberg, Saul, 1944 January-February
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1944

Box 1, Folder 16  Steinberg, Saul, 1944 March-June
Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947

Box 1, Folder 17  Steinberg, Saul, 1944 July-September
Box 1, Folder 18  Steinberg, Saul, 1947-1948

Box 1, Folder 19  Steinberg, Saul, 1949 March-May

Box 1, Folder 20  Steinberg, Saul, 1951

Box 1, Folder 21  Steinberg, Saul, 1952

Box 1, Folder 22  Steinberg, Saul, 1953

Box 1, Folder 23  Steinberg, Saul, 1954

Box 1, Folder 24  Steinberg, Saul, 1955

Box 1, Folder 25  Steinberg, Saul, 1956

Box 1, Folder 26  Steinberg, Saul, 1957

Box 1, Folder 27  Steinberg, Saul, 1958

Box 1, Folder 28  Steinberg, Saul, 1959-1962

Box 1, Folder 29  Illegible and Unknown, circa 1945-1965

Box 2, Folder 1  Oversized Correspondence scanned with Box 1, Folder 10, circa 1961-1962
Series 3: Writings, circa 1945-1965

5 Folders (Box 1)

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

Materials are arranged by document type.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 30  Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965
Image(s): Miscellaneous Notes: circa 1945-1965

Box 1, Folder 31  Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965
Image(s): Miscellaneous Notes: circa 1945-1965

Box 1, Folder 32  Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1945-1965
Image(s): Miscellaneous Notes: circa 1945-1965

Box 1, Folder 33  Miscellaneous Notes (collated), circa 1945-1965
Image(s): Miscellaneous Notes (collated): circa 1945-1965

Box 1, Folder 34  Miscellaneous Notes (collated), circa 1945-1965
Image(s): Miscellaneous Notes (collated): circa 1945-1965

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Series 4: Exhibitions, 1970

3 Folders (Box 1)

Exhibition files consists 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.

Materials are arranged by document type.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 35  

Box 1, Folder 36  

Box 1, Folder 37  

*Return to Table of Contents*
Series 5: Printed Material, 1946-1977

3 Folders (Box 1)

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.

Materials are arranged by document type.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 38   Cards, circa 1960-1969
Image(s): Cards: circa 1960-1969

Box 1, Folder 39   Clippings, circa 1950
Image(s): Clippings: circa 1950

Box 1, Folder 40   Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1946-1977
Image(s): Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs: 1946-1977

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1945-1965

4 Folders (Box 1)

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

Materials are arranged by document type.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

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

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Series 7: Photographic Materials, 1939-1969

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

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.

Materials are arranged by document type and subject matter.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 45
Photographs of Hedda Sterne, circa 1947-1969
Image(s): Photographs of Hedda Sterne: circa 1947-1969
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
Image(s): Photographs of Hedda Sterne and Saul Steinberg: 1944-1969
Oversized photographs housed in Box 2, Folder 3.

Box 1, Folder 47
Photographs of Artwork, Early Paintings, 1939-1949
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, Early Paintings: 1939-1949

Box 1, Folder 48
Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Abstract Paintings, 1952-1955
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Abstract Paintings: 1952-1955

Box 1, Folder 49
Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Figurative Paintings, 1950-1952
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, 1950s, Figurative Paintings: 1950-1952

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

Box 1, Folder 51
Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Ink Washes, circa 1960-1969
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Ink Washes: circa 1960-1969

Box 1, Folder 52
Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Lines, circa 1961
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Lines: circa 1961

Box 1, Folder 53
Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Pen and Ink, circa 1966
Image(s): Photographs of Artwork, 1960s, Pen and Ink: circa 1966

Box 1, Folder 54
Photographs of Artwork, Sculptures, 1937-1949
Image(s): 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

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Series 8: Antoine de Saint Exupéry, circa 1942

4 Folders (Box 1)

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.

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

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

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

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

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

Box 1, Folder 59  Artwork, Drawings, circa 1942
Image(s): Artwork, Drawings: circa 1942