



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

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:	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 <i>New Yorker</i> 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 <i>Lettre A Leon Werth</i> and 4 drawings Saint-Exupéry sent to Sterne.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Hedda Sterne donated her papers in 1970, 1971, and 1972.

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

Hedda Sterne papers, 1939-1977. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

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

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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

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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

	Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: circa 1947
Box 1, Folder 18	Steinberg, Saul, 1947-1948 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1947-1949
Box 1, Folder 19	Steinberg, Saul, 1949 March-May Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 20	Steinberg, Saul, 1951 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1951-1955
Box 1, Folder 21	Steinberg, Saul, 1952 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1952
Box 1, Folder 22	Steinberg, Saul, 1953 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1953
Box 1, Folder 23	Steinberg, Saul, 1954 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1954
Box 1, Folder 24	Steinberg, Saul, 1955 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1955
Box 1, Folder 25	Steinberg, Saul, 1956 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1956-1958
Box 1, Folder 26	Steinberg, Saul, 1957 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1957
Box 1, Folder 27	Steinberg, Saul, 1958 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1958
Box 1, Folder 28	Steinberg, Saul, 1959-1962 Image(s): Steinberg, Saul: 1959-1962
Box 1, Folder 29	Illegible and Unknown, circa 1945-1965 Image(s): Illegible and Unknown: circa 1945-1965
Box 2, Folder 1	Oversized Correspondence scanned with Box 1, Folder 10, circa 1961-1962

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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	Betty Parsons Gallery, <i>Everyone</i> (1970), Article by Walter Abish, 1970 Image(s): Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Article by Walter Abish: 1970
Box 1, Folder 36	Betty Parsons Gallery, <i>Everyone</i> (1970), Interview Transcript, 1970 Image(s): Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Interview Transcript: 1970
Box 1, Folder 37	Betty Parsons Gallery, <i>Everyone</i> (1970), Press Release, 1970 Image(s): Betty Parsons Gallery, Everyone (1970), Press Release: 1970

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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.

Box 1, Folder 41	Drawings, circa 1953 Image(s): Drawings: circa 1953
Box 1, Folder 42	Sketchbook #1, circa 1945-1965 Image(s): Sketchbook #1: circa 1945-1965
Box 1, Folder 43	Sketchbook #2, circa 1945-1965 Image(s): Sketchbook #2: circa 1945-1965
Box 1, Folder 44	Sketchbook #3, circa 1945-1965 Image(s): Sketchbook #3: circa 1945-1965

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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.

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|------------------|---|
| 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 |

[Image\(s\): Slides of Artwork: circa 1958-1968](#)

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|-----------------|--|
| 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, <i>Lettre A Leon Werth</i> (manuscript), circa 1942 Image(s): Writings, Lettre A Leon Werth (manuscript): circa 1942
Box 1, Folder 57	Writings, <i>Lettre A Leon Werth</i> (typescript), circa 1942 Image(s): Writings, Lettre A Leon Werth (typescript): circa 1942
Box 1, Folder 58	Writings, <i>Lettre A Leon Werth</i> (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

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