



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Kamekichi Tokita Papers, circa 1900-circa 2010, bulk circa 1910-1948, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson and Rihoko Ueno

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the Smithsonian Institution Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool. Funding for the digitization of this collection was provided by the Lichtenstein Endowment and the Terra Endowment.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Kamekichi Tokita Papers
Date:	circa 1900-circa 2010 (bulk 1900-1948)
Identifier:	AAA.tokikame
Creator:	Tokita, Kamekichi
Extent:	1.5 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English and Japanese.
Summary:	The personal papers of Seattle area painter Kamekichi Tokita (1897-1948) measure 1.5 linear feet and date from circa 1900 to circa 2010 with the bulk of the material dating from circa 1910 to 1948. The papers include biographical materials, including documents about the closing of the War Relocation Authority's Minidoka Camp in Idaho; correspondence; three diaries written in Japanese documenting Tokita's war time experiences and forced relocation to Minidoka, two earlier notebooks, also written in Japanese, and scattered notes; a few personal business records; printed materials; one scrapbook; sketches; and one family photograph album.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Kamekichi Tokita papers were donated by his son, Shokichi Tokita in 1990. He donated a third and final diary in 2017. They were collected as part of the Archives of American Art Northwest Asian American project in Seattle, Washington.

Separated Materials

A watercolor painting on paper by Kamekichi Tokita, Untitled (Still Life), 9 x 12 in. was transferred to the Smithsonian American Art Museum in 2012.

Available Formats

A portion of the collection is available on 35 mm microfilm reel 4883 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

The bulk of the collection was digitized in 2021 and is available on the Archives of American Art website.

Processing Information

The collection was microfilmed onto reel 4883 shortly after receipt. In 2016-2017, the papers were fully processed with a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson with funding provided by the Smithsonian Institution Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool. In 2021, the finding aid was lightly

edited and then fully prepared for digitization by Rihoko Ueno and digitized with funding by the Lichtenstein Endowment and the Terra Endowment.

Preferred Citation

Kamekichi Tokita papers, circa 1900-circa 2010, bulk circa 1910-1948. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

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Biographical / Historical

Kamekichi Tokita (1897-1948) was a Japanese American painter and businessman who emigrated from Japan in 1919 and settled in Seattle, Washington. Tokita was a member of the Seattle area progressive artists' collective known as the "Group of Twelve" and widely exhibited his artwork throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Kamekichi Tokita was born in Shizouka City, Japan and immigrated to the United States at the age of twenty-two. He settled in the Japantown neighborhood of Seattle, Washington where he opened the Noto Sign Company with business partner Kenjiro Nomura. Nomura was also an artist and encouraged Tokita's interest in oil painting. They both used the sign shop as their studio after-hours. In 1936, the Noto Sign Company closed and Tokita took over management of the Cadillac Hotel, although he continued to paint commercial signs. Tokita married Haruko Suzuki in 1932 and together they had eight children.

As a child in Japan, Tokita studied calligraphy in China. Although he attended a few art school classes in the U.S. and went on weekend painting trips with Nomura and other Seattle artists, Tokita is considered to be a largely self-trained artist. Support and recognition came from Dorothy V. Morrison of the Henry Gallery at the University of Washington who wrote to Tokita to inquire whether a "group of Japanese artists in the city" would be interested in exhibiting their work. Although the exhibition of Japanese artists did not happen, Tokita later loaned paintings to the gallery for inclusion in an exhibition sponsored by the American Federation of Arts. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s Tokita exhibited widely in the Seattle area. In 1935, the *Seattle Daily Times* touted the work of Tokita and other painters in the "Group of Twelve" that also included Morris Graves, Kenneth Callahan, Walter F. Isaacs, and Ambrose and Viola Patterson, among others. In 1942, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Kamekichi Tokita and his family (five children at the time), along with the approximately 120,000 Japanese and Japanese American citizens living on the West Coast, were ordered under President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 to be forcibly removed to one of several incarceration camps. For the first six months of their imprisonment, the family lived at a temporary Civilian Assembly Center in Puyallup, Washington. They were transferred to the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Hunt, Idaho where they remained until their release in 1945. While incarcerated in Minidoka, Tokita worked as a sign painter and continued to privately paint, using whatever materials he could find, including beaver board. His work was featured in art shows at the camp. Many of his camp scenes are now lost or were given away.

At the end of World War II, Tokita and his family (now seven children) moved back to the Seattle-area. Unable to find housing, the Tokitas lived at a Japanese language school until Tokita was able to re-establish his business. During this period he painted very little. In 1946 Tokita and his wife purchased the New Lucky Hotel

in the Chinatown area of Seattle. Shortly thereafter, Tokita fell ill and died in 1948. Many of his works are believed to have been destroyed or lost. Some of his work remains, however, and is among the permanent collections of the Seattle Art Museum, the Tacoma Art Museum, the Portland Art Museum.

Note: Much of this biographical note was taken from "A Biographical Resume" written by Shokichi and Elsie Y. Tokita.

Scope and Contents

The personal papers of Seattle area painter Kamekichi Tokita (1897-1948) measure 1.5 linear feet and date from circa 1900 to circa 2010 with the bulk of the material dating from circa 1910 to 1948. The papers include biographical materials, including documents about the closing of the War Relocation Authority's Minidoka Camp in Idaho; correspondence; three diaries written in Japanese documenting Tokita's war time experiences and forced relocation to Minidoka, two earlier notebooks, also written in Japanese, and scattered notes; a few personal business records; printed materials; one scrapbook; sketches; and one family photograph album.

Biographical materials include a file on the Public Works of Art Project, a file on the War Relocation Authority and the closing of the Minidoka incarceration camp, an immigration document, and an essay on Tokita written by Shokichi and Elsie Tokita.

Correspondence is primarily professional in nature and concerns exhibitions at the Seattle Museum of Art (previously the Art Institute of Seattle) and other topics. Correspondents include Kenneth Callahan, Henry Gallery, the Seattle Art Museum, and others.

Tokita's writings consist of three diaries, two notebooks, and scattered general writings, most of which are in Japanese. The diaries were kept during World War II and document the family's incarceration at the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho. Included is a transcript of the diaries which were translated from prewar to modern Japanese by Haruo Takasugi and from modern Japanese to English by Naomi Kusunoki-Martin.

Scattered business records include a patent application, records from the Cadillac Hotel, and a claim filed through the Department of Justice. A few published books in English and Japanese are about art and religion. Also found are exhibition catalogs for shows in which Tokita participated and clippings. There is one mixed media scrapbook about Tokita's exhibitions.

Artwork consists of unsigned pencil and watercolor sketches by Tokita. There is also a family photo album containing snapshots and portraits of the Tokita family and friends.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 8 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-1985 (Box 1; 5 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1920-1944 (Box 1; 8 folders)
- Series 3: Diaries and Writings, 1923-circa 1950 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1928-1950 (Box 1; 3 folders)
- Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1910-1940 (Box 1-3; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 6: Scrapbook, 1929-1933 (Box 2-3; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 7: Artwork, circa 1910-1940s (Box 2-3; 0.1 linear feet)
- Series 8: Photograph Album, circa 1900-1930 (Box 2; 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:

Art, American -- Northwestern States
Art, Modern -- 20th century -- Northwestern States
Asian American art
Asian American artists
Asian American painters
Japanese American art
Japanese American artists
Japanese Americans -- Forced removal and internment, 1942-1945 -- Diaries
Painting, Modern -- 20th century -- Washington (State) -- Seattle
World War, 1939-1945 -- Japanese Americans

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Photograph albums
Photographs
Scrapbooks
Sketches

Names:

Art Institute of Seattle
Callahan, Kenneth, 1905-1986
Group of Twelve (Seattle, Wash.)
Henry Art Gallery
Hotel Cadillac (Seattle, Wash.)
Minidoka Relocation Center
Public Works of Art Project
Seattle Art Museum
Tokita, Elsie
Tokita, Shokichi

Occupations:

Painters -- Washington (State) -- Seattle

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-1985

5 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical materials include an immigration document for Kamekichi and Karuko Tokita; a file relating to the closure of the War Relocation Authority's Minidoka Camp; a file on the Public Works of Art Project which contains a report, bulletins, and two letters, including one from Edward Bruce dated 1934. There is also a biographical sketch on Tokita written by Shokichi and Elsie Tokita.

Arrangement: The material in this series is arranged alphabetically by folder title.

Available: This series has been digitized in its entirety.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Sketch, "Kamekichi Tokita" by Shokichi and Elsie Tokita, 1985
Box 1, Folder 2	Immigration Records, circa 1940
Box 1, Folder 3	Public Works of Art Project, 1934
Box 1, Folder 4	Treasury Department Art Projects, 1936-1941
Box 1, Folder 5	War Relocation Authority Report on Closure of Minidoka Camp, 1945

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Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1920-1944

8 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The bulk of Tokita's scattered correspondence concerns his exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum (formerly called the Art Institute of Seattle), but there are also includes letters from friends, other galleries, and institutions. Correspondents include Kenneth Callahan, Henry Gallery, and the Seattle Art Museum. Some letters are in Japanese.

Arrangement: This series is arranged in alphabetically order by correspondent.

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

Box 1, Folder 6	A-C, Miscellaneous, 1932-1944 Notes: Includes letters from American Airlines, American Federation of Arts, and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor.
Box 1, Folder 7	Callahan, Kenneth, 1935-1938
Box 1, Folder 8	H-I, Miscellaneous, 1925-1935 Notes: Includes letters from Henry Gallery, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum (John Davis Hatch, Jr.), and K. M. Ishii.
Box 1, Folder 9	M-P, Miscellaneous, 1931-1936 Notes: Includes letters from Mallet's Library of Reproductions, Y. Morinaga, Municipal Art Committee of New York City, Mrs. Reginal H. Parsons, Penthouse Gallery, and others.
Box 1, Folder 10	S, Miscellaneous, 1931-1937 Notes: Includes letters from San Francisco Art Association (Ray Boynton), San Francisco Museum of Art, and Carolyn A. Schneider.
Box 1, Folder 11	Seattle Art Museum, 1931-1936
Box 1, Folder 12	T-U, Miscellaneous, 1934-1935 Notes: Includes letters from the Treasury Department and the University of Washington (Ambrose Patterson).
Box 1, Folder 13	Miscellaneous Correspondence, circa 1930-circa 1940 Notes: Includes one letter from Roy Suzuki to Mr. Bishop and 1 empty envelope.

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Series 3: Diaries and Writings, 1923-circa 2010

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series consists of diaries written by Tokita (in Japanese) between December 7, 1941 and 1944 while his family was forcibly removed to and incarcerated in Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho, and other notebooks and notes. There is also a transcript translated from prewar to modern Japanese by Haruo Takasugi and a subsequent translation of the diary from modern Japanese to English by Naomi Kusunoki-Martin. Two additional notebooks written by Tokita much earlier are also in this series. There is a fragment of a letter written in English from Minidoka, school notes, and a poem about an orange in Japanese. An unsigned note contains a sketch of a pig and concerns receipts discarded after Tokita's death. There are also some annotated scattered notes in Japanese, perhaps written by Tokita or others.

Arrangement: The diaries and transcriptions are at the beginning of the series in chronological order. The diaries are followed by notebooks and notes in loose chronological order.

Available Formats: The bulk of this series has been digitized, except for blank pages of notebooks.

Box 1, Folder 14	Diary, 1941 December 7-1942 February 21 Notes: This is possibly Kamekichi Tokita's original diary.
Box 1, Folder 15	Diary (Disbound, Part 1 of 3), 1941 December 7-December 31 Notes: This is possibly the diary that was translated from prewar to modern Japanese by Haruo Takasugi.
Box 1, Folder 16	Diary (Disbound, Part 2 of 3), 1942 January 1-March 6
Box 1, Folder 17	Diary (Disbound, Part 3 of 3), 1942 March 8-April 5
Box 1, Folder 18	Diary, 1942 April 9-28
Box 1, Folder 19	Diary from Minidoka Camp, 1942 September 12-1943 July 29
Box 1, Folder 20	Diary from Minidoka Camp, 1943 September 23-1944 July 20 Notes: Includes poems and fragments of diary entries.
Box 1, Folder 21	English Translation of Diary (1 of 2), circa 2010
Box 1, Folder 22	English Translation of Diary (2 of 2), circa 2010
Box 1, Folder 23	Notebook, 1923
Box 1, Folder 24	Notebook, circa 1923-circa 1945
Box 1, Folder 25	Notes Probably by Kamekichi Tokita, circa 1925-1945
Box 1, Folder 26	Notes by Tokita or Others, circa 1940-circa 1950

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Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1928-1950

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: There are a few scattered personal business records documenting unemployment, sale of the furniture of the Cadillac Hotel, a patent application filed in 1928 by Tokita for a device designed to lift manually-operated vehicles, and a claim made by the Tokita family to the Department of Justice, Office of Alien Property.

Arrangement: This series is in alphabetical order by folder title.

Available: This series has been digitized in its entirety.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 27	Cadillac Hotel Records, 1936-1942
Box 1, Folder 28	Department of Justice Claim File, 1950
Box 1, Folder 29	Patent for Vehicle Lift, 1928

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Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1910-1940

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1-3)

Scope and Contents: Published books include an annotated copy of *Modern French Painters* by Jan Gordon and Japanese books on art and religion. There are exhibition catalogs for group shows in which Tokita participated including various annual exhibitions held at the the Seattle Art Museum and the Group of Twelve exhibition of 1937. Also found are clippings in English and Japanese, annual reports from the Seattle Art Museum, blank stationery from Tokita's Noto Sign Company, and reproductions of works of art by others.

Arrangement: The material in this series is grouped together by type of printed material: books, clippings, exhibition catalogs, etc.

Available Formats: The bulk of this series has been digitized, except for duplicates. Most of the books and annual reports and some of the exhibition catalogs have had their covers, title pages, and relevant pages digitized.

Box 1, Folder 30	Blank Stationery for Kamekichi Tokita's Noto Sign Company, circa 1930s
Box 1, Folder 31	Book - Japanese Book of Art Reproductions, 1927
Box 1, Folder 32	Book - Japanese Book on Landscapes and Scenery, circa 1910
Box 1, Folder 33	Book - Japanese Book on Religion, circa 1910
Box 1, Folder 34	Book - Japanese Book on Artist Tsuguharu Foujita, 1929
Box 1, Folder 35	Book - Japanese Book on Archery, 1927
Box 1, Folder 36	Book - Modern French Painters, Annotated by Tokita, 1924
Box 1, Folder 37	Clippings on Kamekichi Tokita, 1929-1944
Box 1, Folder 38	Exhibition Catalogs, 1924-1935
Box 1, Folder 39	Exhibition Catalogs, 1936-1937
Box 1, Folder 40	Reproductions of Artwork by Others, circa 1920-circa 1940
Box 3, Folder 1	Reproductions of Works of Art and Posters by Others (Oversized), circa 1920-circa 1940
Box 3, Folder 2	Reproductions of Works of Art and Posters by Others (Oversized), circa 1920-circa 1940
Box 1, Folder 41	Seattle Museum of Art/Art Institute of Seattle Annual Reports, 1930-1933
Box 1, Folder 42	Seattle Museum of Art/Art Institute of Seattle Annual Reports, 1934-1936
Box 2, Folder 1	Seattle Art Museum Annual Reports, 1938-1940

Box 2, Folder 2 [Seattle Art Museum Guidebook, circa 1930s](#)

Box 2, Folder 3 [Miscellaneous Printed Material, circa 1930s](#)

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Series 6: Scrapbook, 1929-1933

0.2 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: A scrapbook focuses on Tokita's exhibitions and contains letters from museums, including a letter from Dorothy Morrison of the Seattle Art Museum inviting Tokita to exhibit; clippings in English and Japanese; catalogs; and photographs of works of art.

Arrangement: The scrapbook is housed in an oversized box while the loose materials from the scrapbook are inside a separate folder.

Available Formats: The bulk of this series has been digitized, except for blank pages of the scrapbook.

Box 3, Folder 3 [Oversized Mixed Media Scrapbook, 1929-1933](#)

Box 2, Folder 4 [Loose Material from Scrapbook, 1929-1933](#)

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Series 7: Artwork, circa 1910-1940s

0.1 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

Scope and Contents: Pencil sketches are unsigned but likely by Tokita. They depict landscapes, people, boats, Japanese architecture and traditional costume. Watercolor drawings are of street scenes and buildings. Also found is a sketch of a sign banning Japanese or those of Japanese-descent.

Arrangement: Most of the sketches are unsigned and undated, so they are loosely grouped by size with the oversized sketched housed separately from the smaller sketches.

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

Box 2, Folder 5	Sketches, circa 1920s-1940s
Box 3, Folder 4	Oversized Sketches, circa 1910-circa 1940

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Series 8: Photograph Album, circa 1910-circa 1930

0.2 Linear feet (Box 2)

Scope and Contents: A family photograph album includes snapshots and portraits of the Tokita family and friends, in traditional Japanese and Western dress. Snapshots show the family on vacations, car trips, and practicing kyudo (Japanese archery). Also found are photographs of Tokita's Noto Sign Company and the Cadillac Hotel. Likely written by one of Tokita's children, notes identifying some of the individuals are included.

Arrangement: This scrapbook has been disbound and is divided into two separate folders.

Available Formats: The bulk of this series has been digitized, except for blank pages.

Box 2, Folder 6 [Family Photo Album, circa 1910-circa 1930](#)

Box 2, Folder 7 [Family Photo Album, circa 1910-circa 1930](#)

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