



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

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the
Smithsonian Institution Asian Pacific American Initiatives Pool

4 January 2017

Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Arrangement.....	3
Scope and Contents.....	3
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Names and Subjects	3
Container Listing	5
Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-1985.....	5
Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1920-1944.....	6
Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1923-circa 2010.....	7
Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1928-1950.....	8
Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1910-1940.....	9
Series 6: Scrapbook, 1929-1933.....	10
Series 7: Artwork, circa 1910-1940s.....	11
Series 8: Photograph Album, circa 1900-1930.....	12

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Kamekichi Tokita Papers
Identifier:	AAA.tokikame
Date:	circa 1900-circa 2010 (bulk 1900-1948)
Creator:	Tokita, Kamekichi
Extent:	1.5 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English and Japanese.
Summary:	The scattered 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 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.

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.

Preferred Citation

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

Restrictions

This collection is being processed and digitized and is closed to researchers.

Terms of Use

The Archives of American Art makes its archival collections available for non-commercial, educational and personal use unless restricted by copyright and/or donor restrictions, including but not limited to access and publication restrictions. AAA makes no representations concerning such rights and restrictions and it is the user's responsibility to determine whether rights or restrictions exist and to obtain any necessary permission to access, use, reproduce and publish the collections. Please refer to the [Smithsonian's Terms of Use](#) for additional information.

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 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 110,000 – 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-American citizens living on the West Coast, were ordered under President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 to relocate to one of several confinement camps. For the first six months of their confinement, 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. The confinement camps were organized much like communes and independent cities (fenced and guarded) where the residents were self-reliant for most of their basic necessities, including schooling. While interned 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 scattered 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 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 internment 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 Burt Brown Baker, Roy Boynton, 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 confinement 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:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1934-1985 (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1920-1944 (Box 1; 6 folders)
- Series 3: Writings and Notes, 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; 0.1 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 -- Evacuation and relocation, 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
Baker, Burt Brown
Boynton, Roy
Callahan, Kenneth, 1905-1986
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

4 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.

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Sketch, by Shokichi and Elsie Tokita, 1985
Box 1, Folder 2	Immigration Records, circa 1940
Box 1, Folder 3	Public Works of Art Project, United States Treasury Department, 1934-1941
Box 1, Folder 4	War Relocation Authority, 1945

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, circa 1920-1944

6 Folders (Box 1)

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

Box 1, Folder 5	General, 1925 Notes: Missing Title: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Schultz (Henry Gallery) • K.M. Ishin (?)
Box 1, Folder 6-7	General, 1931-1937 Notes: Missing Title: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roy Boynton • Mrs. Reginald Parsons • Lloyd La Page Rollins • California Palace of the Legion of Honor • Walter Iteil • Burt Brown Barker • William J. Klam, Puget Sound Group of Northwest Painters • John Davis Hatch, Jr. • Penthouse Gallery • Kenneth Callahan • Mallet's Library of Reproductions • Ambrose Patterson, University of Washington • Carolyn A. Schneider • San Francisco Art Association • City of New York Municipal Art Committee • American Federation of Artists • Seattle Art Museum, Art Institute of Seattle
Box 1, Folder 8	General, 1944 Notes: Missing Title: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Airlines
Box 1, Folder 9	General, Undated, circa 1920-circa 1940 Notes: Missing Title: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roy Suzuki
Box 1, Folder 10	Empty Envelopes, 1932

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Writings and Notes, 1923-circa 2010

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: There are three diaries written by Tokita (in Japanese) between December 7, 1941 and 1944 while the family was confined in the Minidoka Relocation Camp in Idaho. It is unclear which diary is the first of the three, but there is a transcript translated from prewar to modern Japanese by Haruo Takasugi and subsequently translated from modern Japanese to English by Naomi Kusunoki-Martin. Two additional notebooks written by Tokita much earlier are also found. 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 his children.

Box 1, Folder 11	Diary, 1941-1944
Box 1, Folder 12	Diary, 1941-1944
Box 1, Folder 13	Diary, 1941-1944
Box 1, Folder 14	Diary, Transcript, circa 2010
Box 1, Folder 15	Notebooks, 1923
Box 1, Folder 16	General, circa 1920s-1940s
Box 1, Folder 17	by Others, circa 1950

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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.

Box 1, Folder 18	Cadillac Hotel, 1939-1943
Box 1, Folder 19	Department of Justice, 1950
Box 1, Folder 20	Patent, 1928

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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.

Box 1, Folder 21-26	Books, circa 1910-1929
Box 1, Folder 27	Clippings, 1929-1935
Box 1, Folder 28-29	Exhibition Catalogs, 1924-1937
Box 1, Folder 30	Menu, circa 1940
Box 1, Folder 31	Seattle Museum of Art/Art Institute of Seattle, 1930-1940
Box 2, Folder 1-2	Seattle Museum of Art/Art Institute of Seattle, 1930-1940
Box 2, Folder 3	Stationery, Noto Sign Company, circa 1930s
Box 3, Folder 3	Oversized Reproductions of Works of Art and Posters, circa 1930s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Scrapbook, 1929-1933

0.1 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.

Box 2, Folder 4 Mixed Media Scrapbook, 1929-1933
Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 3, F1

Box 3, Folder 1 Oversized Mixed Media Scrapbook, From Box 2, F4, 1929-1933

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

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.

Box 2, Folder 5	Sketches, circa 1920s-1940s
Box 3, Folder 2	Oversized Sketches, from Box 1, F34, circa 1910-circa 1940

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 8: Photograph Album, circa 1900-1930

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 the Cadillac Hotel. Likely written by one of Tokita's children, notes identifying some of the individuals are included.

Box 2, Folder 6-7 Family Photo Album, circa 1900-1930

[Return to Table of Contents](#)