



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Dorothy Varian Papers, circa 1902-1984, in the Archives of American Art

Dominique Luster

2014 June 4

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
Biographical / Historical.....	2
Arrangement.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Names and Subjects	3
Container Listing	4
Series 1: Biographical Material, 1920-1980.....	4
Series 2: Correspondence, 1917-1981.....	5
Series 3: Writings, 1940s-1960s.....	7
Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1931-1984.....	8
Series 5: Printed Material, 1916-1981.....	9
Series 6: Photographs, circa 1902-1961.....	10
Series 7: Artwork, circa 1912-1920s.....	11

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Dorothy Varian papers
Date:	circa 1902-1984
Identifier:	AAA.varidoro
Creator:	Varian, Dorothy, 1895-1985
Extent:	2.3 Linear feet
Language:	The collection is in English and French.
Summary:	The papers of painter Dorothy Varian date from circa 1902 to 1984 and measure 2.3 linear feet. This collection documents Varian's life primarily through scattered biographical material; correspondence with family, friends, artists and art galleries; personal business records; a few writings; exhibition catalogs, news clippings, and other printed material; photographs of Varian, her friends, and artwork; and original sketches by Varian and fellow artist Peggy Bacon.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to the Archives of American Art in installments by Dorothy Varian in 1972, 1978, and 1981. An additional installment was donated in 1986 by the Dorothy Varian estate, via Robert Plate.

Related Materials

Also found in this repository is an interview of Dorothy Varian conducted 1980 Dec. 6-7, by Avis Berman, for the Archives of American Art.

Available Formats

Portions of the collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 797 and 833 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 processed to a minimal level and a finding aid prepared by Dominique Luster in 2014.

Preferred Citation

Dorothy Varian papers, circa 1902-1984. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment. Use of archival audiovisual recordings with no duplicate access copy requires advance notice.

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

Dorothy Varian (1895-1985) was a painter in New York City, and Woodstock, NY. Varian was born in New York City on April 26, 1895; daughter of Eugene W. and Helen Estelle Varian. She dropped out of high school at 15 and entered Cooper Union where she graduated with honors. After Cooper Union she attended the Art Students League. While a student she inadvertently won first and second prize in a local art contest sponsored by movie producer, William Fox. She used the prize money to rent her first studio in Woodstock.

In 1920, her cousins Jessie and C. Vanderbilt Barton provided her the means to study in Paris. Varian's first one-man show was held in 1922 at the Durand-Ruel Galleries in Paris. A close friend of Varian's during this time was Jean Renior, son of Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Within the first year after she returned permanently to the United States, Varian had exhibitions at the Whitney Club, Whitney Galleries, and the Downtown Galleries. Edith Halpert, director of the Downtown Galleries became Varian's art dealer. Varian used the money from her work to buy a home in Woodstock which became her primary painting studio. The majority of her circle was formed during her time at the Art Students League and during her years in Paris. Varian also met many artists who were living and working alongside her in Woodstock. Throughout her life, she stayed in contact with many of these friends including Peggy Bacon, Alex Brook, Georgina Klitgaard, Frederick Dana Marsh, Lenore G. Marshall, and Waldo Pierce.

Varian worked primarily with watercolor and oil painting. Varian's work has been exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Corcoran Galleries, Carnegie International, Whitney Museum of American Art, Association of American Artists Gallery, Brooklyn Museum, and several universities across the country. Over the course of her career, Varian held fifteen solo exhibitions and received many awards including the Kuniyoshi Award in 1975. Varian died in 1985 at the age of 90.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Dorothy Varian date from circa 1902 to 1984 and measure 2.3 linear feet. This collection documents Varian's life primarily through scattered biographical material; correspondence with family, friends, artists and art galleries; personal business records; a few writings; exhibition catalogs, news clippings, and other printed material; photographs of Varian, her friends, including Peggy Bacon, Alex Brook, Bernard Karfiol, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and artwork; and original sketches by Varian and fellow artist Peggy Bacon.

Varian's earliest correspondence is with her mother and her cousin Jessie, detailing her life as an artist in Paris. Also found is extensive correspondence with with Peggy Bacon, Hermine Kleinert, Lenore G. Marshall, Waldo Pierce, Katherine Schmidt, Antoinette Schulte, and the Renoir family.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1920-1980 (5 folders; Box 1)
 - Series 2: Correspondence, 1917-1981 (0.8 linear feet; Box 1)
 - Series 3: Writings, 1940s-1960s (3 folders; Box 1)
 - Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1931-1984 (9 folders; Box 1)
 - Series 5: Printed Material, 1916-1981 (0.5 linear feet; Box 2)
 - Series 6: Photographs, circa 1902-1961 (13 folders; Boxes 2-3)
 - Series 7: Artwork, circa 1912-1924 (11 folders; Boxes 2-3)
-

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:

Photographs
Sketches

Names:

Bacon, Peggy, 1895-1987
Brook, Alexander, 1898-1980
Karfiol, Bernard, 1886-1952
Klienert, Herminie
Kuniyoshi, Yasuo, 1889-1953
Marshall, Lenore, 1897-1971
Peirce, Waldo, 1884-1970
Schmidt, Katherine, 1898-1978
Schulte, Antoinette E., 1897-1981

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1920-1980

5 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes U.S. passports and French identification papers. Also found are an annotated resume and curriculum vitae as well as the Archives of American Art oral history transcript for an interview conducted by Avis Berman, which was also annotated by Varian. One 5-inch sound tape reel includes an interview of Dorothy Varian conducted by Karl Fortess.

Box 1, Folder 1	Identification Records, 1959-1965, 1920-1922
Box 1, Folder 2	Biographical Excerpts, 1940s-1950s
Box 1, Folder 3	Chronology and Resumes, undated
Box 1, Folder 4	Organization Memberships, 1955 October 22-November 18
Box 1, Folder 5	Oral History Interview by Karl Fortess, 1969 June, 1973 1 Sound tape reel
Box 1, Folder 6	Annotated Oral History Transcript, 1980 December 6

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1917-1981

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1)

Arrangement: Correspondence is arranged alphabetically by name. Additional correspondence with galleries can be found within Personal Business Records.

Scope and Contents: The majority of this series consists of personal correspondence between Varian and friends and family members. Varian's earliest correspondence is with her parents, Eugene and Helen, and with her cousins, Jessie and Vanderbilt during her years in Paris. Extensive correspondence is with Peggy Bacon, Hermine Kleinert, Lenore G. Marshall, Waldo Pierce, Katherine Schmidt, Antoinette Schulte, and the Renoir family. Varian also received a number of illustrated letters from Frederick Dana Marsh and others. Also of note are holiday and greeting cards Varian sent to her friends and colleagues.

Box 1, Folder 7	A, Miscellaneous, circa 1917
Box 1, Folder 8-9	Bacon, Peggy, 1920-1930, 1975-1979
Box 1, Folder 10-13	Barton, Jessie and C. Vanderbilt, 1920-1942
Box 1, Folder 14	Brook, Alexander, 1920-1921, 1968-1977
Box 1, Folder 15	B, Miscellaneous, 1921-1937, 1978-1981
Box 1, Folder 16	C, Miscellaneous, 1934-1939, 1959-1961
Box 1, Folder 17	Durand-Ruel, Paul and Madge, 1922
Box 1, Folder 18	D, Miscellaneous, 1959-1961, 1921
Box 1, Folder 19	E, Miscellaneous, 1965
Box 1, Folder 20	F, Miscellaneous, circa 1934, 1968
Box 1, Folder 21	G, Miscellaneous, 1922-1933, 1961-1975
Box 1, Folder 22	H, Miscellaneous, 1930-1953 Notes: Includes letters from Edith Halpert and Isabella Howland.
Box 1, Folder 23	J, Miscellaneous, 1920-1930 Notes: Includes letters from Edward Alden Jewell and James Dudley.
Box 1, Folder 24	Kleinert, Hermine E., 1921, 1939-1941
Box 1, Folder 25	K, Miscellaneous, 1925-1965 Notes: Includes letters from Georgina Kiltgaard, Manuel Komroff, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi.
Box 1, Folder 26	L, Miscellaneous, 1917, 1942-1944 Notes: Includes letters from Reeves Lewenthal.

Box 1, Folder 27	Marsh, Frederick Dana, 1946-1951
Box 1, Folder 28	Marshall, Lenore G., 1941-1967
Box 1, Folder 29	M, Miscellaneous, 1944, 1966-1979
Box 1, Folder 30	N, Miscellaneous, undated
Box 1, Folder 31	O, Miscellaneous, 1938
Box 1, Folder 32	Peirce, Waldo and Alzira, 1928-1938
Box 1, Folder 33	P, Miscellaneous, 1922-1930, 1975
Box 1, Folder 34	Renoir, Jean and Andree, 1922-1924
Box 1, Folder 35	R, Miscellaneous, 1921, 1948-1965
Box 1, Folder 34	Schmidt, Katherine (Mrs. Irvine Shubert), circa 1920s, 1955-1977
Box 1, Folder 35	Schulte, Antoinette, 1960s-1970s
Box 1, Folder 36	S, Miscellaneous, 1924-1962 Notes: Includes letters from Homor Saint-Gaudens, Eugene Speicher, and Alfred Stiegliz.
Box 1, Folder 37	T, Miscellaneous, 1922
Box 1, Folder 38	Unidentified, circa 1920s, 1960
Box 1, Folder 39-40	Varian, Eugene W. , 1920s
Box 1, Folder 41	W, Miscellaneous, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 42	Z, Miscellaneous, 1923 Notes: Includes letters from Armando Zegri.
Box 1, Folder 43-47	Greeting Cards, 1920s-1980s, undated
Box 1, Folder 48	Unidentified Letter Envelopes, 1920-1980

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Writings, 1940s-1960s

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains a sample of Varian's poetry and essays. There are also miscellaneous notes and drafts of poems. Some of the writings in the series are "Letter to the Editor" pieces while others are essays on art and the artist.

Box 1, Folder 49	Poems, 1950s-1960s
Box 1, Folder 50	Essays, 1940s-1960s
Box 1, Folder 51	Miscellaneous Notes, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Personal Business Records, 1931-1984

9 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Personal business records primarily include art gallery commission and exhibition records. These records come from galleries across the country, particularly the Carnegie Institute, Downtown Gallery, and Whitney Museum of American Art. Other records included in this series are transaction receipts of art sales, inventories and price lists.

Box 1, Folder 52	Carnegie Institute, 1931-1945
Box 1, Folder 53	Downtown Gallery, 1932-1940
Box 1, Folder 54	A-M, Miscellaneous, 1936-1982 Notes: Includes records from The Art Institute of Chicago, The Art Students League, and the American Artists Group.
Box 1, Folder 55	Whitney Museum of American Art, 1940-1980
Box 1, Folder 56	Wichita State University , 1971-1973
Box 1, Folder 57	Yasuo Kuniyoshi Fund Inc., 1975-1977
Box 1, Folder 58	N-Z, Miscellaneous, 1934-1984
Box 1, Folder 59	Lists of Artwork and Price Lists, circa 1940s
Box 1, Folder 60	Records of Art Sales, 1950s-1960s

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Printed Material, 1916-1981

0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2)

Scope and Contents: Printed material primarily includes exhibition catalogs and announcements and newspaper clippings. Exhibition materials are for works by Varian as well of exhibitions by other artists. Of note is a 1926 Brancusi exhibition catalog inscribed to Varian. Some newspaper clippings document the activities of friends and fellow artists Peggy Bacon and Bernard Karfiol. Also included is a book of poetry, *Tease the Tiger's Nose* which Varian illustrated.

Box 2, Folder 1	Gallery and Exhibition Publications, 1920-1980
Box 2, Folder 2-3	Exhibitions Announcements, 1920-1980
Box 2, Folder 4	Exhibition Catalogues, 1920s
Box 2, Folder 5-10	Exhibition Catalogues, 1930s
Box 2, Folder 11-13	Exhibition Catalogues, 1940s
Box 2, Folder 14	Exhibition Catalogues, 1950s
Box 2, Folder 15-16	Exhibition Catalogues, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 17-19	News Clippings, 1916-1981
Box 2, Folder 20	News Clippings regarding Bernard Karfiol, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 21	Published Books, 1965
Box 2, Folder 22	Miscellaneous, 1919 Notes: Art Students League 1919 issue of "Bad News" for which Varian was the Assistant Editor.

Return to Table of Contents

Series 6: Photographs, circa 1902-1961

13 Folders (Boxes 2-3)

Scope and Contents: This series includes professional portraits of Varian and her artwork. There are additionally photos of exhibit installations taken at Long Island University in 1961. The series also contains more candid, personal photos of Varian with friends and family. Of note are photographs of friends Peggy Bacon, Alex Brook, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Bernard Karfiol. Though the majority of these personal photos are from Varian's mid-to-late adult life, there are a few photos of Varian as a child.

Box 2, Folder 23-24	Portraits of Dorothy Varian, 1916-1937
Box 2, Folder 25-27	Personal Photographs, circa 1902-1950s
Box 2, Folder 28	Photographs of Artwork, 1922-1949
Box 2, Folder 29	Exhibition Installations, 1961
Box 2, Folder 30	Photographs of Peggy Bacon and Alex Brook with Children, circa 1920s
Box 2, Folder 31-33	Photographs of Bernard Karfiol, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Oversized Personal Photograph, circa 1934
Box 3, Folder 2	Oversized Photograph of Artwork, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 7: Artwork, circa 1912-1920s

11 Folders (Boxes 2-3)

Scope and Contents: This series primarily consists of pencil sketches done by Varian during her time at the Art Students League and in Paris. The sketches feature a mixture of human and landscape subjects. In addition to the sketches created by Varian, the series also includes sketches by Peggy Bacon and Edmund Duffy. Also found are a small selection of handmade greeting cards.

Box 2, Folder 34	Greeting Cards, undated
Box 2, Folder 35	Sketches, 1912
Box 2, Folder 36	Sketches, 1917
Box 2, Folder 37	Sketches, 1910s-1920s
Box 2, Folder 38	Sketches, 1917-1918
Box 2, Folder 39-41	Sketches, circa 1921-1924
Box 2, Folder 42	Sketches by Edmund Duffy, 1917-1918
Box 2, Folder 44	Sketches by Peggy Bacon, 1917-1918
Box 4, Folder 3	Oversized Sketch, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)