



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Louise Medbery von Brockdorff Papers, 1905-1975, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

Processing of this collection received support from  
the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

2023/02/22

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Louise Medbery von Brockdorff papers
<b>Date:</b>	1905-1975
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.vonbroc
<b>Creator:</b>	Von Brockdorff, Louise Medbery
<b>Extent:</b>	0.9 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The papers of painter and designer Louise Medbery von Brockdorff measure 0.9 linear feet and date from 1905 to 1975. The collection comments on von Brockdorff's colorful life of different interests and travel. Found are address books, biographical materials, letters from Maryette Charlton, eighteen journals, sketches, and handwritten writings and notes.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Donated 1980 by Lillian Kiesler and Maryette Charlton, friends of von Brockdorff. Additional materials were donated by Maryette Charlton between 1998 and 2013.

### Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds the Maryette Charlton papers, circa 1890-2013. Charlton, who served as executor of von Brockdorff's estate, was a close friend. The Charlton papers include letters from von Brockdorff to Charlton, information on the acquisition of the estate, legal documents, and records regarding von Brockdorff's memorial which was organized by Charlton.

### Processing Information

The collection was processed, and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2023 with support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative.

### Preferred Citation

Louise Medbery von Brockdorff papers, 1905-1975. 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

Louise Medbery von Brockdorff (1887-1975) was a painter and designer based in New York, New York who worked briefly for the Works Progress Administration. She was also an astrologist and a socialite with many friends in the arts including choreographers, dancers, artists, and poets.

Known to friends as Fifi, Louise Medbery was born in Columbus, Ohio and studied at Vassar College. Shortly after graduation, she moved to Europe and studied painting in Munich, Germany. She married Count Hugo von Brockdorff in 1910 and remained in Germany while he fought in World War I. The couple lived in Denmark after the war but Louise ultimately returned to Columbus and the two divorced, after which she completed a secretarial course and worked at an office in Columbus and took other jobs around Ohio.

Von Brockdorff moved often seeking out new interests and professions. In 1924 she moved to New York City to study fashion design and pursued an interest in astrology which ultimately became a career. During the Depression, she supported herself through mail-order star charts and would find clients through word-of-mouth. Briefly, she worked for the Works Progress Administration and continued to move in and out of New York City. Later in life, von Brockdorff took an interest in theater and dance and became close with choreographers, poets, and artists.

She died in 1975 in New York City.

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## Scope and Contents

The papers of painter and designer Louise Medbery von Brockdorff measure 0.9 linear feet and date from 1905 to 1975. The collection comments on von Brockdorff's colorful life of different interests and travel. Found are address books, biographical materials, letters from Maryette Charlton, eighteen journals, sketches, and handwritten writings and notes.

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## Arrangement

Due to the small size of this collection the papers are arranged as one series.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Women artists  
Women authors

Names:

Charlton, Maryette

Occupations:

Designers -- New York (State) -- New York  
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Louise Medbery von Brockdorff Papers, 1905-1975

#### 0.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-2, OV 3)

Scope and Contents: In addition to the addresses of friends and colleagues, address books also contain birth statistics for famous and notable figures, presumably for astrology. Biographical materials include a sketch of von Brockdorff, obituaries written by Maryette Charlton, passports, and completed star charts. Correspondence consists of letters from Maryette Charlton. Eighteen journals contain diary entries, poems, reflections on life and art, and scattered sketches. Watercolor and ink sketches depict abstract scenes and designs. Also found are loose writings and notes containing entries similar to those found in the journals.

Box 1, Folder 1	Address Books, circa 1930-1970s
Box 1, Folder 2	Biographical Material, 1933-1975
Oversize 3	Biographical Material, Oversized, 1923
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1960-1974
Box 1, Folder 4-9	Journals, 1905-circa 1920s
Box 2, Folder 1-2	Sketches, 1945-1974
Box 2, Folder 3-7	Writings and Notes, Loose, 1924-1971

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