



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Otto Wittmann Papers,
1932-1996, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Hanson

Funding for the processing of this collection was
provided by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

May 21, 2012

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 Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	3
Arrangement.....	3
Names and Subjects	4
Container Listing	5
Series 1: Biographical Information, 1995-1996.....	5
Series 2: Correspondence, 1959-1990.....	6
Series 3: Professional Files, 1947-1986.....	7
Series 4: Getty Museum Files, 1978-1991.....	12
Series 5: National Endowment for the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Files, 1976.....	14
Series 6: Scrapbooks, 1932-1977.....	15

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Otto Wittmann papers
Identifier:	AAA.wittotto
Date:	1932-1996
Extent:	10.1 Linear feet
Creator:	Wittmann, Otto, 1911-2001
Language:	English .
Summary:	<p>The papers of museum director, art consultant and curator Otto Wittmann (1911-2001) date from 1932 to 1996 and measure 10.1 linear feet. The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence and other files concerning Wittmann's career as Director of the Toledo Museum of Art and as trustee and acting chief curator of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Eleven scrapbooks contain materials primarily relating to the activities of the Toledo Museum of Art, but also contain documentation of Wittmann's World War II service in the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the present day CIA. Also found within the papers are files relating to his work with the National Endowment of the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnification Committee, scattered biographical information, and personal correspondence.</p>

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Otto Wittmann donated his papers to the Archives of American Art in 1991 and 1995.

Related Material

The Archives of American Art has an oral history interview with Otto Wittmann conducted by Paul Cummings on August 19-20, 1976, and another conducted by Thomas Carr Howe on October 25, 1976.

Processing Information

The Otto Wittmann papers were processed to a minimal level and described by Jayna Hanson in 2012 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art. The goal for minimal-level processing at the Archives of American Art is to provide access to collections as quickly as possible while maintaining high standards for arrangement, description and preservation. Generally, materials are minimally rearranged, existing folder titles are retained, and all materials are rehoused in acid-free folders and boxes. Individual items within folders may not be fully arranged or verified for content. Staples and other fasteners may not always be

removed, but materials are removed from binders or other damaging housing conditions when necessary.

Preferred Citation

Otto Wittmann papers, 1932-1996. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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 Note

Otto Wittmann (1911-2001) was director of the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo Ohio from 1959-1976. He left Toledo to work as an arts consultant, trustee, and acting chief curator for the Getty Museum in Los Angeles from 1978 though 1989. During World War II, he served in the Army Air Force and as a special intelligence officer assigned to locate and return works of art looted by the Nazis.

Otto Wittmann was born in Kansas City, Missouri on September 1, 1911. He graduated from Harvard University with a fine arts degree in 1933 and returned to Kansas City to become the Curator of Prints at the Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, the first art museum in the city. Later, he enrolled at Skidmore College for graduate studies and worked at The Hyde Collection in Glen Falls, New York.

During World War II, Wittmann served as a Major with the Air Force in the Air Transport Command. He was transferred to the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) in Washington, D.C. under the Office of Strategic Services. He spent long periods in Paris and Munich assisting with looted art recovery, investigating transactions in Sweden and Switzerland, and working with the collection centers set up in France. Years later, at the Toledo Museum of Art, he curated an exhibition of recovered artwork, and invited the U.S. Army members that assisted with protecting the artwork.

After the war, Wittmann accepted a position at the Toledo Museum of Art (TMA), working there for thirty years and as director from 1959-1976. During his tenure, he tripled the museum's collection of artwork and expanded its exhibition space. Under his direction, the museum was one of the first American museums to display sculpture, painting, furniture, and decorative arts in one setting.

In 1978, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles hired Wittmann as an acquisitions consultant as the museum began to spend the huge billion dollar trust left behind by J. P. Getty. Many institutions and the art market in general were nervous that the Getty's new and huge purchasing power would drive up prices and shut out other institutions and museums from acquiring works of art. Wittmann, however, steadied the Getty's purchases and kept prices competitive enough so that other museums could outbid him if they desired. Within a year, he was appointed to trustee and, shortly thereafter, as acting chief curator until 1983. The Getty named Wittmann a trustee emeritus in 1989.

Otto Wittmann was among the first museum professionals to encourage the establishment of Federal programs for the arts. He was one of the founding members of the National Council on the Arts and served on the museum advisory panel for the National Endowment for the Arts and on the arts advisory panel for the Internal Revenue Service. He was the first chairman of the Advisory Committee to the Federal Council of Arts and Humanities responsible for implementing the initial programs of the Federal Arts Indemnity Act. He was active in many national professional arts associations.

In 1947, Otto Wittmann married Margaret Hill, with whom he had two sons, John and William. Wittmann died in 1997 in Montecito, California.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of museum director, art consultant and curator Otto Wittmann (1911-2001) date from 1932 to 1996 and measure 10.1 linear feet. The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence and other files concerning Wittmann's career as Director of the Toledo Museum of Art and as trustee and acting chief curator of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Eleven scrapbooks contain materials primarily relating to the activities of the Toledo Museum of Art, but also contain documentation of Wittmann's World War II service in the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the precursor to the present day CIA. Also found within the papers are files relating to his work with the National Endowment of the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnification Committee, scattered biographical information, and personal correspondence.

Biographical information includes a biographical sketch and an index of an interview of Wittmann by Richard Candida Smith. Correspondence is mostly personal and with family, friends, and colleagues.

Professional files include Wittmann's files from the Toledo Museum of Art that consist of general operations and administrative files from the director's office. Wittmann's role as an art consultant and advisor to the Owens Corning Fiberglass Corporation is documented, as well as his many affiliations with professional arts associations, arts organizations, and other museums and institutions.

Files documenting Wittmann's consulting and curatorial work for the Getty Museum are arranged in a separate series and consist of chronological correspondence and scattered expense reports. Correspondence concerns the development of the Getty Museum's early art collecting policy and the general formation of the museum.

There seven files relating to Wittmann's work for the National Endowment for the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnification Committee.

Eleven scrapbooks dating from 1932 to 1977 focus on a variety of subjects, including the Hyde Collection, Skidmore College, the U.S. Army Air Force, the Toledo Museum of Art, and the Getty Museum. Found within the scrapbooks are mixed formats, such as correspondence, biographical information, clippings, brochures, and photographs. The scrapbook dating from 1932 to April 1959 contains scattered photographs from Wittmann's service in the Art Looting Investigation Unit (ALIU) of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 6 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Information, 1995-1996 (Box 1; 2 folders)

- Series 2: Correspondence, 1959-1990 (Box 1; 0.6 linear feet)
- Series 3: Professional Files, 1947-1986 (Boxes 1-6, OV18; 5.2 linear feet)
- Series 4: Getty Museum Files, 1978-1991 (Boxes 6-9; 1.7 linear feet)
- Series 5: National Endowment for the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Files, 1976 (Box 9; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 6: Scrapbooks, 1932-1977 (Boxes 10-17; 2.4 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art museum directors -- Ohio -- Toledo
Art museums -- Ohio -- Toledo
Curators -- Ohio -- Toledo
Museum directors -- Ohio-Toledo

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Hyde Collection
J. Paul Getty Museum
National Endowment for the Arts
Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation
Skidmore College
Toledo Museum of Art
United States. Army Air Forces
United States. Office of Strategic Services

Occupations:

Art consultants

Functions:

Arts organizations

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Information, 1995-1996

2 Folders (Box 1)

Found is a biographical sketch used by Otto Wittmann for his museum consulting business and an index of an interview of Wittmann by Richard Candida Smith.

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Sketch, circa 1995
Box 1, Folder 2	Index of Interview, by Richard Candida Smith, 1995-1996

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1959-1990

0.6 Linear feet (Box 1)

Personal correspondence is primarily with family, friends, and colleagues, including colleagues at the Getty and the Toledo Museum of Art. Also found are letters from various friends and museum professionals congratulating Otto Wittmann on becoming the Director of the Toledo Museum of Art and his responses.

Box 1, Folder 3	A-C, 1984-1990
Box 1, Folder 4	D-J, 1982-1990
Box 1, Folder 5	K-M, 1977-1989
Box 1, Folder 6	N-Q, 1980-1990
Box 1, Folder 7	R-S, 1983-1989
Box 1, Folder 8	T-Z, 1980-1989
Box 1, Folder 9-12	Congratulations, 1959, 1995

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Professional Files, 1947-1986

5.2 Linear feet (Boxes 1-6, OV 18)

Numerous files documenting Wittmann's professional work with the Toledo Museum of Art, consulting work with the Owens-Illinois and Owens Corning Fiberglas Company, and his many professional affiliations with organizations are found here. The files contain a wide variety of documents, including correspondence, printed materials, and receipts. Files are found for the American Association of Museums, American Society of the French Legion of Honor, Art Advisory Panel of the Commission of Internal Revenue, Art Dealers Association of America, Association of Art Museum Directors, The Century Association, College Art Association, International Council of Museums, The Museums Association of Great Britain, National Collection of Fine Arts Commission, National Council on the Arts, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, and the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities.

These files reflect the creator's original order and folder titles. They are arranged primarily by name of organization or corporation.

Operations Files

Box 1, Folder 13	Toledo Museum of Art History, 1949-1976
Box 1, Folder 14	Memos for the Record, 1977-1984
Box 1, Folder 15	Memos to Staff, 1977-1985
Box 1, Folder 16	Memos to/from Roger Mandle, circa 1980
Box 1, Folder 17	Director, Wittmann, Otto: Biographies, 1968-1981
Box 1, Folder 18	Retirement, Mr. Wittmann, 1977
Box 1, Folder 19	Director, Extension Activities, 1966-1977
Box 1, Folder 20	Volunteer Workers and Art Museum Docents, 1947-1984

Owens-Illinois Files

Box 2, Folder 1-2	Consultant Files, 1980-1983
Box 2, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1983-1984
Box 2, Folder 4	Headquarters, Fountain, 1979-1982 Oversized material housed in OV18

Owens Corning Fiberglas, Art Committee

Box 2, Folder 5 History and Procedures, 1968-1979

Box 2, Folder 6-7 Correspondence, 1978-1985

Box 2, Folder 8 Exhibitions, 1977-1979

Box 2, Folder 9-10 Purchase and Aquisitions, 1978-1983

Box 2, Folder 11 Meeting, 23 January 1980, 1979-1980

Box 2, Folder 12-14 Proposed Trip to California, 1980

Box 2, Folder 15-16 Articles on Artists in OCF Foundation, 1975-1979

Associations and Organizations

Box 2, Folder 17 Alliance Francaise de Toledo, 1979-1983

Box 2, Folder 18 Art Dealers Association of America, 1979

Box 2, Folder 19-21 American Association of Museums, 1977-1983

Associations and Organizations

Box 3, Folder 1 American Association of Museums, 1977-1983

Box 3, Folder 2 American Society of the French Legion of Honor, INC., 1967-1983

Box 3, Folder 3-5 Association of Art Museum Directors, 1977-1982

Box 3, Folder 6 Association of Art Museum Directors, Membership Lists, 1978-1981

Box 3, Folder 7-17 Association of Art Museum Directors, Meetings, 1977-1984

Box 3, Folder 18-20 The Century Association, 1970-1983

Box 3, Folder 21 College Art Association, 1977-1979

Box 3, Folder 22-23 Internal Revenue Service, Art Advisory Panel, 1970-1982

Associations and Organizations

Box 4, Folder 1 International Council of Museums, 1976-1982

Box 4, Folder 2	Museum Presidents Conference, 1978-1982
Box 4, Folder 3	Museum Services Institute, 1977-1978
Box 4, Folder 4-5	National Collection of Fine Arts Commission, 1978-1979
Box 4, Folder 6-7	National Council on the Arts, 1974, 1965
Box 4, Folder 8-10	National Endowment for the Arts, 197-1985
Box 4, Folder 11-15	National Endowment for the Arts, Museum Advisory Panel, 1972-1976
Box 4, Folder 16-21	National Endowment for Humanities, 1961-1981
Box 4, Folder 22-24	National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, 1977-1978

Associations and Organizations

Box 5, Folder 1	The Toledo Club, 1978-1986
Box 5, Folder 2-3	Travellers' Club, 1968-1985

Museums and Institutions

Box 5, Folder 4-5	American Friends of Attingham, 1976-1985
Box 5, Folder 6	Art Institute of Chicago, 1977-1982
Box 5, Folder 7	Boston, 1977-1982
Box 5, Folder 8	Cleveland, 1978-1984
Box 5, Folder 9	Dart Industries, INC., 1977-1980
Box 5, Folder 10	Detroit Institute, 1977-1984
Box 5, Folder 11	Dixon Art Gallery, 1975-1983
Box 5, Folder 12-13	England, General, 1973-1984
Box 5, Folder 14	Foreign, General, 1977-1984

Box 5, Folder 15	France, General, 1977-1983
Box 5, Folder 16	Great Britain, 1973-1984
Box 5, Folder 17	Holland, General, 1977-1982
Box 5, Folder 18-19	Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978-1983
Box 5, Folder 20	Museum Directors in America, circa 1979
Box 5, Folder 21-24	Museums, Miscellaneous, circa 1970-1983

Museums and Institutions

Box 6, Folder 1-2	National Gallery of Art, 1978-1982
Box 6, Folder 3-4	New York, Miscellaneous, 1978-1982
Box 6, Folder 5	Palm Beach, 1978-1983
Box 6, Folder 6	Philadelphia, 1977-1980
Box 6, Folder 7	Rochester Museum and Science Center, 1981
Box 6, Folder 8	Seattle, Washington, 1975
Box 6, Folder 9	Switzerland, 1977-1982
Box 6, Folder 10	Texas, 1978-1985
Box 6, Folder 11	Toledo, 1977-1984
Box 6, Folder 12	University of Michigan, 1979-1985
Box 6, Folder 13	Washington, District of Columbia, 1977-1984

Miscellaneous

Box 6, Folder 14-16	Memoranda, 1977-1982
Box 6, Folder 17	"Community Art Centers" Information File, circa 1970s
Oversize 18	Oversized Blueprint of Fountain, circa 1982

See Box 2, F4

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Getty Museum Files, 1978-1991

1.7 Linear feet (Boxes 6-9)

Found here are primarily chronological files of copies of outgoing letters from Otto Wittmann to the Getty Museum staff and colleagues when he served as a consultant, trustee, and acting chief curator for the museum. The letters focus on the early formation of the Getty Museum including policies and art acquisitions. There are also travel expense reports.

Box 6, Folder 18	Chronological Correspondence, 1978-Dec 1981
Box 6, Folder 19	Chronological Correspondence, 1982 Jan-Apr
Box 6, Folder 20	Chronological Correspondence, 1982 May-Oct
Box 7, Folder 1	Chronological Correspondence, 1982 Nov-Dec
Box 7, Folder 2	Chronological Correspondence, 1983 Jan-Mar
Box 7, Folder 3	Chronological Correspondence, 1983 Mar
Box 7, Folder 4-5	Chronological Correspondence, 1983 Apr-Jun
Box 7, Folder 6-7	Chronological Correspondence, 1983 Jul-Dec
Box 7, Folder 8	Chronological Correspondence, 1984 Jan-Mar
Box 7, Folder 9	Chronological Correspondence, 1984 Apr-Dec
Box 7, Folder 10	Chronological Correspondence, 1985 Jan-Apr
Box 7, Folder 11	Chronological Correspondence, 1985 May-Dec
Box 7, Folder 12	Chronological Correspondence, 1986 Jan-Apr
Box 7, Folder 13	Chronological Correspondence, 1986 May-Dec
Box 7, Folder 14	Chronological Correspondence, 1987 Jan-May
Box 7, Folder 15	Chronological Correspondence, 1987 Jun-Dec
Box 7, Folder 16	Chronological Correspondence, 1988 Jan-Apr
Box 7, Folder 17	Chronological Correspondence, 1988 May-Dec

Box 7, Folder 18-19	Chronological Correspondence, 1989
Box 8, Folder 1	Chronological Correspondence, 1990-1991
Box 8, Folder 2-3	Expense Reports, 1978-1984
Box 8, Folder 4-5	Expense Reports, 1985-1991
Box 8, Folder 6	Memoranda, Blue File Copies, 1980-1981
Box 9, Folder 1	Memoranda, Blue File Copies, 1981-1982

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: National Endowment for the Arts, Arts and Artifacts Indemnity Files, 1976

0.2 Linear feet (Box 9)

There are seven files of applications from museums for grants from the Arts and Artifacts Indemnity program under the National Endowment for the Arts, for which Otto Wittmann sat on the committee.

Box 9, Folder 2	Advisory Panel Meeting, 1976
Box 9, Folder 3	Armand Hammer Collection, 1976
Box 9, Folder 4	Corning Museum of Glass, 1976
Box 9, Folder 5	International Exhibitions Foundation, 1976
Box 9, Folder 6	Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1976
Box 9, Folder 7	Nelson Gallery--Atkins Museum, 1976
Box 9, Folder 8	Seattle Art Museum, 1976

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 6: Scrapbooks, 1932-1977

2.4 Linear feet (Boxes 10-17)

Eleven scrapbooks date from 1932 to 1977. Each scrapbook is arranged chronologically and typically includes biographical information, correspondence, invitations, clippings, brochures, and scattered photographs. Wittmann's service during and immediately following World War II, including his work with the Art Looting Investigation Unit of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services is represented in the scrapbook dating from 1932 to April 1959, but is scattered. The other scrapbooks document Wittmann's career and work for the Hyde Collection, the Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, the Toledo Museum of Art, and the Getty Museum. Photographs are mostly of receptions at the Toledo Museum of Art.

Box 10, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1932-1959 Apr
Box 11, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1959 May-1963 Jan
Box 12, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1963 Feb-1965 Jun
Box 13, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1965 Sep-1967 Nov
Box 14, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1967 Dec-1970 Apr
Box 14, Folder 2	Scrapbook, 1970 Jun-1971 Oct
Box 15, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1971 Oct-1973 Oct
Box 15, Folder 2	Scrapbook, 1973 Nov-1975 Jul
Box 16, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1975 Jul-1976 Oct
Box 16, Folder 2	Scrapbook, 1976 Nov-Aug 1977
Box 17, Folder 1	Scrapbook, 1977 Oct

[Return to Table of Contents](#)