



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Claire Zeisler Papers,
1941-1992, in the Archives of American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Claire Zeisler papers
Date:	1941-1992
Identifier:	AAA.zeisclai
Creator:	Zeisler, Claire, 1903-1991
Extent:	3.5 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of fiber artist Claire Zeisler measure 3.5 linear feet and date from 1941 to 1992. Zeisler's career is documented through project files, printed materials, and scrapbooks. The bulk of the collection consists of twenty-two scrapbooks containing resumes and chronologies; an honorary degree; business correspondence with libraries, museums, and other institutions concerning exhibitions of Zeisler's work and the loan of her personal art collection; exhibition lists and condition reports; loan records; printed materials for exhibitons; and scattered sketches and hanging instructions. Project files contain documents relating to titled weavings and general works, and may include fabric samples, hanging instructions, plans, and material costs. Also found are three exhibition catalogs.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Scrapbooks on reel 3019 were lent to the Archives of American Art for microfilming in August 1983 by Claire Zeisler. In 1992 her son and executor, Thomas Florsheim, donated additional scrapbooks, and project and weaving files. He interfiled new material in the previously microfilmed scrapbooks, 1941-1983, expanding them from eight notebooks to thirteen.

Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds material lent for microfilming (reel 3109) including scrapbooks lent by Ziesler in 1983. Some, but not all, of this material was included in later donations. This material remains with the lender and is not described in the collection container inventory.

Related Materials

Also found in the Archives of American Art is an oral history interview of Claire Zeisler conducted by Dennis Barrie in June 1981.

Available Formats

Material lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reel 3109 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Jayna Josefson in 2018.

Preferred Citation

Claire Zeisler papers, 1941-1992. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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Biographical / Historical

Claire Zeisler (1903-1991) was a fiber artist and art collector active in Chicago, Illinois.

Zeisler was born Claire Block in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1903. She studied at Columbia College Chicago but left to marry Harold Florsheim in 1921. The couple divorced in 1943 and she married Ernest Zeisler in 1946.

For much of her early life, Claire concentrated her interest in art on collecting. Throughout the 1930s, she acquired paintings by European modern artists such as Paul Klee, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso. Later, she collected paintings by American artists such as Franz Kline and Robert Rauschenberg. She expanded her collection to include textile works and baskets by Native Americans, and African sculpture among others.

After her divorce, she returned to the study of art at the Chicago Institute of Design and the Illinois Institute of Technology. She studied under Bea Swartchild who inspired a love for weaving. Zeisler's first works used traditional loom techniques but later she focused on knotting and braiding. She innovated free-falling fiber sculpture and her works helped push fiber art from craft to a fine art.

Scope and Contents

The papers of fiber artist Claire Zeisler measure 3.5 linear feet and date from 1941 to 1992. Zeisler's career is documented through project files, printed materials, and scrapbooks. The bulk of the collection consists of twenty-two scrapbooks containing resumes and chronologies; an honorary degree; business correspondence with libraries, museums, and other institutions concerning exhibitions of Zeisler's work and the loan of her personal art collection; exhibition lists and condition reports; loan records; printed materials for exhibitons; and scattered sketches and hanging instructions. Project files contain documents relating to titled weavings and general works, and may include fabric samples, hanging instructions, plans, and material costs. Also found are three exhibition catalogs.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as three series

- Series 1: Project Files, circa 1941-1991 (0.8 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Printed Material, 1977-1987 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 3: Scrapbooks, 1941-1992 (2.5 linear feet; Boxes 2-5)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- Collectors and collecting
- Fiberwork
- Textile crafts
- Women artists
- Women textile designers

Occupations:

- Collectors -- Illinois -- Chicago
- Fiber artists -- Illinois -- Chicago
- Textile designers -- Illinois -- Chicago
- Weavers -- Illinois -- Chicago

Container Listing

Series 1: Project Files, circa 1941-1991

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Found here are files for Zeisler's projects and commissions arranged chronologically. Material may include agreements, financial information, correspondence, and plans for specific projects, although the items are scattered. Also found are fiber samples and general ideas and sketches.

Box 1, Folder 1	Circle, 1967
Box 1, Folder 2	Chuck II, 1967
Box 1, Folder 3	Mellow Yellow, 1967
Box 1, Folder 4	Red Forest, 1967
Box 1, Folder 5	Red Wednesday, 1967
Box 1, Folder 6	Untitled--Three Elements, 1967
Box 1, Folder 7	Black Tuesday, 1968
Box 1, Folder 8	Breakwater, 1968
Box 1, Folder 9	Evening Presence, 1968
Box 1, Folder 10	Rosemary, 1968
Box 1, Folder 11	White Monday, 1968
Box 1, Folder 12	Winter White, 1968
Box 1, Folder 13	Black and White Hanging, 1969
Box 1, Folder 14	Homage to Masae, 1969
Box 1, Folder 15	Red Lace, 1969
Box 1, Folder 16	Red Preview, 1969
Box 1, Folder 17	See Thru, 1969
Box 1, Folder 18	To Conrad, 1969

Box 1, Folder 19	Red Forest II, 1970-1971
Box 1, Folder 20	Red Line Raffia #5, 1971-1972
Box 1, Folder 21	Red Slinky, 1971-1972
Box 1, Folder 22	Black Madagascar, 1972
Box 1, Folder 23	Buddy Balls, 1972
Box 1, Folder 24	Multi-Color Slinky, 1972
Box 1, Folder 25	Red Floor Slinky, 1972
Box 1, Folder 26	Red Madagascar, 1972
Box 1, Folder 27	Coil Series I, 1977
Box 1, Folder 28	Hemp Three Elements, 1977
Box 1, Folder 29	Madagascar, 1977
Box 1, Folder 30	Small Rippled, 1977
Box 1, Folder 31	The King, 1977
Box 1, Folder 32	Stela I, 1977-1978
Box 1, Folder 33	Stela II, 1977-1978
Box 1, Folder 34	Coil Series II, 1978
Box 1, Folder 35	Coil Series III, A Celebration, 1978
Box 1, Folder 36	Coil Series IV, 1978
Box 1, Folder 37	Public Affairs II, 1978
Box 1, Folder 38	Silent Spring, 1978
Box 1, Folder 39	Small Curved Line, 1978
Box 1, Folder 40	Small Hemp Piece, 1978
Box 1, Folder 41	Small Totem Sample, 1978
Box 1, Folder 42	Totem I, 1978

Box 1, Folder 43	Totem II, 1978
Box 1, Folder 44	Totem III, 1978
Box 1, Folder 45	Totem IV, 1978
Box 1, Folder 46	Felt Samples, 1980
Box 1, Folder 47	Fran's Piece, 1980
Box 1, Folder 48	Horizontal Sample, 1980
Box 1, Folder 49	Large Sewn Piece II, 1980
Box 1, Folder 50	Piece Two with Macrame, 1980
Box 1, Folder 51	Sewn Piece, 1980
Box 1, Folder 52	Blue Vision, 1981
Box 1, Folder 53	Brunswick Corporation, 1981
Box 1, Folder 54	PBS Sample, 1981
Box 1, Folder 55	Red Chevron, 1981
Box 1, Folder 56	Sewn Sample I, 1981
Box 1, Folder 57	Stela III, 1981
Box 1, Folder 58	Stela IV, 1981
Box 1, Folder 59	Untitled (Four Elements), 1981
Box 1, Folder 60	Borg Warner Commission, 1982
Box 1, Folder 61	Carbondale, SIU Commission, 1983
Box 1, Folder 62	Red Arch, 1983-1984
Box 1, Folder 63	Doublewall Triptych, 1984
Box 1, Folder 64	Hi Rise, 1984
Box 1, Folder 65	Tri Color Arch, 1984
Box 1, Folder 66	Clove Lace, 1986

Box 1, Folder 67	Private Affair I, 1986
Box 1, Folder 68	Private Affair II, 1986
Box 1, Folder 69	Private Affair III, 1986
Box 1, Folder 70	Kapal, 1987
Box 1, Folder 71	Nine Square, Disassembled, 1987
Box 1, Folder 72	Library Project, 1988
Box 1, Folder 73	Untitled, 1988
Box 1, Folder 74	Cascade, 1988-1990
Box 1, Folder 75	Flower Garden, 1989
Box 1, Folder 76	Flower Garden/Tassel, 1991
Box 1, Folder 77	Tassel Piece, 1991
Box 1, Folder 78	Almost Christmas, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 79	Double Red II, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 80	Raffia Module II, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 81	Rug Sculptures, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 82	Sisal I, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 83	Three Lines--2 Red/1 Black, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 84	General, Sketches and Ideas, circa 1970-circa 1990
Box 1, Folder 85-138	General, Fabric Samples, circa 1970-circa 1990

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Series 2: Printed Material, 1977-1987

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Found are three exhibition catalogs for group exhibitions featuring Zeisler's work. Catalogs are from the Cleveland Museum of Art, the American Craft Museum, and the University of Michigan Museum of Art.

Box 1, Folder 139-140 Exhibition Catalogs, 1977-1987

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Series 3: Scrapbooks, 1941-1992

2.5 Linear feet (Boxes 2-5)

Scope and Contents: Twenty-two scrapbooks contain resumes and chronologies; an honorary degree; business correspondence with libraries, museums, and other institutions concerning exhibitions of Zeisler's work; exhibition lists and condition reports; loan records; printed materials including clippings, posters, and exhibition announcements and catalogs; hanging instructions, sketches, and fiber samples; and photographs of gallery openings, of works of art, and of Claire Zeisler with others. Also found are documents relating to Zeisler's personal art collection and the loan of those works.

Box 2, Folder 1-2	Scrapbook 1, 1941-1963
Box 2, Folder 3-4	Scrapbook 2, 1964-1967
Box 2, Folder 5-6	Scrapbook 3, 1968-1971
Box 2, Folder 7-8	Scrapbook 4, 1971
Box 2, Folder 9	Scrapbook 5, 1972
Box 2, Folder 10-11	Scrapbook 6, 1973-1974
Box 2, Folder 12-13	Scrapbook 7, 1976-1977
Box 2, Folder 14-15	Scrapbook 8, 1978-1979
Box 2, Folder 16-17	Scrapbook 9, Art Institute of Chicago Retrospective, 1978-1979
Box 2, Folder 18	Scrapbook 10, 1980
Box 3, Folder 1-3	Scrapbook 11, 1981-1982
Box 3, Folder 4-5	Scrapbook 12, 1982-1983
Box 3, Folder 6-7	Scrapbook 13, 1984
Box 3, Folder 8-9	Scrapbook 14, 1985
Box 3, Folder 10-11	Scrapbook 15, 1986
Box 3, Folder 12-13	Scrapbook 16, 1986
Box 3, Folder 14-15	Scrapbook 17, 1987
Box 3, Folder 16-17	Scrapbook 18, 1988
Box 4, Folder 1-2	Scrapbook 19, 1989

Box 4, Folder 3	Scrapbook 20, 1990
Box 4, Folder 4	Scrapbook 21, 1991-1992
Box 4, Folder 5	Scrapbook 22, Chronologies, 1991
Oversize 5	Oversized Material from Scrapbooks, 1960s-1991

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