



# 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

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Repository:</b> | Archives of American Art                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Title:</b>      | Claire Zeisler papers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Identifier:</b> | AAA.zeisclai                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Date:</b>       | 1941-1992                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Creator:</b>    | Zeisler, Claire, 1903-1991                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Extent:</b>     | 3.5 Linear feet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Language:</b>   | English .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Summary:</b>    | <p>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.</p> |

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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 -- United States
- Women artists
- Women textile designers

### Occupations:

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

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## 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<br>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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