



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Karl Zerbe Papers,
1928-1996, in the Archives of American Art

Christopher DeMairo

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Karl Zerbe papers
Identifier:	AAA.zerbkarl
Date:	1928-1996
Extent:	6.5 Linear feet
Creator:	Zerbe, Karl, 1903-1972
Language:	English
Summary:	The papers of German American painter and educator Karl Zerbe measure 5.1 linear feet and date from 1928 to 1996. The papers document Zerbe's career through biographical material, writings and journals, art gallery records, financial records, printed material, photographs, documentary film materials, and home movies.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated by Karl Zerbe's daughter, Maria Zerbe Norton, in 2010.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid was written by Christopher DeMairo in 2019.

Preferred Citation

Karl Zerbe papers, 1928-1996. 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.

Researchers interested in accessing audiovisual recordings in this collection must use access copies. Contact References Services for more information.

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Biographical / Historical

Karl Zerbe (1903-1972) was a German American expressionist painter and art educator in Boston, Massachusetts and Tallahassee, Florida.

Born in Berlin, Zerbe split his childhood between France and Germany until 1920 when he began working in an architect's office. At that time, Zerbe began studying at the Debschitz Art School in Munich, and then at the Munich Academy of Art. In 1922, Zerbe had his first one-man show at the Gurlitt Gallery in Berlin. With assistance from the city of Munich, he then studied in Italy for three years. During this time, he consistently displayed his work in group and solo exhibitions throughout Europe. His art was first shown in the United States at the Golz Gallery in New York in 1933, and Zerbe moved to Boston not long after. He worked for seventeen years in Boston including time as head of the Department of Painting in the Boston Museum School. After Boston, Zerbe, along with his wife, Marion, and daughter, Maria, moved to Florida where he took the position of head of the Department of Painting at Florida State University at Tallahassee.

Zerbe received honors for his life-long dedication and contribution to art by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Carnegie Institute, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Tallahassee Area Chamber of Commerce, and the state of Florida.

Scope and Contents

The papers of German American painter and educator Karl Zerbe measure 5.1 linear feet and date from 1928 to 1996. The papers document Zerbe's career through biographical material, writings and journals, art gallery records, financial records, printed material, photographs, documentary film materials, and home movies.

The collection consists of papers related to Zerbe's estate, exhibitions, and associations, along with ephemera such as address books and awards; daily journals used by both Zerbe and his wife, Marion; biographical essays written about Zerbe, and some painting descriptions. Also included are papers related to the various galleries Zerbe dealt with such as the Downtown Gallery, Foster Harmon Gallery, Nordness Gallery, and Robert C. Vose Gallery. Financial records include cash books, receipts, invoices, and papers related to loans of art work. Printed material consists of mostly exhibition-related documentation, but also includes articles and clippings that cover a variety of art topics, a leaflet on modern art distributed by the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1948, artist cards, and auction lists. Images depict Zerbe's personal life, studio, artwork, and encaustic painting technique.

This collection also contains 2.4 linear feet of moving image material. Included are home movies and travel films, as well as videocassettes containing raw footage, rough cuts, and the final version of "Expressions of Life," a one hour documentary for television on the life and work of Karl Zerbe. Documentation on this project also includes interview transcripts with Zerbe and others, a production script, and production notes. The documentary was written by Ernest Kolowrat, 1986, Peter J. Barton Productions.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 8 series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1944-1991 (0.8 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-1994 (7 folders; Box 1)
- Series 3: Writings, 1938-1974 (9 folders; Box 1-2)
- Series 4: Gallery Files, 1939-1996 (0.8 linear feet; Box 2)
- Series 5: Financial Records, 1942-1979 (7 folders; Box 2-3)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1941-1986 (0.8 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 7: Photographs, 1928-1972 (1 linear foot; Box 3-4, OV 6)
- Series 8: Moving Images, 1954-2002 (2.4 linear feet; Box 4-5, FC 7-20)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Expressionism (Art)

Types of Materials:

Moving images

Video recordings

Names:

Kolowrat, Ernest

Occupations:

Educators -- Florida -- Tallahassee

Educators -- Massachusetts -- Boston

Painters -- Florida -- Tallahassee

Painters -- Massachusetts -- Boston

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1944-1991

0.8 Linear feet (Box 1)

Biographical material includes a variety of documentation including exhibition lists, meeting minutes, legal records, addresses, loan papers, awards, as well as notes related to Zerbe's honors, affiliations, and estate records.

Box 1, Folder 1	Address Book, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 2	Class Quotes by Dr. Karl Zerbe, recorded by Daisy R. Pope, circa 1965
Box 1, Folder 3	Death of Karl and Marion Zerbe, 1972-1974
Box 1, Folder 4-5	Estate Documents, 1944-1991
Box 1, Folder 6	Exhibitions Lists, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 7	Papers, circa 1950s-1970s
Box 1, Folder 8-9	Artists Equity Association, 1947-1959
Box 1, Folder 10-12	Lemoyne Art Foundation, 1964-1977
Box 1, Folder 13	Ford Foundation, Jury, 1958-1959
Box 1, Folder 14	List of Awards, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 15	Virginia Museum of Fine Art, John Barton Payne Award Medal, 1942
Box 1, Folder 16	Art Institute of Chicago, Norman Wait Harris Prize, 1946
Box 1, Folder 17	State of Florida Plaque of Recognition, 1962
Box 1, Folder 18	Tallahassee Area Chamber of Commerce, Leading Artist Citizen Plaque, undated

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1940-1994

7 Folders (Box 1)

Correspondents include American poet, writer, and critic Mark Van Doren, the American Federation of the Arts, the Carnegie Institute, and others. Topics include Zerbe's work in exhibitions, his paintings, and some commissions. Also found is one file of letters that belonged to his daughter, Maria.

Box 1, Folder 19	American Federation of the Arts, 1958-1961
Box 1, Folder 20	Carnegie Institute, 1941-1964
Box 1, Folder 21	Van Doren, Mark, 1960s
Box 1, Folder 22	Exhibitions, 1941-1971
Box 1, Folder 23	Paintings, 1940-1970
Box 1, Folder 24	General, 1940-1974
Box 1, Folder 25	Maria Zerbe Norton, 1978-1994

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Series 3: Writings, 1938-1974

9 Folders (Box 1-2)

Journals appear to have been authored by both Zerbe and his wife, Marion, and include appointments, daily schedules, photographs, sketches, and miscellaneous writings. Also found are some painting descriptions and writings by others about Zerbe.

Box 1, Folder 26	Journal, 1938
Box 2, Folder 1-4	Journal, 1939-1941, 1974
Box 2, Folder 5	On the Paintings "Troupes" and "Job," Karl Zerbe, undated
Box 2, Folder 6	"Karl Zerbe" by Ralph Pearson, 1948
Box 2, Folder 7	"Karl Zerbe" by Laurence Schmeckebier, undated
Box 2, Folder 8	Zerbe Questionnaire , undated

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Series 4: Gallery Files, 1939-1996

0.8 Linear feet (Box 2)

Gallery files include correspondence, price lists, sales and loan records, printed material, and some shipping papers documenting Zerbe's relationship with numerous galleries including the Downtown Gallery, Foster Harmon Gallery, Nordness Gallery, and Robert C. Vose Gallery.

Box 2, Folder 9	Allan Gallery, 1955-1957
Box 2, Folder 10	Boris Mirski Gallery, 1957-1974
Box 2, Folder 11	Bucholz Gallery, 1939-1942
Box 2, Folder 12	The Downtown Gallery, 1943-1962, 1991
Box 2, Folder 13	Fischman-Weiner Gallery, 1967-1968
Box 2, Folder 14-15	Foster Harmon Galleries of American Art, 1962-1996
Box 2, Folder 16	Grace Horn Galleries Inc., 1939-1944
Box 2, Folder 17	Group Gallery, 1963-1970
Box 2, Folder 18	Las Olas Gallery, 1968-1969
Box 2, Folder 19	Loch Haven Art Center, 1968-1971
Box 2, Folder 20	New York University, Grey Art Gallery, 1982
Box 2, Folder 21-23	Nordness Gallery, 1957-1995
Box 2, Folder 24	Ringling Museum of Art, 1957-1973
Box 2, Folder 25	Robert C. Vose Gallery, 1941-1979
Box 2, Folder 26	Sid Deutsch, 1989-1992
Box 2, Folder 27	St. Armands Gallery, 1966-1976
Box 2, Folder 28	Trend House Gallery, 1971, 1974
Box 2, Folder 29	General Gallery Correspondence, 1959-1968

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Series 5: Financial Records, 1942-1979

7 Folders (Box 2-3)

Included are cashbooks from 1942-1974 as well as correspondence, financial lists, receipts, and invoices from lectures, commissions, loans, and other expense-related endeavors.

Box 2, Folder 30-32	Cashbook, 1942-1960
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Cashbook, 1960-1974
Box 3, Folder 3-4	Receipts and Invoices, 1941-1979

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1941-1986

0.8 Linear feet (Box 3)

Printed material primarily consists of exhibition catalogs and announcements, clippings, ephemera, and artist cards. Also included is the leaflet, "'Modern Art' and the American Public," distributed by the Institute of Contemporary Art in 1948, filed with a bulletin announcement calling for a meeting to discuss the leaflet that was immediately distributed by the Modern Artists Group of Boston.

Box 3, Folder 5-6	Clippings and Articles, 1941-1982
Box 3, Folder 7-8	Exhibition Announcements, 1938-1972
Box 3, Folder 9-18	Exhibition Catalogs, 1955-1986
Box 3, Folder 19	Ephemera, 1970s-1980s
Box 3, Folder 20	Zerbe Artist Cards, circa 1960s
Box 3, Folder 21	"'Modern Art' and the American Public," Statement by the Institute of Contemporary Art; Modern Artists Group of Boston Call for Meeting, 1948

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Series 7: Photographs, 1928-1972

1 Linear foot (Box 3-4)

Photographic materials include slides, negatives, snapshots, and contact sheets depicting Zerbe's artwork and personal life. The slides include Zerbe's individual works, some of his series of works, friends and family, as well as images of works by other artists from the late-nineteenth and twentieth century. Also included are slides from Zerbe's lecture on the encaustic-style painting.

Box 3, Folder 22-24	Slides, Art , 1928-1950
Box 4, Folder 1-8	Slides, Art, 1950-1968
Box 4, Folder 9	Slides, GEMS, 1966-1968
Box 4, Folder 10	Slides, Lecture on Encaustic Technique, 1940s-1960s
Box 4, Folder 11	Slides, Lemoyne Serigraphs, 1969-1972
Box 4, Folder 12	Slides, Remaining Works, 1951-1961
Box 4, Folder 13-15	Slides, Mixed, 1930s-1960s
Box 4, Folder 16-17	Slides, Other Artists, 1900s-1960s, circa 1940s-1960s
Box 4, Folder 18-19	Negatives, Art, 1940s-1970s
Box 4, Folder 20	Negatives, Personal, 1950s-1979s
Box 4, Folder 21	Snapshots and Contact Sheets, Personal and Art, circa 1930s-1970s
Oversize 6	Karl Zerbe Portrait, circa 1960s

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Series 8: Moving Images, 1954-2002

2.4 Linear feet (Box 4-5; FC 7-20)

Moving images include home movies, documentary film footage and other event footage. Home movies depict nature and family trips. Also found are videocassettes containing raw footage, rough cuts, and the final version of "Expressions of Life," a one hour documentary for television on the life and work of Karl Zerbe. Documentation on this project also includes interview transcripts with Zerbe and others, a production script, and production notes. The documentary was written by Ernest Kolowrat, 1986, Peter J. Barton Productions. Additional recordings include a CBS Sunday Morning story on the Neue Galerie, New York, and a partial recording of amateur color footage from the 1939 Cultural Festival in Munich titled, "Good Morning Mr. Hitler."

Expressions of Life (1989)

Box 4, Folder 22	Rough Edits, circa 1988 <i>1 videocassettes (betacam)</i>
Box 5, Folder 1-4	Rough Edits, circa 1988 <i>4 videocassettes (betacam)</i>
Box 5, Folder 5	Jenson and Harmon, Raw Footage, undated <i>1 videocassettes (betacam)</i>
Box 5, Folder 6	Correspondence, 1987
Box 5, Folder 7	Dr. Thompson Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 8	Pucket Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 9	Parkers Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 10	Dr. Moore Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 11	Mautz Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 12	Mr. Gunn Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 13	Bruce Dempsey Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 14	Dr. Bosch Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986
Box 5, Folder 15	Foster Harmon Interview Transcript, 1986
Box 5, Folder 16	Jack Levine Interview Transcript, 1986

Box 5, Folder 17 Aronson Interview Transcript, 1985

Box 5, Folder 18 Maria Zerbe Norton Interview Transcript, circa 1985-1986

Box 5, Folder 19-21 Script, circa 1987

Home Movies

Box FC 7 Cape Cod, 1954-1960
1 Film reel (16mm)

Box FC 8 Dakotas I, 1958
1 Film reel (16mm)

Box FC 9 Dakotas II Churchill, 1958
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 10 Family and Friends, 1954-1961
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 11 Florida Parks, 1958-1962
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 12 Florida Wading Birds, 1954-1963
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 13 Hummingbirds I, 1959-1963
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 14 Hummingbirds II, 1959-1961
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 15 Land Birds I, 1954-1962
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 16 Land Birds II, 1958-1961
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 17 Pelicans, Ducks, and Seagulls , 1962
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 18 South America, 1962-1963
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 19 St. Marks, 1959

1 Film reel (16 mm)

Box FC 20 Studies in Nature, 1959-1961
1 Film reel (16 mm)

Other Moving Images

Box 5, Folder 22 Good Morning Mr. Hitler; Shock of the New, circa 1990s
1 videocassettes (betacam)

Box 5, Folder 23 CBS Sunday Morning: "What's Neue?: Neue Gallerie", 2002
1 videocassettes (vhs)

Box 5, Folder 24 "Encaustic" (1957), undated
1 videocassettes (vhs)

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