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Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Creator: Davis, Robert Tyler
Title: Robert Tyler Davis Papers
Dates: 1918-1977 and undated
Quantity: 4 linear meters.

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 7439, Davis, Robert Tyler, Robert Tyler Davis Papers

Access Restriction
Use of this record unit requires prior arrangement with the Archives staff.

Historical Note

Robert Tyler Davis (1904-1978) was born in Los Angeles, California. He was a museum administrator and an educator in art and art history, specializing in Pacific Northwest Native American art, and decorative arts, particularly tapestries. He graduated from Franklin High School, Los Angeles, and studied art history, drawing, and painting at the University of California at Los Angeles, and at Harvard, A.B., 1926, A.M., 1928. He was a Carnegie Fellow (1927-1929), and studied fine arts abroad, taking courses at the Sorbonne. He taught drawing, painting and art history at the University of Rochester, in New York (1929-1933), and at the Erskine School for Girls, Boston, when he returned to Harvard for graduate museum studies between 1933 and 1934.

On September 6, 1934 Davis married mystery novelist Lillian Soskin, and became Director of Education at the Albright Gallery in Buffalo, New York. In 1939 Davis was named Director of the Portland Art Museum in Oregon, where he researched and collected Native American art. His book, Native Arts of the Pacific Northwest, was published in 1949. From 1947 to 1952 Davis was Director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, and Professor of Fine Arts at McGill University in Montreal. Davis was Director of the Vizcaya-Dade County Art Museum, 1953-1957, Interim Director of the Joe and Emily Lowe Gallery, University of Miami, 1955-1956, and Coordinator of Humanities and Professor of Art at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, 1956-1959. Lillian Davis died October 12, 1957. Davis was remarried January 29, 1959 to Janet Evans Golby.

In 1960 Davis was hired as museum consultant and liaison for the French and Company art dealership in New York. In September 1968 Davis became Assistant Director of the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Acting Director, June 1969-January 1970; and later Special Assistant for the Collections, 1972-1975. His son, Martin M. Davis, died in 1969, and Janet Davis died in 1973. In 1975
Robert Tyler Davis retired to Lily Dale, New York, and traveled extensively. He died in 1978 in Pasadena, California.

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Descriptive Entry

These papers document Robert Tyler Davis' education and career, 1918-1977. The majority of the material is dated 1937-1977. A fair amount of incoming correspondence illustrates Davis' personal life, and, to a lesser extent, his professional career. Of special note are letters from Davis' second wife, Janet, and journals kept during his travels. Materials concerning his career consist largely of photographs, newspaper clippings, and research notes, and less often include official business papers and correspondence. The most detailed division regards his directorship of the Vizcaya Museum. Davis' research on the Gellatly Collection in the Smithsonian is also well documented. Other materials include travel photographs, artistic sketches drawn by Davis, and notes.

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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:
- Art

Types of Materials:
- Art objects
- Diaries
- Photographs
- Sketches

Names:
- Albright Art Gallery (Buffalo, N.Y.)
- Davis, Robert Tyler
- French & Company (New York, N.Y.)
- Harvard University
- Joe and Emily Lowe Art Gallery (University of Miami)
- McGill University
- Montreal Museum of Fine Arts
- National Collection of Fine Arts (U.S.)
- Portland Art Museum (Or.)
- University of Miami
- University of Rochester
- Vizcaya Museum and Gardens (Miami, Fla.)
Container Listing


This series contains incoming personal letters and cards to Robert and Janet Davis from family, friends, and colleagues. Of special note are letters from Janet Davis, which reveal much about their relationship and her long illness. The collection also includes numerous and frequent letters from Robert Tyler Lee, Davis' cousin, friend, and companion, as well as a significant amount of correspondence from friend Stephan Bourgeois, New York art consultant and author.

Box 1

Folder 1 Andorfer, Greg, 1973, and undated
Folder 2 B, general
Folder 3 Barland, Meleur, 1968, 1977
Folder 4 Beal, Rachel, 1977
Folder 5 Blackmun, Florence and Ted, 1976-1977, and undated
Folder 7 Bower, Tom, 1976, and undated
Folder 8 Breeskin, Adelyn Dohme, 1976, and undated
Folder 9 C-D, general
Folder 10 Sister Corona, 1976, 1977, and undated
Folder 11 Cuddy, Lorraine, 1976, and undated
Folder 12 Davis, Eugenie, undated
Folder 13 Davis, Janet, 1959, 1960-1962
Folder 15 Davis, Janet, February-April, 1971
Folder 16 Davis, Janet, August-December, 1971
Folder 17 Davis, Janet, 1972-1973
Folder 18 Davis, Janet, undated
Folder 19 Davis, Martin, 1960, and undated
Folder 20 DePietro, Anne Cohen, 1977, and undated
Folder 21 Dubin, Elizabeth, undated
Folder 22 E-F, general
Folder 23 Eisenberg, Helen, 1975, and undated
Folder 24 Evans, Jenella, 1977, and undated
Folder 25 Fabian, Monroe, 1972
Folder 26 Feldman, Thalia, 1976, and undated
Folder 27 Ferault, Thirese, 1971, 1977
Folder 28 Fisch, Olga Anhalzer, undated
Folder 29 Fisher, Fred and Becky, 1976, 1977
Folder 30 Francis, Frances Meriam, 1976, and undated
Folder 32 G-H, general
Folder 33 Gomez, Mary and Alden, 1977, and undated
Folder 34 Hesen, Stephne, 1974, and undated
Folder 35 Hoffman, Edmund M., 1977
Folder 36 Irvine, Evy, 1960, 1975
Folder 37 J, general
Folder 38 Kaufman, Louis and Annette, 1977, and undated
Folder 39 Kuhr, Dave, 1976, and undated
Folder 40 L-O, general
Folder 41 Landgren, Marchal E., 1976-1977
Folder 42 Lee, Robert Tyler, 1953, 1975
Folder 43 Lee, Robert Tyler, February-June, 1976
Folder 44 Lee, Robert Tyler, July-October, 1976
Folder 45 Lee, Robert Tyler, January-April, 1977
Folder 46 Lee, Robert Tyler, May-July, 1977
Folder 47 Lee, Robert Tyler, August-October, 1977
Folder 48 Lee, Robert Tyler, November-December, 1977, and undated
Folder 49 Maxwell, Jane, 1973, 1977, and undated
Folder 50 Milliken, William Mathewson, 1977, and undated
Folder 51 Mostecky, Helmut and Karin, 1977
Folder 52 P-S, general
Folder 53 Paine, Barbara ("Babs"), 1976-1977
Folder 54 Pancoast, Kay, 1977, and undated
Folder 55 Rauch, Doris, 1975-1977, and undated
Folder 56 Reiff, Daniel and Janet
Folder 57 Rhoades, Georgia M., 1976, and undated
Folder 58 Risser, Fred, M.D., 1972
Folder 60 Sphar, John and Pat, undated
Folder 61 Spickard, Jean, 1971, 1973, and undated
Folder 62 T, W, general
Folder 63 Tyler, Don, 1977, and undated
Folder 64 Watt, Marge and William, 1977, and undated
Folder 65 Wheeler, Maggie, 1977, and undated

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This series contains several notebooks, and Robert Tyler Davis' pocket calendars, 1968-1977, which give very brief account of Davis' business and personal affairs. Also included are travel journals, which generally describe Davis' travels for the National Collection of Fine Arts, and during his retirement, but which also occasionally give special insight into Davis' thoughts on retirement, the deaths of his son and second wife, his travels, and his relationship with Robert Tyler Lee.

Box 2

folders 1-10 pocket day-timers, 1968-1977

Box 3

Folder 1 Address book
Folder 2 Notebooks, 1963-1968, and undated
Folder 4 Travel journal, September-November 1974
Folder 5 Travel journal, November 1974
Folder 6 Travel journal, January-November 1976
Folder 7 Travel journal, November-December 1976

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Series 3: PAPERS RELATING TO ROBERT TYLER DAVIS’ EDUCATION AND PROFESSORSHIP, 1918-1926, 1928, 1932-1934, AND UNDATED.

This series concerns Robert Tyler Davis’ education at Franklin High School, Los Angeles, California, the University of California at Los Angeles, Harvard University, and abroad, and his brief professorship at the University of Rochester. Included are several course notebooks, a sketch book of Davis drawings, and high school annuals.

Box 3

Folder 8 Diplomas
Folder 9 Franklin High School photograph, programs and clippings
Folder 10 Franklin High School "Almanac," 1918-1919
Folder 11 Franklin High School "Almanac," 1922
Folder 12 University of California botany notes, 1922-1923
Folder 13 Harvard memorabilia
Folder 14 Composition book
Folder 15 Design notebook
Folder 16 Lettering notebook
Folder 17 Note cards
Folder 18 Sketch book, drawings of Tiepolo, 1928
Folder 19 Art lectures, notes, papers and blueprints, 1934, and undated
Folder 20 University of Rochester catalogue, 1932-1933

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Series 4: PAPERS RELATING TO ALBRIGHT ART GALLERY, BUFFALO, NEW YORK, 1937-1939, AND UNDATED.

As Director of the Albright Gallery, Davis designed programs which fostered cooperation between the museum and area schools. This series includes reports, papers, and interviews relating to his programs, as well as collection photographs and other memorabilia.

Box 3

Folder 21 Albright Art Gallery catalogues, photographs, clippings and postcards, 1937-1939

Folder 22 Albright Art Gallery installation and collection photographs

Folder 23 Interviews on educational museum programs, 1938

Folder 24 "Questionnaire on the Place of the Art Museum in General Education"

Folder 25 Educational material, notes and brochures


Folder 27 "Educational Activities of Art Museums," by Robert Tyler Davis

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Series 5: PAPERS RELATING TO PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, 1939-1947.

This series contains a number of installation and collection photographs from the Portland Art Museum. It illustrates the public view of the museum, and of Davis, with many newspaper clippings and catalogues, and includes specific information on two Davis exhibits on Indian art and the "Masterpieces of French Painting."

Box 3

Folder 28 Portland Art Museum acquisition listings and photographs, 1939-1947
Folder 29 Portland Art Museum installation and collection photographs
Folder 30 Portland reports, bulletins and programs
Folder 31 Portland Art Museum lectures and notes, 1940-1947, and undated
Folder 32 Portland Art Museum catalogues by Robert Tyler Davis, 1939-1946, and undated

Box 4

Folder 1 Museum policies and codes
Folder 2 Portland Art Museum publicity clippings, photographs, and memorabilia
Folder 3 Portland Indian Art Exhibit publicity clippings and photographs
Folder 4 Portland "Masterpieces of French Painting" exhibit, 1941

At the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Davis created a bilingual program and museum. The collection contains a significant amount of photographs and publicity clippings, written in both French and English. It also includes the museum's annual reports, general personal correspondence from colleagues, and several reviews of Davis’ book, Native Arts of the Pacific Northwest. There are very few papers relating to McGill University.

Box 4

Folder 5 Correspondence regarding Montreal position, 1947
Folder 6 Montreal correspondence, notes, invitations and photographs. In French and English.
Folder 7 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts annual reports, 1947, 1949-1951
Folder 8 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts publications, 1947-1951, and undated
Folder 9 Montreal lectures and notes, 1947-1951, and undated
Folder 11 Montreal scrapbook. In French and English.
Folder 12 Montreal Indian exhibition photographs
Folder 13 Montreal landscape exhibition photographs
Folder 15 McGill University papers and reports, 1947-1949, and undated
Folder 16 McGill College catalogues, 1948-1952
Folder 17 Robert Tyler Davis publications and reviews, 1948-1950

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This series describes the interoffice affairs of the Vizcaya Museum, including policy committee meetings, memoranda and reports, director's reports, and financial statements. It also contains personal and professional correspondence concerning Davis' appointment to Vizcaya, original correspondence from early Vizcaya organizer, Paul Chaflin, and notes and outlines for Davis' Miami University television series, entitled "Focus on Art." Several publicity photographs and clippings concerning both Davis and his first wife, Lillian Davis, are also included.

Box 4

Folder 18 Paul Chaflin general Vizcaya correspondence, 1934-1937, 1953, 1957, and undated
Folder 19 Appointment to Vizcaya. Correspondence and memorabilia, 1952-1953.
Folder 20 Vizcaya general photographs, notes and correspondence, 1953-1956, and undated
Folder 21 Vizcaya policy committee meetings and agendas, 1953-1954
Folder 22 Vizcaya policy committee meetings and agendas, 1955-1956
Folder 23 Vizcaya memos, letters and reports to the policy committee, 1953-1954
Folder 24 Vizcaya memos and reports to the policy committee, 1955
Folder 25 Vizcaya weekly director's reports, 1953, 1956
Folder 26 Vizcaya director's reports and memos, 1953-1956
Folder 27 Vizcaya annual and monthly director's reports, 1954
Folder 28 Vizcaya weekly reports to the director, 1955
Folder 29 Dade County Art Museum financial statements, January 1, 1953-September 30, 1953
Folder 30 Dade County Art Museum financial statements, October 1, 1953-September 30, 1954
Folder 31 Dade County Art Museum financial statements, October 1, 1954-September 30, 1955
Folder 32 Dade County Art Museum financial statements, October 1, 1955-September 30, 1956
Folder 33 "Focus on Art" television series, 1959
Folder 34 Lowe Gallery clippings and letters, 1955 and undated
Folder 35 Miami publicity photographs and clippings, 1953-1956, and undated

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This series includes general personal and professional correspondence and newspaper clippings relating to Robert Tyler Davis' employment at French and Company, in New York. A large portion of the collection contains photographs of art works handled by the company, including the Houdon bust and Chateau Lafayette. Also included are Davis' research notes and report on tapestries and their preservation.

Box 4

Folder 37 French and Company collection photographs

Box 5

Folder 1 The Artemisia Tapestries of the Putnam Foundation, 1964
Folder 2 Tapestry cleaning
Folder 3 Houdon bust. Photographs and correspondence, 1967.
Folder 4 Chateau Lafayette photographs and negatives

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This series includes Robert Tyler Davis' lecture notes, clippings, NCFA staff information, papers concerning the Intermuseum Conservation Association, and several photographs--including pictures of Janet Davis. It contains little correspondence. The bulk of the collection concerns Davis' research and reference inquiries about the Smithsonian's Gellatly Collection.

Box 5

Folder 7 National Collection of Fine Arts miscellaneous notes and memorabilia
Folder 8 National Collection of Fine Arts photographs, 1969, and undated
Folder 10 Smithsonian Institution National Collection of Fine Arts catalogue, 1963
Folder 11 National Collection of Fine Arts opening symposium, 1968
Folder 12 National Collection of Fine Arts five year report, May 1968-May 1973
Folder 13 General Gellatly Collection publications
Folder 14 Gellatly purchases by dates
Folder 15 Gellatly Collection inventories and exhibit listings
Folder 16 Gellatly American paintings, alphabetically by artist
Folder 17 Gellatly Renaissance jewelry, notes and references
Folder 18 Gellatly collection dealers and prices
Folder 19 Mrs. Edith Gellatly Estate contents
Folder 20 Gellatly research and photographs
Folder 21 Gellatly Collection research notes
Folder 23 Ralph Seymour notes and correspondence, 1975
Folder 24 Ralph Seymour Gellatly notes
Folder 25 Childe Hassam research notes and correspondence, 1965, 1969-1972
Folder 26 Freer correspondence. Robert Tyler Davis copies and notes.

Folder 27 Nineteenth century American art notes


Folder 29 Miscellaneous art history notes

Folder 30 Course and lecture outlines, 1968-1974, and undated

Folder 31 Associates lecture, "Museum Hopping," 1974

Folder 32 Intermuseum Conservation Association Training Program, 1974

Folder 33 National Collection of Fine Arts calendar, 1975-1977, and undated clippings

Folder 34 Smithsonian clippings, 1969-1970

Folder 35 The Pragmatist in Art, 1972-1975

This series contains miscellaneous personal and financial records. Of special note is Robert Tyler Davis' curriculum vitae and Standard Form 171, documents and photographs regarding Davis' personal art collection, Lillian Davis' will, papers regarding Martin M. Davis' death and estate, Davis' income tax records, papers regarding various residences, several personal photographs, and an audio cassette which belonged to Janet Davis.

Box 5

Folder 37 Robert Tyler Davis allergy test, 1966
Folder 38 Robert Tyler Davis' curriculum vitae and Standard Form 171, 1968-1969
Folder 39 Harvard class reunions, 1971, 1976
Folder 40 Friends of the Daniel Reed Library, 1976-1977
Folder 43 Sotheby Parke Bernet auction catalogues, 1975-1976

Box 6

Folder 1 Lillian Davis Estate
Folder 2 National Cathedral School, 1971-1972
Folder 3 Eugenie Davis, 1977
Folder 4 Martin M. Davis Estate and mementos
Folder 5 Audio cassette tape. Woman singing song about Lily Dale, in poor condition.
Folder 6 Bibliographies and lists
Folder 7 Chandelier photographs and fragment
Folder 8 Miscellaneous photographs, 1962, 1977 and undated
Folder 9 Miscellaneous notes
Folder 10 Miami, Florida, residence, 1957-1961
Folder 11 New York apartments, 1960-1968
Folders 13-14 Income Tax records, 1955-1956


This series includes itineraries, photographs and postcards from numerous Davis trips to Europe, Central and South America, and within the United States. Most photographs are annotated.

Box 6

Folder 26 Travel arrangements and itineraries, 1949, 1974, 1976-1977
Folder 27 London playbills and notes, 1974
Folder 28 Travel photograph negatives and one slide, Mexico, 1976
Folder 29 Travel photographs, South America, 1976
Folder 30 Travel photographs, South America, 1976
Folder 31 Travel photograph negatives, South America, 1976
Folder 32 Travel photograph negatives, South America, 1976
Folder 33 Travel photographs and negatives, Egypt, 1977
Folder 34 Travel photographs and negatives, Egypt and Turkey, 1977
Folder 35 Travel photographs and negatives, Turkey, 1977

Box 7

Folder 1 Travel photographs and negatives, Turkey and Greece, 1977
Folder 2 Travel photographs and negatives, Greece, 1977
Folder 3 Travel photographs and negatives, Greece, 1977
Folder 4 Travel photographs and negatives, Greece, 1977
Folder 5 Travel photographs and negatives, San Diego Wildlife Park, 1977
Folder 6 Postcards, Turkey and Greece
Folder 7 Postcards, Venice
Folder 8 Postcards, Peruvian art, general
Folder 9 Postcards, general

This series contains oversized materials, including sketches and paintings by Robert Tyler Davis drawn during his education in Europe, and during the 1960s. Many are studies of human form, and self portraits. Other items include prints of personal interest, gifts from artist friends, several oversized photographs, and other memorabilia.

Box 7
- Folder 10 Sketches by Robert Tyler Davis, 1929 and undated
- Folder 11 Sketchbook
- Folder 12 Drawings by C. Morris
- Folder 13 European art photographs
- Folder 14 Miscellaneous art prints

Box 8
- Folder 1 Robert Tyler Davis photograph
- Folder 2 Painting by Robert Tyler Davis, Paris
- Folder 3 Painting by Robert Tyler Davis, sea shells
- Folder 4 Painting by Robert Tyler Davis, flower
- Folder 5 Paintings and sketches by Robert Tyler Davis, 1928 and undated
- Folder 6 Nude sketches by Robert Tyler Davis, 1928-1929, and undated
- Folder 7 Sketches by Robert Tyler Davis, 1961-1962
- Folder 8 European art photographs and prints
- Folder 9 Christmas greetings prints, 1940, 1947, and undated
- Folder 10 Portland "Citizen of the Week" poster, 1947
- Folder 11 Certificate of appreciation from New York City Mayor, Robert F. Wagner

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This series includes photograph albums from trips Davis took to Central and South America and within the United States. Most photo albums are annotated.

Box 9

Folder 1 Photo album, domestic, 1976. Negatives included.

Folder 2 Photo album, Ecuador, 1976

Folder 3 Photo album, Peru and Bolivia, 1976

Folder 4 Photo album, Mexico, 1976

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