

Guide to the Dorothy Eisner Papers

GEN MSS 778



by Sandra Markham

2008

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 778

CREATOR: Eisner, Dorothy

TITLE: Dorothy Eisner papers

DATES: 1923-2008

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.25 linear feet (2 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The Dorothy Eisner Papers consist of correspondence, photographs, and ephemera that document periods of her personal life and artwork. Eisner's correspondence files contain letters from fellow painters: nearly thirty from her friend Dorothy Andrews (1918-2008), who wrote mostly from her home in Khania, Crete; three from William Kienbusch (1914-1980); and one each from Sarah Freedman McPherson (1894-1978) and Emil Holzhauer (1887-1986); there are also letters from her stepdaughter, the painter Joan McDonald Miller. However, the bulk of the correspondence is between Eisner and her parents William and Florine Eisner, and includes letters in which she describes her interactions with Leon Trotsky during the Dewey Commission's hearing in Mexico City. Additional items related to that experience are the nearly fifty informal snapshot photographs taken in and around the hearing, Eisner's admission card, and one letter from Trotsky. Other friends in the correspondence files include the writers Tess Slesinger (1905-1945) and Diana Trilling (1906-1996). Other papers include copies of the constitution of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, and an autobiographical memoir written by her grandfather Moritz Eisner, who had emigrated from Vienna to the United States. A folder of miscellaneous personal papers holds some childhood letters and drawings, a bank book from the early 1930s, and a few financial papers from the late 1970s-early 1980s. A binder of photographs and a scrapbook of clippings, photographs, and ephemera, supplemented by folders of announcements, brochures, and installation photographs, document Eisner's paintings and collages, and exhibitions of her work. The collection also includes two published books of photographs by Walker Evans.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.eisner>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.eisner>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Christie McDonald and Joan McDonald Miller, 1999-2008.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Dorothy Eisner Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Dorothy Eisner Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, and competing priorities. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections as they are acquired, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

This collection received a basic level of processing, including rehousing and minimal organization. Descriptive information is drawn in large part from information supplied with the collection and from an initial survey of the contents.

The collection contains correspondence, photographs, and printed matter that were culled from several accessions (2000-2008) of John McDonald and Dorothy Eisner papers, specifically Uncat MSS 76, Uncat MSS 386, Uncat MSS 997, and Uncat MS Vault File (1938), as well as material donated separately in 2008. It was formerly filed under two different call numbers: Uncat MSS 1048 and Uncat MSS 1069.

This finding aid may be updated periodically to account for new acquisitions to the collection and/or revisions in arrangement and description.

Associated Materials

Correspondence between Dorothy Eisner and her husband, and between the couple and their daughters, can be found in the John McDonald Papers (GEN MSS 622).

Dorothy Eisner (1906-1984)

Dorothy Eisner was an American painter whose career spanned more than five decades. She was born in New York on January 17, 1906, the daughter of Florine (1883-1974) and William J. Eisner (1880-1975). Though William Eisner was a businessman and manufacturer, he and his wife were also painters active in art circles in the city and in Woodstock, New York, where they had a second home. Their two children, Dorothy and Anne (1911-1967), also became artists, studying at the Art Students League then briefly in France, and spending a summer (1931) with other artists on Monhegan Island off the coast of Maine.

Dorothy Eisner met the writer John McDonald in New York in 1935; they were married on November 7, 1936, while each was employed by the federal government, McDonald with the Federal Writers' Project, and Eisner with the Resettlement Administration. The following spring the couple left their jobs and traveled to Mexico City with members of the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky, a group of American liberals and intellectuals who supported the Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials (also known as the Dewey Commission after its chairman, John Dewey). While McDonald worked on Trotsky's administrative team, Eisner painted portraits of Trotsky and the hearing room.

With the exception of living in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, from 1942-1945, Eisner resided and had painting studios in the Greenwich Village section of New York City. She generally spent her summers painting in rural settings including Linville, North Carolina (1932-1935), Liebhardt, New York (1937-1942), Cape Breton, Nova Scotia (1947), and Livingston, Montana (1949-1958); the latter three were places to which she was introduced by her husband, an avid fisherman. From 1960 through her death, Eisner summered and painted on Cranberry Island, off the coast of Maine. She died in New York on April 28, 1984, survived by her husband, stepdaughter Joan (born 1929), and daughter Christie (born 1942).

Dorothy Eisner was a member of the Society of Independent Artists and the American Artists' Congress, and was a founding member of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors. She also exhibited with the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors.

Scope and Contents

The Dorothy Eisner Papers consist of correspondence, photographs, and ephemera that document periods of her personal life and artwork. Eisner's correspondence files contain letters from fellow painters: nearly thirty from her friend Dorothy Andrews (1918-2008), who wrote mostly from her home in Khaniá, Crete; three from William Kienbusch (1914-1980); and one each from Sarah Freedman McPherson (1894-1978) and Emil Holzhauer (1887-1986); there are also letters from her stepdaughter, the painter Joan McDonald Miller. However, the bulk of the correspondence is between Eisner and her parents, and includes letters in which she describes her interactions with Leon Trotsky during the Dewey Commission's hearing in Mexico City. Additional items related to that experience are the nearly fifty informal snapshot photographs taken in and around the hearing, Eisner's admissions card, and one letter from Trotsky. Other friends in the correspondence files include the writers Tess Slesinger (1905-1945) and Diana Trilling (1906-1996). Other papers include copies of the constitution of the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, and an autobiographical memoir written by her grandfather Moritz Eisner, who had emigrated from Vienna to the United States. A folder of miscellaneous personal papers holds some childhood letters and drawings, a bank book from the early 1930s, and a few financial papers from the late 1970s-early 1980s. A binder of photographs and a scrapbook of clippings, photographs, and ephemera, supplemented by folders of announcements, brochures, and installation photographs, document Eisner's paintings and collages, and exhibitions of her work. The collection also includes two published books of photographs by Walker Evans.

Arrangement

The collection is largely grouped by material type.

Collection Contents

b.1	Card of admission to Trotsky hearing: Tarjeta de admision Miss Dorothy Eisner. Para las sesiones de la Comision Preliminar de investigastion de los cargos hachos contra Leon Trotsky en los jurados de Moscu. Presidente John Dewey [signed], Secretario Suzanne La Follette [signed].	1937
b.1	Photographs taken during the Dewey Commission investigating the Moscow Trials: 48 photographs including images of: Dorothy Eisner and John McDonald with Leon Trotsky; participants in the Dewey Commission including Herbert Solow, Jan Frankel, Albert Goldman, Jean van Heijenoort, as well as two of Diego Rivera with Trotsky; portraits of Leon Trotsky, inscribed by him to John McDonald and Dorothy Eisner; Eisner's painting of the Dewey Commission (now at the Dewey Study Center, University of Illinois, Carbondale); Eisner's portrait of Trotsky (now at Houghton Library, Harvard University); a lost painting by Eisner of Trotsky.	1937
b.1	<i>Encounter</i> magazine issue containing a letter by Eisner about the Dewey Commission	1982
b.1	Review of Trotsky's <i>The Revolution Betrayed</i> , in the <i>Evening Star</i>	1937 Mar 13
b.1	Photographs of two paintings: "The McDonald House, Croton-on-Hudson, New York" (1943) by Walker Evans, and "Walker Evans Painting the McDonald House" (1943-1944), by Dorothy Eisner.	undated
b.1	<i>Dance International 1900-1937</i> : exhibition catalog with Eisner drawings reproduced; letter of permission	1937-1938
Ephemera from Eisner's exhibitions		
b.1	Delphic Studios, New York, Mar 25-Apr 8, 1934:checklist	1934
b.1	James Gallery, New York, Feb 17-Mar 10, 1961:advertising poster, checklist of paintings, and 15 installation photographs by Walker Evans (one signed)	1961
b.1	Cisneros Gallery, New York, Nov-Dec 17, 1966: announcement	1966
b.1	Cisneros Gallery, New York, Apr 5-25, 1969: announcement	1969
b.1	Ashby Gallery, New York, May 17-Jun 6, 1980: announcement cards, signed catalog, notecard	1980
b.1	Ashby Gallery, New York, April 16-May 6, 1983: announcement, review by Carl Little, press release, and photocopy of guest book	1983
b.1	Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine, May 3-Jul 5, 1992: announcement, catalog, reviews, slides	1992
b.1	Announcements and brochures	2005-2008
b.1	Biographic time line with exhibition histories	undated
Correspondence		
b.1	Andrews, Dorothy 2 Folders	1954-1983

b.1	Clark, Eleanor	1959 Jan 8
b.1	Eisner, William and Florine, letters from <i>2 Folders</i>	1925-1961
b.1	Eisner, William and Florine, letters to <i>7 Folders</i>	circa 1925-1959, undated
b.1	Kienbusch, William	1958-1962
b.1	Letters from Linville, North Carolina, friends	1932-1941
b.1	Miller, Joan McDonald	1956-1962
b.1	Moore, Edie	1983-1984
b.1	Putnam, Anne Eisner Includes one letter from John McDonald about Dorothy Eisner and the Works Progress Administration	circa 1936-1962, undated
b.1	Slesinger, Tess	1923-1938
b.1	Trilling, Diana	1965
b.1	Trotsky, Leon	1938
b.1	General Correspondence <i>3 Folders</i>	1937-1984, undated
b.1	Letters to Florine Eisner (third-party)	1937-1951
b.1	Drawings	undated
b.1	Holiday cards (printed) designed by Eisner	1940, 1951, undated
Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors		
b.1	Constitution	1940
b.1	List of names and titles of works for exhibition	circa 1964
b.1	Personal Papers <i>2 Folders</i>	1936-1982, undated
b.1	Photographs, miscellaneous	undated
b.1	Moritz Eisner autobiographical memoir, 1936; mimeograph	undated
b.1	Christie McDonald, "Brushes with History"; offprint from <i>Harvard Review</i>	2006
Books by Walker Evans		
b.1	<i>American Photographs</i> (New York: Museum of Modern Art)	1938
b.1	<i>Walker Evans</i> (New York: Museum of Modern Art)	1971
Oversize		

b. 2	Scrapbook relating to career of Eisner (assembled posthumously)	circa 1927-1947, undated
b. 2	Photographs of art work by Eisner (in binder)	undated

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Art, American -- 20th Century
Artists -- United States
Moscow Trials, Moscow, Russia, 1936-1937
Painters -- United States
Women artists -- United States

Genres / Formats

Photographic prints

Occupations

Artists
Painters

Names

Andrews, Dorothy, 1918-2008
Eisner, Dorothy
Eisner, Florine, 1883-1974
Eisner, Moritz, 1852-1938
Eisner, William J., 1880-1975
Evans, Walker, 1903-1975
Holzhauer, Emil, 1887-1986
Kienbusch, William, 1914-1980
McPherson, Sarah Freedman, 1894-1978
Putnam, Anne Eisner
Slesinger, Tess, 1905-1945
Trilling, Diana, 1905-1996
Trotsky, Leon, 1879-1940
Trotskaia, Nataliia Ivanovna, 1882-1962

Corporate Bodies

Commission of Inquiry into the Charges Made
Against Leon Trotsky in the Moscow Trials,
New York, 1937
Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors

Contributors

Eisner, Dorothy
Eisner, Moritz, 1852-1938