
Finding Aid to the Federal Art Project at the Southwest Museum Records MS.252

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Title: Federal Art Project at the Southwest Museum Records

Identifier/Call Number: MS.252

Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library

Language of Material: English

Physical Description: 35.1 Linear feet(22 boxes)

Date (bulk): Bulk, 1936-1937

Date (inclusive): 1936-1939

Abstract: The Works Progress Administration of 1935 created a Federal Art Project to support artists and provide collection and exhibit maintenance and reference material to museums during the Great Depression. The National Parks Service carried out one such Federal Art Project at the Southwest Museum, with some work being completed at the Los Angeles Museum of History, Art, and Science (now the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County) from 1936 to 1937. The records, photographs, and works of art on paper document this Federal Art Project, and include one of two sets of documentary photographs made during this endeavor; the other under the custodianship of the National Parks Service. The main focus of this documentation and collection of reference material was historic and contemporary culture and life in the Southwest, including Native American tribes of the Southwest and California.

creator: Cortez, Galileo

creator: Cox, Gladys

creator: Federal Art Project

creator: Gellert, Emery

creator: Hall, Ansel F. (Ansel Franklin), 1894-1962

creator: Halle, F. J. van

creator: Harrington, M. R. (Mark Raymond), 1882-1971

creator: Harvey, Hazel

creator: Hyde, Marie

creator: Jordan, Helen

creator: Mardis, Faye

creator: Nadeau, Evelyn Hunt

creator: Rader, Albert

creator: Robinson, Helen

creator: United States. National Park Service.

creator: United States. Works Progress Administration.

creator: Wardman, John W.

Access

Collection is open for research. Appointments to view materials are required. To make an appointment please visit <http://theautry.org/research/research-rules-and-application> or contact library staff at rroom@theautry.org. An item-level inventory is available from library staff.

Use

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Preferred citation

Federal Art Project at the Southwest Museum Records, 1936-1939, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.252; [folder number] [folder title][date].

Acquisition

Materials in this collection were deposited to the Braun Research Library (previously known as the Southwest Museum Library) by Museum staff and departments, circa 1936-1937. A later donation from Charles Rozaire (linked materials found at the Natural History Museum) was made in 1987.

Historical note

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a relief measure established in 1935 by executive order. From 1935 until it ended in 1943, the WPA employed more than 8.5 million people and established almost 1.5 million projects, including construction of roads, dams, schools and other public facilities, murals in public buildings, written guides to each state, and the Historical Records Survey. Administrative control of these projects was turned over to the states in 1939.

The Federal Art Project, a subdivision of the WPA, was created to support artists while enhancing the arts in America. One of their projects, the Museum Art Project, was sponsored at the Southwest Museum by the National Park Service's Field Division of Education. The goal of the Museum Art Project was to produce archeological, ethnological, and historical exhibits and reference material of Southwestern culture for the use of the museums of the National Parks and Monuments in constructing their own dioramas and exhibits. The project started April 8, 1936 and concluded July 10, 1937, with the only cost to the Southwest Museum being housing and supervision. Ansel F. Hall of the WPA and Southwest Museum curator M. R. Harrington organized and directed the project, creating a visual cache of information through photographs, line drawings, water colors, and oil paintings. All materials were to be made in duplicate, with one copy going to the Southwest Museum and one copy going to the National Parks Service. A collection of dioramas, miniatures, paintings, sculptures, labels and signs were created for exhibits in the Southwest Museum and the Casa de Adobe, which were opened to the public on December 1, 1936.

In order to assist in reaching the goals of the Project, a Photography Project was also initiated to record the costumes and artifacts in the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art (now the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County), and to create photographic prints of the negatives by Charles Fletcher Lummis of Native Americans in the Southwest. In the effort to capture the styles of dress, patterns of some of the apparel were drawn up and photographed, as well. Two prints were made of each negative created for the project, with one copy staying with the Southwest Museum and the other copy going to the National Parks Service.

The entire project employed 32 people at its height, including painters, map makers, sculptors, a plaster worker, letterers, a wood carver, a constructor of miniature costumes, a miniature vegetation maker for dioramas, a photographer, and two photographer's assistants. Besides creating and updating exhibits and exhibit labels, other work accomplished during this project included cataloging of photographic negatives, creation of hand-lettered labels for specimens, diorama cleaning and repair, and the construction of a dark room for the photographic staff.

Scope and contents

This collection consists of administrative records, Photographic Field Notes, photographic files, and works of art on paper created during a Federal Art Project sponsored by the National Park Service at the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art from 1936-1937.

The first series contains administrative records, which include correspondence, instructions, personnel reports, and other notes and records regarding the administration of the Federal Art Project.

The second series of these records includes Photographic Field Notes, Photographic File Notes, and photographs created for this project. Photographic Field Notes document field serial numbers and headquarter serial numbers, and information regarding the object being photographed and the photographer's technical information. The photographs created for this project are mostly of clothing in the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art and of artifacts at the Southwest Museum. Some photographs are of the line drawings depicting patterns for clothing. Some of the WPA employees are also documented in these photographs. This series contains mounted photos, photos and photo file notes in binders, and folders of additional notes. These files may contain extensive hand-written or typed notes on the collection items.

The third series of this collection consists of works of art on paper, such as chalk drawings, ink drawings, maps, oil paintings, and water colors depicting artifacts and clothing in the Southwest Museum collection as well as historical figures and imagined scenes from historical California as well as contemporary Native American culture in the Southwest. Artists whose work is contained in this collection are Galileo Cortez, Gladys Cox, Faye Mardis, Evelyn Hunt Nadeau, Francis van Halle, and John Wardman.

Processing history

Initial processing by Glenna Schroeder, circa 1977-1981. Finding aid updated by Anna Liza Posas 2012 April 6. Additional processing and finding aid completed by Holly Rose Larson, NHPRC Project Archivist, 2012 August 3 made possible through grant funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Series 1: Administrative Records

Series 2: Photographic Field Notes and Files

Subseries 2.1: Mounted photographs

Subseries 2.2: Photograph Project Binders

Subseries 2.3: Photograph Project Files

Series 3: Works of Art on Paper

Related Archival Materials

Elizabeth Crozer W. Campbell and William H. Campbell manuscript collection, 1929-1936, Braun Research Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.221.

Mark Raymond Harrington Collection, 1930-1961, Braun Research Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.214.

Record Group 69: Records of the Work Projects Administration, 1922-1944, National Archives, 398.

Southwest Museum Institutional Archives, 1901-2008, Braun Research Library, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.3

Custodial history

Some materials in this collection were previously associated with manuscript collection numbers MS.573 and MS.654. All materials produced during the Federal Art Project at the Southwest Museum are now united and identified as MS.252. The collection numbers MS.573 and MS.654 have been retired.

Subjects and Indexing Terms

Southwest Museum (Los Angeles, Calif.)

Art, American

Chalk drawings

Correspondence

Field notes

Indians of North America

Ink drawings

Manuscripts

Maps

Negatives

Paintings

Photographs

Watercolors

Box 1

Administrative records, 1936-1937

Physical Description: 0.4 Linear feet1 box

Scope and contents

This series contains papers from 1936-1937 regarding the administration of the Federal Art Project carried out at the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science and Art between 1936 and 1937. Papers include correspondence, instructions, personnel reports, and other notes and records.

Box 1-13

Photographic Field Notes and Files, 1936-1939

Physical Description: 5.45 Linear feet

Scope and contents

This series of the Federal Arts Project records includes Photographic Field Notes, Photographic File Notes, negatives and photographs created for this endeavor. Photographic File notes describe all newly created negatives. Photographic Field Notes document field serial numbers and headquarter serial numbers, subject, ownership, location, local accessories number, source, chronological date, dimensions, exhibit label information, color notes, and miscellaneous data. The field notes form also includes photographic data, such as photographer, date and time of photograph, size, film used, filter, diaphragm stop, exposure, and miscellaneous photographic data. The photographs created for this project are of clothing in the Southwest Museum and the Los Angeles Museum of History, Science, and Art and of artifacts at the Southwest Museum. Some photographs are of the line drawings depicting patterns for clothing. Some of the WPA employees are also documented in these photographs.

Box 2

Mounted photographs, 1936-1939

Physical Description: 0.4 Linear feet

Scope and contents

This collection of photographs has been mounted on colored board and includes captions. The photographs were taken during Federal Art Project contracts, from 1936-1939, and include copies of photographs found in other parts of the collection. These mounted photographs with typed captions feature both Headquarter and Field Serial Numbers.

Boxes 3-6

Photograph project binders, 1936-1937

Physical Description: 1.75 Linear feet

Scope and contents

This subseries consists of eight binders of Photographic Field Notes and Photographs depicting the clothing and accessories documented in the project, as well as employees creating works for the project.

Binders S1-S3: Spanish California Costumes

Binder S4: Women's Dresses and Men's Shirts - Women's dresses, Native American; Men's Shirts includes Plains, Southwest and Northwest Coast material

Binder S5: Headdresses and Leggings - Headdresses: Contents include hair roaches, Apache Ceremonial Headdress, Pueblo Tableta, Plains War Bonnets, Jemez Mask, Crow Headdress; Leggings: Includes Plains, Pueblo

Binder S6: Pipe and Pipe Bags, Cradleboards, Hides - Pipes and Pipe Bags; Cradleboards: Includes Plains, Pueblo; Hides (decorated): Includes Kicking Bear's "Battle of Little Big Horn", quilled, painted

Binder S7: Pottery and Kachinas

Binder S8: Southwest Museum artists who created dioramas and murals

Boxes 1, 7-13

Photograph project files, 1936-1937

Physical Description: 3.3 Linear feet

Scope and contents

This subseries includes Photographic Field Notes, Photographic File Notes, and other photographs and notes not contained in the binders. Files for photographed items sometimes contain typed sheets of information which record Field Serial Numbers and Southwest Museum accession numbers, descriptions of collection items, and job numbers or copies of job cards. [Location of the job cards is currently unknown.] These files may contain extensive hand-written or typed notes on the collection items.

oversize-box PORT.s
12, 13, 21, 30, 49,
52, 76, 84, 106

Works of Art on Paper, 1936-1937

Physical Description: 25.2 Linear feet

Scope and contents

This series contains chalk drawings, ink drawings, maps, oil paintings, and water colors depicting artifacts and clothing in the Southwest Museum collection as well as historical figures and imagined scenes from historical California and contemporary Native American culture in the Southwest. Artists whose work is contained in this collection are Galileo Cortez, Gladys Cox, Emery Gellert, Francis van Halle, Marie Hyde, Helen Jordan, Faye Mardis, Evelyn Hunt Nadeau, Albert Rader, Helen Robinson, and John Wardman.

Faye Mardis and Gladys Cox created ink drawings on linen-backed paper of patterns for apparel items in the Southwest Museum and Los Angeles Museum collections. These patterns were created as instructional tools for other FAP artists to make replicas for miniature figures in the Southwest Museum's dioramas.

Some of the subjects of the oil painting portraits by van Halle are Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, Kit Carson, General John C. Fremont, Pio Pico, and Fray Junipero Serra. Watercolors and other line drawings depict examples of artifacts in the Southwest Museum's collection, such as pottery and basketry. Other paintings and drawings depict scenes of life to be used as reference or for dioramas.