Finding Aid to the John de Kramer Personal Papers and Photographs MS.253

Finding aid prepared by Sarah Jane Joel, Anna Liza Posas
Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
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2013
Title: John de Kramer Personal Papers and Photographs
Identifier/Call Number: MS.253
Contributing Institution: Autry National Center, Braun Research Library
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 6.0 Linear feet (6 boxes)
Date (inclusive): 1963-1996
Abstract: John de Kramer was an artist and Professor of art. In the 1930s, he attended Pasadena Junior College and earned a Bachelor of Engineering degree at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 1954, he began teaching in the Los Angeles City School system. He was a Professor of art at Pierce College located in Woodlands Hills, California, from 1963-1987. Throughout his career and after his retirement in 1984, de Kramer photographed his extensive and frequent travels to Mexico. The collection consists of correspondence, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, study aids, photographs, and books that pertain to de Kramer's lifelong interest in pre-Columbian art. Of particular focus are Mayan archeological sites and the art and culture of Mexico. The material in this collection were created from 1963 through 1996.
creator: de Kramer, John
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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Scope and contents
The collection consists of correspondence, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, study aids, photographs, and books that pertain to de Kramer’s lifelong interest in pre-Columbian art. Of particular focus are Mayan archeological sites and the art and culture of Mexico.
This collection also includes his flashcards de Kramer created for studying the Mayan calendar, numbering system and language through the hieroglyphs.
The images in this collection were made and collected while de Kramer was a member of the faculty of the Art Department at Pierce College, a member of the Los Angeles Community College system, in Woodlands Hills.
There are approximately 4,650 35mm color transparencies and 490 black and white prints none larger than 8" x 11", including some mounted double sided prints, and a few color prints. All the imagery is relevant to his interest and travels in Mexico. There are date stamps impressed on the cardboard slide mounts showing the date that the 35mm transparencies were processed. This date does not relate to the exact date the image was taken. The date stamps in this collection range from April 1963 to March 1995.
Apart from the color work John De Kramer produced for his classes, he also shot in black and white and produced unbound volumes of mounted images on archeological sites with forewords and extensive well-informed captions. There is one complete boxed volume in the collection on the Mayan site Copan, in Honduras, and a note from de Kramer’s wife, Ricki de Kramer, offering others for loan.
The collection also contains 35mm color transparencies from other sources. About 50 transparencies were purchased from commercial sources which are identified on their slide mounts.
In addition, there is a series of images, predominately consisting of photographed copies of paintings. These photos were shot in Mexico on de Kramer’s behalf by a Spanish-speaking colleague or assistant which is apparent from the caption writing. These appear in the boxes marked “Mexican Colonial” in Box 4.
There are 490 black and white prints none larger than 8" x 11", including some mounted double sided prints, and a few color prints. The collector has also printed his work, sometimes reprinting up to 20 times to achieve a different tonal quality in each case.
Biographical note
John de Kramer was an artist and Professor of art. In the 1930s he attended Pasadena Junior College and continued his interest in art while he earned a Bachelor of Engineering at University of California, Los Angeles. He worked his way through college as a lifeguard.
During World War II, he enlisted as a navigator in the Naval Air Transport Service, working within Pan American World Airways, Inc.

In the years after the War he flew with United Pacific Overseas and the Flying Tiger Line, a commercial air cargo service based at Los Angeles International Airport. He continued his own work as a painter, making paintings based on sketches that he made during his extensive travels abroad over this period of 16 years.

In 1954 he began teaching in the Los Angeles City School system. In 1963 he took a position as an Instructor in Art at Pierce College, a member of the Los Angeles Community College system located in Woodlands Hills, California. In 1969, de Kramer became Chairman of the Art Department, which he held until 1978. He held the Chairman position again from 1981 to 1982.

In 1972, he introduced and taught two new courses for the following three years. Course "Art 81: An Introduction to Pre-Columbian Art," was a survey of the arts of the Americas from the earliest times to the period of the conquest by the European powers. "Art 82: Introduction to Post-Conquest Mexican Art," aimed to “develop an appreciation of the unique character of the art of Mexico and …to give the Mexican-American a sense of pride.” A course that combined both curricula called “Introduction to the Arts of Mexico Art” was offered in 1976-78, 1982, and 1983.

De Kramer travelled to Mexico and created a body of photographic work to accompany his lectures for these courses. The first set of photographs was created in 1963 during a trip to archeological sites in the Yucatan. He also made and photographed trips to Mexico made in 1969, 1970, 1972, and 1975.

After his retirement from Pierce College in 1984, he travelled to Mexico as a tourist in 1987 and with a group in 1988. He also attended a UCLA Extension Field Study Tour in 1995 from March 18 to March 28. The field study was led by E.C. Krupp, Director of the Griffith Observatory. Dr. Krupp, a prominent figure in the field of Archeoastronomy, had written on the astronomical orientation of the alignment of buildings in Mayan cities. Significant developments in the study and deciphering of the Mayan ‘language’, comprised of symbols and glyphs, occurred in the late 1980s. This influenced de Kramer to study the calendar, numbering system and Mayan language through the hieroglyphs.

Preferred citation
John de Kramer Personal Papers and Photographs, 1963-1996, Braun Research Library Collection, Autry National Center, Los Angeles; MS.253; [folder number] [folder title][date].

Processing history
Preliminary finding aid and box inventories created by Sarah Jane Joel, 2010 November 7. Revised by Anna Liza Posas, 2013. Final processing of collection and publication of finding aid made possible by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

Series 1: Personal Papers, 1963-1995
Series 2: Color Photographs, 1963-1996

Acquisition

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Art, Mexican
Articles
Books
Clippings
Correspondence
Excavations (Archaeology) -- Honduras
Excavations (Archaeology) -- Mexico
Indian art -- Central America
Indian art -- Mexico
Maya calendar
Mayan art
Mayan languages -- Writing
Mexico -- Antiquities
Mexico -- Description and travel
Photographs
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