San Francisco Museum of Art Film Department records

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Descriptive Summary

Title: San Francisco Museum of Art Film Department records
Dates: 1944-1965
Collection Number: ARCH.ADM.008
Creator/Collector: San Francisco Museum of Art
Extent: 1.7 linear feet (2 cartons, 2 card file boxes)
Repository: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
San Francisco, California 94103

Abstract: Contains records related to film program activities in the San Francisco Museum of Art before the formal establishment of the Film Department. Records are divided into two series reflecting the two main educational functions of the film program from the 1940s through the 1960s: the Film Library, a film rental and distribution program, and Art in Cinema, a curated art-related film series founded by Frank Stauffacher.

Language of Material: English

Access
Collection is available for use. Some materials are restricted for confidentiality or condition.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], [box year and folder title], Film Department, 1944-1965, Administrative Records, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Archives.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Film Department collection records pre-date the official establishment of the Film Department of the San Francisco Museum of Art, but reflect Museum film activities that directly preceded the founding of the Department. The pre-Department activities are distinguishable by two main educational functions and are divided into two series: Film Library, 1953-1965, and Art in Cinema, 1944-1962.

The Film Library was a film rental and distribution service operated out of the Museum, which complemented the Museum’s own film program that had been showing films in the Museum since its opening in 1935. The Film Library expanded in 1953-1954 with the signing of a contract with the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York to act as their official West Coast distribution center. The Film Library series primarily documents this relationship.

Film Library records include files related to arranging loans of films under the auspices of the Western center for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) Film Library, and fielding inquiries about films and their availability. Includes contract negotiations and revisions with MoMA, and the final settlement of accounts when the contract ended in 1964. Film Library records date from 1953-1965, and contain primarily correspondence and reports.

The Film Library materials are generally divisible into two categories: those that deal with the Film Library’s relationship with MoMA and their Film Library Circulation Director, Margareta Akermark, and those that deal with the internal operations of the film rental program at SFMA. Also includes original construction of and revisions to the film rental catalogue. See also Office of the Director Records, 1935-1958 (ARCH.ADM.001) “Film Library: Museum of Modern Art, New York” files.

The Art in Cinema Society was started in 1946 by Frank Stauffacher in collaboration with the Museum. Programs with films about art, art films, and select curated film series were shown annually or semi-annually in the Museum until Stauffacher’s death in 1955. The name Art in Cinema resurfaced in the Museum occasionally over the subsequent ten to fifteen years with attempts to revive the series, none of which were successful. The Art in Cinema records appear to be a small component of what was likely a much larger set of documents about the management and development of the series.

The Art in Cinema series contains a small collection of records related to the Art in Cinema Society and the film programs the society administered at the SFMA. In addition to the film showings in the Museum, the Art in Cinema Society maintained a library of experimental films which they rented to other organizations. Correspondence with film makers, organizations who rented films, and about the general operation of the program can be found in the “Film Rental Correspondence” files. Correspondence with the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, from which the Art in Cinema Society rented films for Art in Cinema programs at the SFMA, can be found in the “Correspondence with MoMA Film Library” file.

Other miscellaneous correspondence and related documents dating from 1946 through 1949 can be found in the “Correspondence, Announcements, Questionnaires, Notes” files. These materials were housed loose in a box with no apparent order. Correspondence is generally addressed to or from Art in Cinema Society staff members Frank Stauffacher, Richard Foster, or Martha Bullitt (secretary).
The “Other Film Societies” files contain programs and announcements from contemporary film groups, primarily from the period 1949 through 1953. The “Reprints of Articles About the Early History of the Motion Picture Industry” file contains several typed articles, copied from publications in the 1930s about innovations in and arguments surrounding the film industry. These articles were housed loose in a box and are not dated, nor do they definitively belong with the Art in Cinema materials.

See also Office of the Director Records, 1935-1958 (ARCH.ADM.001) “Art in Cinema” files.

Indexing Terms
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