Russell Hartley Papers

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Russell Hartley Papers

Descriptive Summary
Title: Russell Hartley Papers
Dates: 1920s-1983
Collection Number: 983.26
Creator/Collector: Russell, Hartley
Extent: 9 Boxes. 11 linear feet.
Repository: Museum of Performance and Design, Performing Arts Library
San Francisco, California 94124
Abstract: Russell Hartley (1924-1983) was a costume designer, antique dealer, art gallery runner, art conservator, and archivist. He worked extensively with the San Francisco Ballet as a costume designer, as well as other various companies like the Markova-Dolin Ballet Co. and the Savoy Opera Co. He ran the Antinuous Art Gallery, later renamed the Hartley Studio. Most notably, Hartley was the founder and director of the Archives for the Performing Arts, now the Museum of Performance + Design. This collection contains material chronicling Russell Hartley's life and career, including his childhood and teenage years, his association with the San Francisco Ballet, his trips to Europe, his partnership in the Antinuous Art Gallery, his time running his own art gallery, his time as an antique dealer, his tenure as director of the Archives for the Performing Arts, and his final years of life. Materials in this collection include photographs, scrapbooks, memorabilia, news clippings, artwork, sketches, programs, exhibition announcements, portfolios, correspondence, paperwork, publicity, publications, pamphlets, research notes, promotional materials, and copies of speeches.
Language of Material: English
Access
Entire Collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
Reproduction of these materials can occur only if the copying falls within the provisions of the doctrine of fair use.
Copyright varies by item.
Preferred Citation
Acquisition Information
This collection was bequeathed to the Archives for the Performing Arts upon Russell Hartley's death on October 4, 1983.
Biography/Administrative History
Russell Hartley was born in 1924. He attended Mt. Tamalpais High School. As an outlet for his creative energy and artistic talents, Russell designed window displays for his father's hardware store. These attracted the attention of Ruby Asquith, wife of Harold Christensen and a dance instructor at the Mill Valley Outdoor Club. At Asquith's invitation, Hartley visited the San Francisco Ballet studios and sketched dancers in rehearsal. There he decided to sign up for ballet classes and a year later, was given a part in William Christensen's Romeo and Juliet. Hartley enjoyed success in eccentric character roles and performed with the company between 1942 and 1949. Christensen also enlisted Hartley's help in revising costume designs for Now the Brides (1944). This led to him participating in designing many shows including 143 costumes for the first production of the Nutcracker Suite in 1944, Pyramus and Thisbe, Coppelia, Swan Lake, Les Maîtresses de Lord Byron, Jinx, Beauty and the Shepherd, and the Standard Hour television show. In addition, Hartley received commissions from the Markova-Dolin Ballet Co. and the Savoy Opera Co. to design costumes for various productions. His art portfolio, Henry VIII and his Wives, published in 1948, served as an inspiration for Rosella Hightower's ballet by this name, which premiered in New York at the Metropolitan Opera House. Hartley became interested in collecting historical materials on local performers and dance and theatrical companies. Hartley scoured antique and bookstores for old dance and theatrical programs, photos, and ephemera. These materials eventually formed the nucleus of Hartley's San Francisco Dance Archives, established in 1950. In February 1946, Hartley and two friends, Leo Stillwell and Arthur Ammann, opened the Antinuous Art Gallery at 701 McAllister St. later renamed the Hartley Studio, run in conjunction with the Modern Ballet Center. Hartley began creating series of dance paintings and show windows in New York, leading to exhibitions of his paintings at the Feragli Galleries in New York, the Labaudt Gallery in San Francisco, and the Miami Beach Art Center, an exhibition on ballet at the De Young Museum, and features of his paintings in various one-man shows at galleries in San Francisco. He also executed costume designs for Balanchine's Serenade, William Dollar's Mendelssohn's Concerto, Lew Christensen's Balletino, and the San Francisco Opera Company's productions of Aida and Rosenkavalier. Hartley began studying the conservation of fine paintings with Gregory Padilla and carried out restoration projects for the Maxwell Galleries, the Oakland Museum, and Gumps. He became a member of the International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and
Artistic Works in 1960. One of his most well-known assignments involved restoring Millet’s Man with a Hoe for the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. In the 1960s he worked as a monthly columnist for Dance Magazine. He also contributed feature articles to After Dark Magazine, Opera and Concert, and The Trumpeteer. He began organizing exhibitions on the history of the performing arts at the War Memorial Opera House and the main branch of the San Francisco Public Library. These exhibits formed the nucleus of a Performing Arts Archive. With the assistance of Dr. Kevin Starr and Mrs. Seymour M. Farber, Hartley obtained a space in the basement of the Presidio Branch of the San Francisco Public Library and became director of the Archives for the Performing Arts in 1975. His own archival collections, which had by this time expanded to include materials on the history of the San Francisco Opera, San Francisco theaters, and the San Francisco Symphony, was supplemented by the dance library of Mrs. James Bodrero and collections donated by Mrs. Arline Lipman and Dore Williams. Along with overseeing the archives, Hartley and his assistant, Judith Solomon, researched and designed numerous exhibitions. In 1981, budgetary cutbacks led to the closure of the archives and Hartley was forced to move the entire collection to his Mill Valley home. At this time, he started battling serious illness, while searching for a permanent home for the archive. In 1983, the San Francisco Ballet donated the San Francisco Opera Chorus Room in the War Memorial Opera House as a space for the archives. A new Board of Directors was formed for the archives and former SFB dancer Nancy Carter became the archives’ first executive director. Hartley died in 1983.

Scope and Content of Collection

The Russell Hartley Collection documents the career of Russell Hartley, from his early days as a costume designer for the San Francisco Ballet to his tenure as director of the Archives for the Performing Arts. Hartley's childhood and teenage years are documented through photographs and such ephemera as a baby book, birth announcements, and high school memorabilia. His association with the San Francisco Ballet is well-documented in scrapbooks, photos, and artwork. The scrapbooks contain news clippings and programs. Hartley's trips to Europe in the late forties and early fifties and his partnership in the Antinous Art Gallery, which later evolved into his own gallery, are also documented in news clippings and exhibition announcements in these scrapbooks. Original artwork in the form of sketches, photos of paintings, and costume designs, reveal the many artistic projects undertaken by Hartley during this time. Several copies of two published portfolios of Hartley's dance sketches, entitled The Ballet and Henry VIII and his Wives, are also included in the collection. Hartley's activities as an antique dealer and art gallery owner can also be traced through files on the Hartley Gallery. These include correspondence, paperwork for exhibitions, exhibition publicity, gallery publications, and photographs. Examples of Hartley's work as a conservator of paintings are also present in the form of before and after photographs. A pamphlet on conservation techniques provides additional information on Hartley's skills and knowledge as an art restorer. The growth of Hartley's collection of materials on the history of dance in San Francisco, first known as the San Francisco Dance Archives and later expanding to become the Archives for the Performing Arts, is chronicled through correspondence, publicity, research notes, and photographs. Very little material exists which reveals Hartley's initial collecting efforts. However, the story of how the archives grew out of Hartley's collecting activities in the forties and fifties is described in promotional materials for the archives. The collection contains a wide variety of material about the archives' first official home in the Presidio Branch of the San Francisco Public Library. These consist of publicity for exhibitions, research notes for various projects, museum loan records, photos, correspondence, and copies of speeches. The final years of Hartley's life, during which he struggled to find a permanent home for the archives and fought with serious illness, are documented in personal and official correspondence and in news clippings.

Indexing Terms

Asquith, Ruby
Bodrero, James
Carter, Nancy
Christensen, Harold
Christensen, William
Hightower, Rosella
Farber, Seymour M.
Lipman, Arline
Padilla, Gregory
Solomon, Judith
Starr, Kevin
Williams, Dore
Antinous Art Gallery
Archives for the Performing Arts
De Young Museum
Ferargil Galleries
Gumps
Hartley Studio
International Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
Labaudt Gallery
Markova-Dolin Ballet Co.
Maxwell Galleries
Miami Beach Art Center
Oakland Museum
San Francisco Ballet
San Francisco Dance Archives
San Francisco Public Library
San Francisco Symphony
Savoy Opera Co.
War Memorial Opera House

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