
Annette Leddy
Descriptive Summary
Title: Kirk Varnedoe papers
Number: 2008.M.60
Creator/Collector: Varnedoe, Kirk, 1946-2003
Physical Description: 61.08 Linear Feet (138 boxes)
Repository: The Getty Research Institute
Special Collections
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100
Los Angeles 90049-1688
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URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10020/askref
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Abstract: Papers of critic and curator Kirk Varnedoe include student papers and lecture notes, research files for exhibitions and publications, typescripts and audio tapes of lectures, and a small amount of material related to his position at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
Request Materials: Request access to the physical materials described in this inventory through the catalog record for this collection. Click here for the access policy.
Language: Collection material is in English
Biographical/Historical Note
Kirk Varnedoe was born in Savannah, Georgia in 1946 to a wealthy and distinguished Southern family. He attended Williams College, where he began studying studio art, but soon switched to art history under the influence of Professor Lane Faison. He also played college football and, after graduating, returned to coach the football team and teach art history for a year. He then earned a Ph.D. at Stanford under Rodin scholar Albert Elsen, with whom he collaborated on an exhibition and catalog about the profusion of drawings falsely attributed to Rodin. From 1974 to 1988 he taught first at Columbia University and then at the Institute of Fine Arts, while also curating exhibitions on Scandinavian painting, Gustave Caillebotte, turn-of-the century Vienna, and primitivism in Modern Art. From 1988 to 2002 he was the curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. His exhibitions there, beginning with High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture, and ending with a major retrospective on Jackson Pollock, attempted to acquaint the museum-going public with art historical narratives that artists and academics had long accepted. These efforts, together with Varnedoe’s Artist Choice series, which engaged contemporary artists to organize exhibitions of work from the permanent collection, helped move the museum into a less canonical and more dynamic presentation of modern art.
Access
Open for use by qualified researchers. Box 119 contains confidential correspondence and is restricted until 2082. Audio visual material restricted until reformatting is complete.
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Preferred Citation
http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2008m60
Acquisition Information
Gift of Elyn Zimmerman.
Processing History
Initial rehousing of the collection was performed by Vladimira Stefrica. Jan Bender processed the greater part of the collection. Annette Leddy did a small part of the processing and cataloged and described the collection.
Scope and Content of Collection
The Kirk Varnedoe papers consist primarily of research files related to Varnedoe’s publications, exhibitions, and lectures. Study photographs abound in these files, particularly of Auguste Rodin’s drawings, but all Varnedoe’s major interests are well represented, including Jackson Pollock and Jasper Johns. Under some research topics are filed exhibition checklists,
installation photographs, and bibliographies. Education and teaching files, containing syllabi, lecture notes, and papers, reveal a coherent intellectual path from Varnedoe's undergraduate days through the Mellon lectures given the year before his untimely death. There is scant personal material, mainly consisting of correspondence during his extended periods in France, and photographs of these travels. Apart from the exhibition material in the research files, Varnedoe's tenure at the Museum of Modern Art in New York is reflected in a discrete amount of miscellaneous material, such as meeting minutes, calendars, and memoranda. There are also audio recordings of Varnedoe's Slade and Mellon lectures.

**Arrangement**


**Subjects - Names**

Rodin, Auguste
Pollock, Jackson

**Subjects - Topics**

Art, Modern -- 19th century
Art, Modern -- 20th century
Art exhibitions -- 20th century

**Contributors**

Elsen, Albert E., 1927-1995
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)
Johns, Jasper, 1930-
Varnedoe, Kirk, 1946-2003

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**Series I. Professional correspondence, 1969-2003**

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet (3 boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Letters regarding the authentication of Rodin drawings, exhibition planning, and book publication.

Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order by year.

**box 1**

1969-1972

Scope and Content Note

Including letters from the National Gallery regarding Varnedoe's Rodin exhibition, from Praeger, Inc. regarding the Rodin book, and various letters regarding authentication of Rodin works.

**box 2**

1973-2003

Scope and Content Note

Including letters from artists Duane Hansen and Cy Twombly, and regarding the exhibition *Primitivism and Modern Art*, and regarding various speaking engagements.

**box 119**

Restricted, 1974-1996
Series II. Personal items, 1967-2003, undated

Physical Description: 1.04 Linear Feet (3 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Letters from friends and colleagues, memorabilia, and photographs, mainly of travels.

Arrangement
Arranged in rough chronological order within the two media categories of correspondence and photography.

box 3
Correspondence, 1970-2003, undated

Scope and Content Note
Including letters from friends and colleagues congratulating Varnedoe on appointments, expressing gratitude for his support, and offering sympathy for his final struggle with illness.

box 4, 120
Photographs, slides, and miscellaneous, 1967-2001, and undated

Scope and Content Note
Including primarily photographs of travels in Europe, with some related memorabilia.

Series III. Education, 1964-1972, undated

Physical Description: 3.75 Linear Feet (9 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
A comprehensive record of Varnedoe's undergraduate and graduate studies, with term papers, lecture notes, transcripts, and assorted materials.

Arrangement
Materials from Williams College and Stanford University are grouped separately and arranged in rough chronological order by year.

box 5-7
Williams College, 1964-1968

Scope and Content Note
Including term papers, lecture notes, address books, an art review from student newspaper, and transcripts. Also present are Varnedoe's curricula for a semester of post-graduate teaching at Williams (1968) and a narrative resume describing his choices and decisions during this stage of his life.

box 7-13
Stanford University, 1968-1972

Scope and Content Note
Including Varnedoe's notes from his classes with Dr. Albert Elsen and others, photocopied pages from art historical textbooks, a heavily annotated copy of an issue of Stanford Today about Van Gogh, and a complete set of term papers from his graduate career. Also present are documents about Varnedoe's involvement in campus anti-war protests and art-related activism.

Series IV. Teaching, 1972-1985, undated

Physical Description: 2.92 Linear Feet (7 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Lecture notes, syllabi, bibliographies, slides, and photocopied related readings.

Arrangement
Materials are grouped by institution in the sequence in which Varnedoe taught in them.

box 14, 133
Stanford University, 1972-1974

box 15-16
Columbia University, 1974-1979

box 17
New York University, 1980-1985

box 18
Las Meninas symposium, New York University, 1984
box 19  
**Assorted, undated**

Series V. Lectures, 1972-2005

Physical Description: 7.7 Linear Feet (16 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Research notes, drafts, study photographs, and in some cases, audio recordings and floppy disk records of the lectures.

Arrangement
Arranged in chronological order by year.

box 20  
1972-1989

Scope and Content Note
On topics such as Caillebotte, Rodin, photography, and primitivism in Modern Art.

box 21  
1990-1992

Scope and Content Note
On such topics as Pollock, Munch, collecting, and including the commencement address Varnedoe gave at Stanford.

box 22-24
box 137, folder C24-C31

Slade lectures: the Poverty of Postmodernism, 1992-1993

Drafts of lecture texts
Audiotapes of lectures

box 25

1993-1994

Scope and Content Note
On topics such as Pollock and Twombly, and including Varnedoe's commencement speech at Williams College.

box 26, 120

1994-1997

Scope and Content Note
On such topics as Twombly and Jasper Johns, and including Varnedoe's eulogy for Leo Castelli. Including views of Varnedoe in the act of lecturing.

box 27

1998-2000

Scope and Content Note
On such topics as Lichtenstein, Pollock, David Smith, and Marcia Tucker

box 28

2001

Scope and Content Note
On topics such as Roulin and Van Gogh, and for George Segal's memorial.

box 29

2002

Scope and Content Note
On topics such as Matisse/Picasso, Van Gogh/Gauguin, and Rembrandt.

box 30-34
box 136, folder C12-C23


Drafts of lectures
Audio tapes of lectures
Series VI. Research and Writings, 1890-2006, undated

Physical Description: 34.59 Linear Feet (86 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Files on the artists or topics Varnedoe wrote on or curated exhibitions about, with ample visual material, historical scholarship in the form of photocopied articles and books, and often including correspondence with artists or the sponsoring institutions, and occasionally also exhibition installation photographs and checklists.

Arrangement
Arranged in three subseries.

Series VI.A. Artists, 1890-2006, undated

Physical Description: 28 Linear Feet (67 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Files contain notes, readings, drafts of essays, study photographs and slides, with occasional audiotaped interviews of living artists.

Arrangement
Arranged in alphabetical order by the last name of the artist.

Box 34A, 35-42, 121
Gustave Caillebotte, 1972-2001

Box 43
Edgar Degas, 1899-1998

Box 43, 137
Duane Hanson, 1974-1985

Box 43-49
Jasper Johns, circa 1960-1996

Box 50-51
Matisse/Picasso, 1959-2003

Box 52-58
Jackson Pollock, 1926-2006

Box 59-82, 122-125, 133
Auguste Rodin, 1892-2003

Box 83-86, 133
Scandinavian artists, circa 1950- circa 1988

Box 87
Richard Serra, 1987-2002

Box 87
James Turrell, 1967-2004

Box 88-90, 121, 133
Cy Twombly, 1920-2000, undated

Box 135, folder C1-C11
Drafts, readings, photographs

Audio tapes
Scope and Content Note
C1: Lecture 1 of 3 from MOMA's Cy Twombly exhibit. October 4, 1994. Speakers are Richard Serra, Francesco Clemente, and Brice Marden.
C8: Lecture 2 of 3 lectures from MOMA, titled "Rethinking Cy Twombly," October 11, 1994. Kirk Varnedoe is the lecturer.
C11: Kirk Varnedoe lectures on Cy Twombly at the National Gallery on May 17, 2001.
C2-C4 are duplicates of C1. C6, C7, and C10 are duplicates of C5. C9 is a duplicate of C8.
Series VI. A. Artists, 1890-2006, undated

Digital media, circa 1980 - circa 2003

Scope and Content Note
Media generally pertains to lectures and includes one recording of the card catalog of Varnadoe’s library. 14 computer discs (floppy disk) : 3 1/2 in. 3 computer disc (floppy disk) : 5 1/4 in. 2 computer disc : digital ; 4 3/4 in.

Series VII. Museum of Modern Art files, 1948-2004, undated

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet(3 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Including minutes of meetings, reports about art institutions other than MOMA, memoranda, and assorted correspondence.

Arrangement
Arranged in rough chronological order by year.

Papers by museum world colleagues and Varnedoe about Museum collecting and management, 1948-2004

Scope and Content Note
Including interview with Adam Gopnik, and plans for museum expansion.

MOMA catalogs and calendars, memos, minutes of meetings regarding MOMA expansion and the Painting and Sculpture committee

MOMA Cycle III meeting notes

Series VIII. Printed matter, 1971-2006, undated

Physical Description: 8.58 Linear Feet(9 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Including a fairly complete clipping file and mainstream serial collection on Varnedoe, documenting his career, with seemingly random selections of art ephemera.

Arrangement
Materials are grouped by type.

Articles about Varnedoe, 1976-2001

Proofs of Pictures of Nothing, 2006

Including correspondence with Varnedoe’s widow.

Postcards of art, undated

Announcements and brochures, 1972-1999, undated

Periodicals, 1971-2002

Miscellaneous, 1977-1991, undated