Finding aid for the Barbara T. Smith series and related material, 1965-1967

Isabella Zuralski
Descriptive Summary
Title: Barbara T. Smith Coffin series and related material
Date (inclusive): 1965-1967
Number: 2013.M.23
Creator/Collector: Smith, Barbara Turner
Physical Description: 12.26 Linear Feet (16 boxes)
Repository:
The Getty Research Institute
Special Collections
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100
Los Angeles 90049-1688
URL: http://hdl.handle.net/10020/askref
Abstract: The collection comprises Coffin, a unique set of twenty-five hand-bound artist's books documenting Barbara T. Smith's experiments with an early Xerox 914 copy machine, and a set of working materials and other works related to the Coffin series.
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
Barbara T. Smith, a pioneer in performance and body art, was born in Pasadena, California in 1931. She studied painting, art history and religion at Pomona College, graduating in 1953. In 1965, she began to study at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, and in 1971, she received her MFA from the University of California, Irvine. While attending UC Irvine, she founded, together with Nancy Buchanan and Chris Burden, the student-run experimental art gallery F-Space. It was at F-Space during the late 1960s where Smith launched her career as an artist at the forefront of feminist, body, and performance art.
In 1965, shortly before turning to performance and body art, Smith experimented with a photocopy machine. She leased a 914 Xerox copier, placed it in her home for several months and began to explore its artistic potential. Between 1965 and 1966 she produced an extensive body of prints which she used to make artists' books called Coffin, sets of prints called Poetry, and other works.
Smith used the process of photocopying as a means of formal experimentation to create both abstract and figurative imagery and to explore non-textual narrative and serialized conceptual processes. She experimented with the imaging process by putting common household items, such as food and magazine clippings, flowers, photographs of her husband and children, and even her own body in various states of undress on the photocopier. She was interested in how images can be manipulated and how technical shifts, such as toner and paper style affect texture, tone, and shadows.
Made by means of personal mental and physical engagement with a machine, the Coffin artists' books and other Xerox works anticipate Smith's performance art that developed just a few years later, including Ritual Meal in 1969, Celebration of the Holy Squash in 1971, and the iconic Feed Me in 1973.
A retrospective exhibition of Smith's work was held in 2005 at Pomona College Museum of Art, and later travelled to the Kennedy Museum of Art at Ohio University. In 2008, the Orange County Museum of Art included her Trunk Piece, along with video footage from past performances, in the show Art Since the 1960s: California Experiments. Also in 2008, Smith's Field Piece was shown at The Box gallery in Los Angeles. In 2013, The Box gallery exhibited works Smith created between 1965 and 1966 using the photocopy machine, including the Coffin series.
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Preferred Citation
http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2013m23
Acquisition Information
The collection was acquired in 2013.

**Processing History**
Isabella Zuralski processed the collection and wrote the finding aid.

**Scope and Content of Collection**
The collection comprises Coffin, a unique set of twenty-five hand-bound artists' books documenting Barbara T. Smith's experiments with an early Xerox 914 copy machine, seven additional artists' books called Coffin, five sets of prints called Poetry, and a sketchbook called Xerox Journal which contains working materials related to the Coffin series.

Twenty-five artists' books from the Coffin series comprise Series I. Series II includes seven additional artists' books called Coffin, five sets of prints called Poetry, and the artist's sketchbook.

**Arrangement**

**Genres and Forms of Material**
Artists books -- California -- Los Angeles -- 20th century
Sketchbooks -- California -- 20th century

**Contributors**
Smith, Barbara Turner

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**Series I. Coffin books, 1965-1966**

**Physical Description:** 10 Linear Feet (12 boxes)

**Scope and Content Note**
The first series comprises twenty-five artists’ books from the Coffin series, made by Smith between 1965 and 1966. All are hand-bound in embossed black covers. Most bindings are spiral, but a few are accordion fold.

**Arrangement**
The books are listed alphabetically by title.

**box 2 Coffin: An Awakening**

**Scope and Content Note**
10.75" x 14.5" closed, 22" x 14.5" open. Inv# BS10255-23.

**box 1 Coffin: Bond**

**Scope and Content Note**
104 pages. Spiral bound. 9.5" x 11.25" closed, 18" x 11.25" open. Inv# BS10255-12.

**box 1 Coffin: Broken Heart**

**Scope and Content Note**
132 pages. Case binding. 8.75" x 11" closed, 17" x 11" open. Inv# BS10255-11.

**box 3 Coffin: Chaotic Attractor**

**Scope and Content Note**

**box 4 Coffin: Coming Out Party**

**Scope and Content Note**

**box 5 Coffin: Die Cut, Barbara Hard-Bound**

**Scope and Content Note**
Spiral bound. 9" x 11.25" closed, 17.75" x 11.25" open. Inv# BS10255-15.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Scope and Content Note</th>
<th>Inv#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Die Cut, Julie Hard-Bound</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 9&quot; x 11.25&quot; closed, 17.75&quot; x 11.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Die Cut, Katie Hard-Bound</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 9&quot; x 11.25&quot; closed, 17.75&quot; x 11.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Die Cut, Rick Hard-Bound</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 9&quot; x 11.25&quot; closed, 17.75&quot; x 11.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Do Nut Tuch!</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 10&quot; x 14.5&quot; closed, 18.75&quot; x 14.5&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Document Carrier and Screen</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 10&quot; x 14.5&quot; closed, 18.75&quot; x 14.5&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Entheos</strong></td>
<td>10&quot; x 14.25&quot; closed, 19&quot; x 14.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Hokusai's Wave</strong></td>
<td>Accordion fold, 20 pages. 9.5&quot; x 11.75&quot; closed, 11.75&quot; x 101.5&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Listen!</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 9.75&quot; x 14.25&quot; closed, 18.75&quot; x 14.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Nuclear Family</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 18 pages. 9.5&quot; x 14.25&quot; closed, 18.75&quot; x 14.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Oh! Those Leopard Skin Bikinis</strong></td>
<td>Accordion fold. 9.25&quot; x 14.75&quot; closed, 108.25&quot; x 14.75&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Rose Bowl</strong></td>
<td>Spiral bound. 20 pages. 9.75&quot; x 13.25&quot; closed, 18.5&quot; x 13.25&quot; open.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Set Theory</strong></td>
<td>Drawings 13&quot; x 11.5&quot; closed, 27&quot; x 11.5&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Coffin: Sign Language</strong></td>
<td>Case binding. 190 pages. 8.75&quot; x 11.25&quot; closed, 17.5&quot; x 11.25&quot; open.</td>
<td>BS10255-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Series I. Coffin books, 1965-1966

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**box 8**  
*Coffin: Split Initiative*  
Scope and Content Note  
Spiral bound. 9.75" x 14.5" closed, 18.75" x 14.5" open. Inv# BS10255-22.

**box 11**  
*Coffin: Time Piece, Fuschia Rose*  
Scope and Content Note  
Spiral bound. 16 pages. 9.5" x 14.25" closed, 18.5" x 14.25" open. Inv# BS10255-6.

**box 11**  
*Coffin: Time Piece, Pink Rose*  
Scope and Content Note  
Spiral Bound. 17 pages. 9.5" x 14.25" closed, 18.5" x 14.25" open. Inv# BS10255-5.

**box 11**  
*Coffin: Time Piece, Yellow Rose*  
Scope and Content Note  
Spiral bound. 20 pages. 9.75" x 13.25" closed, 18.5" x 13.25" open. Inv# BS10255-7.

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**box 11**  
*Coffin: Time Piece, Yellow Rose*  
Scope and Content Note  

**box 12**  
*Coffin: Where Did You Get That Polka-Dot Blouse?*  
Scope and Content Note  
Accordion fold. 9.25" x 14.75" closed, 91.25" x 14.75" open. Inv# BS10255-21.

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Series II. Related material, 1965-1967

Physical Description: 2.26 Linear Feet (4 boxes)  
Scope and Content Note  
Included are seven additional Coffin artists' books. They are finished works but do not have the embossed black covers of the twenty-five books in the main Coffin series. Also present are five sets of prints called Poetry, and Smith's sketchbook called Xerox Journal that documents both, her ideas throughout the process of producing the Coffin series as well as the source imagery for the series.

Arrangement  
The material in this series in divided into three groups: other Coffin books which are not in black embossed bindings, sets of loose prints called Poetry, and the sketchbook.

**Other Coffin books, 1965-1966**  
Scope and Content Note  
The artists' books, which are not from the main Coffin series are Xerox prints, unbound or spiral bound in clear plastic covers, except for the artists' book Coffin: Printed Matter (Xerox Book) which is made of plexiglass plates and printed mylar string bound.

**box 16**  
*Remnant, 813 Reduction,*  
Scope and Content Note  
8.5" x 11". Loose leaves held by two metal rings. Inv# BS10358.

**box 13**  
*Coffin: Printed Matter (Xerox Book)*  
Scope and Content Note  
12 1/2" x 10" X 1 1/8". String bound loose plexiglass and printed mylar. Inv# BS8908.

**box 14, folder 1**  
*Coffin: In Self Defense*  
Scope and Content Note  
12 loose leaves. 14" x 8 1/2". Inv# BS10351.
**Coffin: Important / First Class (Julie)**
Scope and Content Note
Spiral bound. 13 leaves. 11 1/4" x 9" x 1/4". Inv# BS8918.

**Coffin: American Standard (Katie)**
Scope and Content Note
Spiral bound. 13 leaves. 11 1/4" x 9 1/8" x 1/2". Inv# BS8919.

**Coffin: Mellon National Bank and Trust**
Scope and Content Note
Spiral bound. 16 leaves. 11 1/4" x 9" x 5/8". Inv# BS8920.

**Coffin: First Class Mail**
Scope and Content Note
Spiral bound. 13 leaves. 14 3/8" x 9" x 1/8". Inv# BS8914.

**Poetry sets, 1965-1966**
Scope and Content Note
The Poetry sets are loose leaf Xerox prints in folders.

**Poetry: Rebellion**
Scope and Content Note
12 loose leaves. 14" x 8 1/2", leaves; 14 1/4' x 9, folder. Inv# BS10354.

**Poetry: Sorrow**
Scope and Content Note
13 loose leaves. 14" x 8 1/2", leaves; 14 3/8" x 9", folder. Inv# BS10355.

**Poetry: Child Voice**
Scope and Content Note
15 loose leaves. 14" x 8 1/2", leaves; 14 3/8" x 9", folder.

**Poetry: Joy**
Scope and Content Note
11 loose leaves. 14" x 8 1/2", leaves; 14 3/8" x 9 1/8", folder. Inv# BS10353.

**Poetry: The Mystery**
Scope and Content Note
10 loose leaves. 14" x 8 3/8", leaves; 14 3/8" x 9 1/8", folder. Inv# BS10356.

**Xerox Journal, 1966-1967**
Scope and Content Note
Bound sketchbook. 12 1/2" x 9 7/8" x 2". Inv# BS8885. Paper label on spine: Xerox '66-1967 #1. The Xerox Journal includes handwritten and typed notes, drawings, pasted in press clippings, several black and white photographs, including one of the artist, four color polaroids (faded); and numerous inserts, such as notes, printed matter, and drawings.