
Finding aid for the Frederick Hammersley sketchbooks, prints, notes, and working materials, 1948-1980

Finding aid prepared by Annette Leddy

Descriptive Summary

Title: Frederick Hammersley sketchbooks, prints, notes, and working materials

Date (inclusive): 1948-1980

Number: 2013.M.33

Creator/Collector: Hammersley, Frederick, 1919-2009

Physical Description: 6.5 linear feet(7 boxes)

Repository:

The Getty Research Institute

Special Collections

1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100

Los Angeles, California, 90049-1688

(310) 440-7390

Abstract: A set of sketchbooks, notebooks, lithographs, notes, and working materials by California hard-edge abstract painter, Frederick Hammersley.

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

One of the founding members of hard-edge abstraction, Frederick Hammersley was born in 1919 in Salt Lake City and moved with his family to Idaho and San Francisco. He studied art at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles from 1940-42, and from 1946-47, serving from 1942-45 as an army sergeant in World War II, stationed in Paris. From 1945-46 he studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. After completing his degree at Chouinard, Hammersley continued his studies at Jepson Art Institute from 1947-50.

Hammersley was an art instructor for more than twenty years. At the same time, he explored a range of media, including oil painting, watercolor, drawing, printmaking, photography, sculpture, mixed media and computer drawings. He first gained critical recognition in 1959 in a show at Los Angeles County Museum of Art titled *Four Abstract Classicists*. In the catalog for that show, the critic Jules Langsner first used the term "hard-edge" to describe the painters' use of flat, colored shapes with defined edges.

Within the media of painting, Hammersley had three principal series: hunch paintings, which were developed intuitively from an initial shape; organic paintings, composed of curving, hand-drawn shapes outlined in pencil and filled in with color; and geometric paintings, based on a grid, in which complexity is achieved through extensive development of minor variations on a theme. Each geometric and organic painting is assigned a title chosen from pages of phrases Hammersley recorded in a stream of consciousness process in response to a completed canvas. He felt that the titles were an integral part of the work and also increased the viewer's accessibility to the paintings.

Beginning in the mid-1990s, Hammersley's work enjoyed resurgent critical interest and a degree of commercial success. He died in 2009.

Access

Open for use by qualified researchers.

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Preferred Citation

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa2013m33>

Acquisition Information

Gift of Frederick Hammersley Foundation in 2013.

Processing History

The collection was processed and described by Annette Leddy in 2013.

Related Archival Materials

A larger portion of the artist's papers is held at the Archives of American Art: [Frederick Hammersley papers, 1897-2008, bulk 1940-2000. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.](#)

Scope and Content of Collection

Hammerley's hard-edge aesthetic and precise working method appear in a range of media, including notes and lists, sketches in pencil or paint, lithographs, and computer prints. The sketchbooks, notebooks and paint sample charts provide meticulous technical details outlining the materials and processes used for nearly every painting Hammersley produced and document the formal experimentation that preceded many of his paintings. An early lithography project from 1949-50 and set of test prints from the Computer Drawings series of 1968-69, as well as his copious notes on potential titles for his paintings, reveal other facets of his methodical serial formal explorations. The collection also includes a small un-stretched canvas that is considered Hammersley's first hunch painting.

Arrangement

Arranged by type of material in rough chronological order.

Subjects - Names

Hammersley, Frederick, 1919-2009

Subjects - Topics

Artists--California--Los Angeles

Painting, Abstract--California--Los Angeles

Genres and Forms of Material

Computer drawings--California--20th century

Lithographs--California--20th century

Sketchbooks--California--20th century

Box 1-2	Sketchbooks, circa 1959-1980 Scope and Content Note Twelve sketchbooks containing preparatory sketches and paintings, often thumbnail size, with detailed lists of pigments and mixing instructions. Note that some are labeled "painting notebook" and others "notebook," but the kind of work they contain is consistent. One book is unnumbered and undated, with the word "windfall" on the recto and "no is yes" on the verso.
Box 2, Folder 6	Titles, undated Scope and Content Note Thick file of paper with possible titles for artworks listed in the artist's tiny handwriting, often accompanied by thumbnail drawings.
Box 3	Lithographs, 1948-1950 Scope and Content Note A series of circa 100 lithographs, typically 4" x 4", and arranged by the artist in groupings numbered 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40. At the end of the sequence are several lithographs labeled "seconds" and then detailed notes covering numerous pages in the artist's handwriting.
Box 4	Hunch painting, September 15, 1950 Scope and Content Note A small unstretched canvas that is considered Hammersley's first hunch painting.
Box 5	Computer drawings, 1968-1969 Scope and Content Note Circa 200 test print computer drawings, comprised of complex symbol patterns printed on computer paper.

Box 6

Paint sample charts, 1979, undated

Scope and Content Note

Sixty-five color charts painted on 8" x 10" paper, with captions in the artist's hand detailing pigment mixtures.

Box 7

Hand made box, circa 1948

Scope and Content Note

Box made by the artist to house his lithography project, which is now housed separately in Box 3.