Finding aid for the Lester Bridaham photographs and papers relating to gargoyles, 1895-1987
Descriptive Summary

Title: Lester Bridaham photographs and papers relating to gargoyles
Date (inclusive): 1895-1987
Number: 87.P.4
Creator/Collector: Bridaham, Lester Burbank
Physical Description: 21.2 linear feet (37 boxes)
Repository:
The Getty Research Institute
Special Collections
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100
Los Angeles, California, 90049-1688
(310) 440-7390

Abstract: The Lester Bridaham photographs and papers relating to gargoyles document the scholar's ongoing fascination with this distinctive form of architectural decoration. Collected over the course of six decades, Bridaham's extensive compilation of photographs and research materials forms a comprehensive overview of the gargoyle and other related grotesques used as ornament in medieval architecture throughout western Europe.

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
Lester Burbank Bridaham (1899-1992) was a museum administrator, educator, artist, collector, art historian, and author. Bridaham's initial academic training was in the sciences. He received a B.S. from Cornell University in chemistry and, in 1923, a M.S. in chemical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Yet, during his time at Cornell, Bridaham developed a deep interest in art, which he credited to his fascination with the gargoyles decorating his fraternity house. After only a brief period working in the steel business, Bridaham devoted the rest of his life to pursuing this interest in art.

In 1928, Bridaham began taking classes at the Art Students League in New York, where he studied under Kimon Nicolaides and Kenneth Hayes Miller. Awarded an American Field Service Fellowship for the 1931/1932 academic year, Bridaham spent the year painting in Morocco and Normandy. After his return to the United States, Bridaham continued his artistic pursuits, moving to Massachusetts and supervising artists working under the aegis of the Federal Art Project. In 1936, Bridaham enrolled in the year-long museum studies course taught by Paul Sachs at the the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University.

The Fogg training ushered Bridaham into a long career as an arts administrator and educator. From 1938 to 1954, Bridaham was a staff member at the Art Institute of Chicago, where among his many roles he founded the public relations department and served as secretary to the board of trustees. After leaving Chicago, he served in administrative roles at a number of other cultural institutions: director of museum operations of the Louisiana State Museums in New Orleans (1954-1956), director of the Chicago Historical Society (1956-1958) and director of the Strathmont Museum in Elmira, New York (1958-1959). In 1959, Bridaham moved back to Denver, Colorado, where he had been born and raised. In Denver, Bridaham initially focused on art education. He taught drawing and painting in the Denver and Jefferson County public school systems, and wrote children's art books suitable for classroom use. Then, in 1974, Bridaham used his knowledge of art and the art world to start his own art appraisal business.

Bridaham also remained a practicing artist throughout his life, from the earliest exhibition of his paintings in 1928 until shortly before his death. His final work My Secrets of the Grand Canyon, a series of fifty watercolors, was completed when Bridaham was eighty-nine years old. Several museums, including the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the Museum of the City of New York, hold his paintings and prints in their collections. In addition to creating art, Bridaham began collecting in the 1920s. Over the years, he and his wife Dorothy developed an enormous collection, often acquiring the work of emerging local artists, such as the self-taught painter Martin Saldaña, from whom Bridaham got over 200 works. This collection would serve as the basis for a gallery Bridaham opened with his daughter in Bozeman, Montana in the last years of his life.

Bridaham's roles as an educator and art historian, and his fascination with the visual, came together in his publications. These range from his children's art books to journal articles on technical aspects of the use of slides in art education to a book on the late nineteenth/early twentieth century photographer, George François Mugnier. Among Bridaham's catholic
interests, however, one stands out, the topic that first led him to art in his student days at Cornell: gargoyles. In 1928, the year he began studio art studies at the Art Students League, Bridaham also began conducting extensive research on gargoyles, culminating in his 1930 book, *Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in French Gothic Sculpture*. Bridaham returned to the topic later in life, spending almost twenty years from the late 1960s to the late 1980s bringing out a new edition of the 1930 publication and working on three further gargoyle book projects.

**Access**
Open for use by qualified researchers, with the exception of the photographic negatives, which require further processing.

**Publication Rights**
Contact Library Reproductions and Permissions.

**Preferred Citation**
http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa87p4

**Acquisition Information**
Acquired in 1987.

**Processing History**
The collection was rehoused in archival folders upon receipt in 1987. Bridaham's folder titles were transferred to the new folders, and any of the old folders bearing notes were retained. In 2014, Ani Mnatsakanyan, working under the supervision of Ann Harrison, conducted research on the collection and created the inventory.

**Related Archival Materials**
Further archival material held by the Getty Research Institute relating to Lester Burbank Bridaham includes the Paul Sachs course notes, 890069, a bound copy of the handouts and materials for the 1936/1937 museum studies course Bridaham attended at the Fogg Art Museum, and the Lester B. Bridaham photographs of Mexico, 87.P.6. Further archival material relating to Bridaham is held by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution and the Denver Public Library.

**Scope and Content of Collection**
The Lester Bridaham photographs and papers relating to gargoyles document the scholar's ongoing fascination with this distinctive form of architectural decoration. Collected over the course of six decades, Bridaham's extensive compilation of photographs and research materials forms a comprehensive overview of the gargoyle and other related grotesques used as ornament in medieval architecture throughout western Europe.

The bulk of the collection is visual. Bridaham compiled thousands of original photographs of artworks. He acquired them from institutional sources and commercial vendors, such as Alinari, photographed some works himself and commissioned photography at other sites. These original photographs are supplemented by further images on postcards and from various print media. Bridaham believed that the relatively early date of many of the photographs gave his collection a special importance, because they were taken before air pollution began seriously damaging the sculptures. These images are also accompanied by a substantial amount of textual research material, specifically correspondence, clippings and articles, notes, and drafts of text for his books. In addition to his main focus on the the grotesque in Medieval Europe, Bridaham collected images and research on peripheral topics ranging from the physiognomy of Joseph Merrick to gargoyles used in New York architecture in the nineteenth century to fantasy creatures in Asian art.

The archive also provides insight into Bridaham's intellectual process. Bridaham created a large pool of images and research materials, and over decades, he mined and repurposed this body of data for the two editions of his book and three further unpublished book projects on the topic of gargoyles. The archive retains Bridaham's folder composition and titling, and often his original folders. Bridaham took extensive notes while conducting his research and often wrote notes on his file folders. Many folders also indicate the dates on which Bridaham consulted them as he continually referenced notes and images from his previous projects.


Series II, the bulk of the archive, documents Bridaham's multiple attempts to publish further material on the topic of gargoyles. Materials relating to three unrealized publications with the proposed titles of "Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque of the Middle Ages in England, Germany, Italy, and Spain," "Meet My Fabulous Grotesque Friends," and "The Bridaham Collection of Photographs of Gargoyles and Grotesque-Style Sculptures of the Middle Ages in All Countries" are found here. Each of these book projects includes images organized by the proposed chapter heading or by the sculpture's
location, as well as correspondence, research, notes, and drafts of text relevant to the project. Series III includes images and materials that relate to Bridaham's entire span of research on gargoyles and the grotesque rather than being attributable to a specific project. Although Bridaham's date notations allow most of his files to be assigned to a project, or at least the project on which he used it last, the materials in this series remain general or are clearly used throughout his work.

**Arrangement**


**Subjects - Names**

Bridaham, Lester Burbank -- Photograph collections

**Subjects - Topics**

Decoration and ornament, Architectural--Europe

Gargoyles

Grotesque in architecture

**Genres and Forms of Material**

Black-and-white photographs

Gelatin silver prints

Negatives (photographic)--20th century

**Contributors**

Oliver, John

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**Series I. Materials relating to Gargoyles, Chimères and the Grotesque in French Gothic Architecture, 1929-1970, undated**

Physical Description: 7.4 linear feet(9 boxes)

Scope and Content Note

Production and research materials related to Bridaham's book, *Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in French Gothic Art*, form this series. Production materials include mounted photographs with printer's instructions, page layouts and proofs. Notes, articles, correspondence, and a small number of images comprise the preserved research materials for the book. The materials in this series derive from the creation of both the 1930 edition of the book and the slightly enlarged 1969 edition. Also included are the contract for the second edition of the book, as well as promotional fliers for the first edition.

Arrangement note

The series is organized into two groupings: production materials and research materials.

**Production materials**

- **Box 1-3, 32-33, 34**
  - Individual image mock-ups with printer's instructions
    - Scope and Content Note
      - Arranged by size into three groupings; then by illustration number.

- **Box 35*, Folder 1-3**
  - Page layouts

- **Box 35*, Folder 4-6**
  - Corrected text proofs

**Research materials, notes and correspondence**

- **Box 4-5**
  - Scope and Content Note
      - See also research materials reused for subsequent projects below, especially bound volumes in boxes 30-31.
Series II. **Unpublished projects, 1917-1987, undated**

**Physical Description:** 9.3 linear feet (21 boxes)

**Scope and Content Note**

Series II is comprised of materials relating to Bridaham’s unpublished book projects. The publication of the second edition of *Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in French Gothic Architecture* spurred Bridaham to further research on the theme of gargoyles. Over the next two decades he would produce three further projects, each expanding the scope of his core idea in terms of geography, chronology and audience.

From 1968 to 1981, Bridaham worked on a book project entitled “Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in the Sculpture of the Middle Ages in England, Germany, Italy and Spain,” an expansion of his study of gargoyles to include monuments of the Romanesque period as well as the Gothic, and to cover much of Europe. Bridaham’s previous publisher, Plenum Press, declined the book and he was unable to interest another publisher in the project. In 1980 Bridaham met John Oliver, who shared his interest in gargoyles, and the two men decided to collaborate. From 1981 to 1983 Bridaham retooled his research into a popular book, co-authored with Oliver, with the working title “Meet My Fabulous Grotesque Friends.” Bridaham and Oliver were unable to find a publisher. In 1986 and 1987, Bridaham returned to the topic again, envisioning a more scholarly project, “The Bridaham Collection of Photographs of Gargoyles and Grotesque-Style Sculptures of the Middle Ages in all Countries,” which would include 1600 photographs. The project remained unpublished.

Each of the projects documented in this series includes both images and papers. The images are primarily photographs, but may also include postcards and other printed material. The images are generally organized by Bridaham’s planned chapter headings. The types of textual material is also relatively similar for each project, including correspondence, research, notes and drafts of text. A limited number of images are also included in these files. Of particular interest is the text dummy for the “Fabulous Friends” book.

Due to the fact that the research projects relate and often overlap, many materials may relate to more than one research project. Although they are generally grouped by the date he last worked with a folder, some anomalies still exist. Thus, the final grouping of this series contains materials relating to all three of the previous unpublished projects, as well as a certain amount of miscellaneous and duplicate material. This includes catalogs and pamphlets, articles, research notes and a variety of images.

**Arrangement note**

The series is arranged in three groups of material correlating to Bridaham’s unpublished book projects. A final, fourth grouping contains materials relating to all three of the previous unpublished projects, as well as a certain amount of miscellaneous and duplicate material.

"*Gargoyles, Chimères, and the Grotesque in the Sculpture of the Middle Ages in England, Germany, Italy and Spain*"

- Box 6-8: Research, notes, correspondence and sections of draft text
- Box 9-11: Images

"*Meet my Fabulous Grotesque Friends*"

- Box 12-13: Research, notes, correspondence and sections of draft text
- Box 26: Final text dummy

- Images
  - Box 14, Folder 1-6: Gargoyles
  - Box 14, Folder 7-9: Devil
  - Box 15: Bestiary
  - Box 16: Chimères
  - Box 17: Symbolism
  - Box 18: Various

"*The Bridaham Collection of Photographs of Gargoyles and Grotesque-Style Sculptures of the Middle Ages in all Countries,*"

- Box 19: Research, notes, correspondence and sections of draft text
- Box 20, Folder 1-2: Gargoyles
Series II. Unpublished projects, 1917-1987, undated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 20, Folder 3</th>
<th>Bestiary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 20, Folder 4</td>
<td>Heads</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 21, Folder 1-4</td>
<td>Chimères</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 22, Folder 1-2</td>
<td>Symbolism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 22-23</td>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 24, Folder 1-10</td>
<td>Cumulative project research materials and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Box 24-25</td>
<td>Research materials and notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Series III. General research materials, 1895-1981, undated

Physical Description: 4.5 linear feet (7 boxes)

Scope and Content Note
Series III includes images and materials that relate to Bridaham's entire span of research on gargoyles and the grotesque rather than being attributable to a specific project. Although Bridaham's date notations allow most of his files to be assigned to a project, or at least the project on which he used it last, the materials in this series remain general or are clearly used throughout.

Arrangement note
The series is arranged by type of material.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 27</th>
<th>Articles, clippings and notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box 30-31</td>
<td>Bound volumes of research notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images</td>
<td>Photographs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postcards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 28</td>
<td>Oversize photograph</td>
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<td>Box 29</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Box 34*, Folder 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box 36-37</td>
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Scope and Content Note
Restricted access.