Finding aid for the Lettrist movement papers, 1949-1988

Finding aid prepared by Laura Schroffel and Annette Leddy
Descriptive Summary

Title: Lettrist movement papers
Date (inclusive): 1949-1988
Number: 900263
Creator/Collector: Mouvement lettriste
Physical Description: 5.75 linear feet (3 boxes, 2 flatfile folders)
Repository: The Getty Research Institute
Special Collections
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100
Los Angeles, California, 90049-1688
(310) 440-7390

Abstract: Assorted material from the Lettrist movement, including manuscripts, printed essays and tracts, and exhibition ephemera.

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 French.

Biographical/Historical Note

Lettrism was founded in 1945 by Romanian poet Isidore Isou who, with the help of Gabriel Pomerand, distributed leaflets in Paris announcing that letters had superseded words as the avant-garde's preferred medium. In 1946 the first Lettrist manifesto was published. In the same year the first exhibition was held, featuring drawings, paintings and sculptures made of Roman letters. In 1949 Isou published a tract advocating sexual promiscuity, La Mécanique des femmes, for which he was briefly incarcerated, and over the subsequent twenty years, Lettrism's scope included everything from art and literature to film, social mores and electoral politics. Various offshoots of the movement developed, including Lettrism International, formed when Guy Debord broke with Isou; Debord subsequently founded the Situationist International.

Access

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Preferred Citation

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http://hdl.handle.net/10020/cifa900263

Processing History

In 2009 with grant funding from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), Laura Schroffel processed the collection and made an inventory under the supervision of Ann Harrison, while Annette Leddy helped devise the arrangement and wrote the descriptive notes.

Separated Materials

In 1990 the Getty Research Institute acquired a collection of circa 200 items documenting the history and activities of the Lettrist movement. This collection was subsequently separated. The published material from the collection, that is the books and serials, circa 150 items, were cataloged by the library as the Lettrist Movement Collection. The unpublished material, circa 50 items, forms the Lettrist Movement papers.

Scope and Content of Collection

This assembled archive of approximately 50 assorted items is a portion of a larger acquisition documenting the development of the Lettrist movement. Included here are manuscripts, tracts, exhibition catalogs, posters and printed ephemera relating to Isidore Isou, the founder of the movement, and other key members such as Maurice Lemaître, Alain Satié, and Jean-Louis Brau, as well as a range of collaborative works.

The archive includes eight items by Isou mostly from the 1970s and 1980s, one regarding the "brain-pollution" of a former colleague, another a "communiqué" to President Giscard d’Estaing. There are nine items by Isou’s compatriot, Maurice Lemaître, including a tract arguing that Isou should be awarded the Nobel Prize. A collection highlight is a set of brilliantly colored issues of Revue littéraire letteriste, each one of which is a poster-size visual "novel" by a different artist/writer. There is also an art object, Les mots parlent (1971) which consists of a partially opened sardine can containing an
advertisement for wine that has been cut into pieces like a jigsaw puzzle.

**Arrangement**

Materials by individual artists/authors are grouped together, followed by a list of materials from collaborative projects.

**Subjects - Topics**

Lettrism

Literature, Experimental

**Genres and Forms of Material**

Art objects

Manuscripts

Posters

Printed ephemera

Tracts (documents)

**Contributors**

Brau, Jean Louis

Isou, Isidore

Lemaître, Maurice, 1926-

Satié, Alain, 1944-

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**Lettrist movement papers**

Box 1, 3*

**Isou, Isidore, 1949-1988, undated**

"Pour une meilleure législation en matière de littérature érotique ou défense de la littérature érotique," circa 1949

Scope and Content Note

Reprographic copy. Also includes copy of "Défense d'Isidore Isou" with signatories: Neveux, Pauwels, Roussin, Maurois, Achard, Arout, Aymé, Bessy, Breton, Cocteau, Gance, Hébertot, Jeanson, de Montherlant, Ragon, Rousselot, Salacrou, Soupault, Torrès, Tzara, de Waroquier, Cassou, and Lemaître.

Box 1, Folder 2

**Manuscript of press release regarding Isou’s film Le Traité de bave et d'éternité, circa January 1952**

Box 1, Folder 3

"Réponse d'Isidore Isou à propos de brain-pollution de Jean-Louis Brau," 1972

Scope and Content Note

Manuscript and two typescript drafts.

Box 1, Folder 4

"M. Giscard d'Estaing dilapide l'argent des Français," 1978

Scope and Content Note

Manuscript and typescript.

Box 1, Folder 5

"Réunir les moyens pour prolonger et améliorer la vie de ceux qui combattent dans la plupart des domaines du savoir et du quotidien pour une Société et une existence meilleures...," 1985

Scope and Content Note

Manuscript and three corrected typescript drafts.

Box 1, Folder 6

"Mes opinions sur les désaccords entre le group 'L' et les groupes 'A'. 'F'.," 1984

Scope and Content Note

Manuscript and corrected typescript drafts.
Box 1, Folder 7  "Il ne faut pas transformer Paris en une jungle...," 1987-1988
   Scope and Content Note
   Photocopy of corrected typescript.

Box 3*, Folder 1  "Invitation à l'art d'avant-garde et au lettrisme par Isidore Isou," undated
   Lemaître, Maurice, 1951-1977
   Scope and Content Note
   Also in flatfile 1**.

Flatfile 1**  Le Film est déjà commencé? poster, 1951
   Aphorismes et lettrées hypergraphiques, 1954
   Scope and Content Note
   Catalog of the first exhibition by Lemaître.

Box 1, Folder 8  Mauvaises toiles de Lemaître et autres chefs-d'oeuvre, 1966
   Scope and Content Note
   Exhibition catalog from Librairie Galerie Anglaise.

Flatfile 1**  "Manifeste," 1966
   Scope and Content Note
   Poster denouncing the manner in which Lettrist works are presented.

Box 1, Folder 10  "Note à tous les letteristes et sympathisants," 1967
   Scope and Content Note
   Reprographic copy of typed tract.

Box 1, Folder 11  "Maurice Bismuth dit Lemaître Union de la jeunesse et de l'externité, pourquoi je me présente," 1967
   Scope and Content Note
   Printed tract relating to the elections of March 1967.

Box 1, Folder 12  Retrospective Lemaître, 1967
   Scope and Content Note
   Exhibition catalog from Marché expérimental d'art.

Box 1, Folder 13  "Le roman de Marcelle," 1970-1971
   Scope and Content Note
   Poster from Revue littéraire lettriste and photocopy of manuscript of unpublished preface "Pour une nécrologie créatrice."

Box 1, Folder 14  "Un prix Nobel de littérature pour Isidore Isou," 1977
   Scope and Content Note
   Reprographic copy of a typewritten tract.

Box 3*, Folder 2  Brau, Jean-Louis, 1959
   Scope and Content Note
   Tract: Potel'asymptotel'asymptotel'. La méthode et ce qui ne l'est pas!

Box 2  Satié, Alain, 1971
   Scope and Content Note
   Art object titled Les mots parlent.
| Box 1, 3* | **Collaborative projects, 1963-1987**  
Scope and Content Note  
Also in flatfile folder 1**-2**. |
| Box 3*, Folder 3 | **La lettre et le signe dans la peinture contemporaine, 1963**  
Scope and Content Note  
Two exhibition posters, printed on newspaper pages, from Galerie Valérie Schmidt. |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | "**Limelight,** 1964  
Scope and Content Note  
Reprographic copy of typewritten tract by Brau, Dufrêne and Wolman. |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | "**Arguments lettristes no. 1,** 1964  
Scope and Content Note  
Text written by the director Isou and editorial committee: Altmann, Lemaître, Sabatier, Spacagna, Studeny, and Roberdhay. |
| Flatfile 1** | **Le mouvement lettriste presente la semaine de l'art moderne, 1965**  
Scope and Content Note  
Poster with schedule of events. |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | **Lettrisme et hypergraphie, 1966**  
Scope and Content Note  
Exhibition catalog from Galerie Europa in Berlin featuring the work of Altmann, Hachette, Isou, Jessemin, Lemaître, Sabatier, Spacagna and others. |
| Box 1, Folder 18 | **Onze Lettristes, 1966**  
Scope and Content Note  
Exhibition catalog from Galerie Stadler featuring the work of de la Tour, Jessemin, Spacagna, Isou, Sabatier, Lemaître and others. |
| Box 1, Folder 19 | **Hypergraphies, 1967**  
Scope and Content Note  
Catalog of Spacagna exhibition at Galerie Stadler. |
| Box 1, Folder 20 | "**Halte au gang des escrocs et des cuistres nécrophages de Dada et pillards du Lettrisme,** 1967  
Scope and Content Note  
Reprographic copy of typewritten tract by Front de la jeunesse/Groupe d'action lettriste. |
| Flatfile 1** | **Pour un front culturel, 1968**  
Scope and Content Note  
Poster. |
| Flatfile 2** | **Jeune Peinture, assemblée générale, 1968**  
Scope and Content Note  
Poster with agenda for the meeting. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 21</th>
<th>&quot;Un malade dangereux: Jean Hughes,&quot; 1969</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reprographic copy of typewritten tract by Broutin, Canal, Conrart, Curtay, Gillard, Hebert, Hachette, Jones, Lemaitre, Mallet, Monod, Poyet, Raimond, Sabatier, Satie, Tarkieltaub, and Virgnaud.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 22</th>
<th>Aujourd'hui le lettrisme et l'hypergraphie, 1969</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exhibition catalog is from Galerie Stadler and features the work of Broutin, Poyet, Allain Gillard, Altman, Isou, Curtay, Satié, Sabatier and others.</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Box 3*, Folder 4</th>
<th>Revue littéraire letteriste, 1970-1972</th>
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<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 23</th>
<th>&quot;Halte aux épiciers de la littérature,&quot; 1971</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reprographic copy of typewritten tract by the Groupe Lettriste commenting on the Prix Goncourt award jury.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 24</th>
<th>La vérité lettriste 1945-1973, 1973</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Invitation to exhibition at Galerie Suzanne Visat.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 25</th>
<th>Le Lettrisme, École de Paris, 1976</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exhibition catalog from Galerie Strunskaja featuring the work of Lemaitre, Isou, Satié, Sabatier, Rose, Grimaud, Hachette and others.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Box 1, Folder 26</th>
<th>Le mouvement lettriste 1987, 1987</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scope and Content Note</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exhibition catalog from Atelier Ste Anne featuring the work of Canal, Dupont, Isou, Lemaitre, Letailleur, Pommerand, Poyet, Roehmer, Satié, and Sabatier.</td>
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