Descriptive Summary
Title: Photograph collection on Katherine Dunham
Date: 1938-1959
Collection Number: MS-P047
Extent: 1.6 linear feet (3 boxes and 4 oversized folders)
Languages: The collection is in English, German, French, and Spanish.
Repository: University of California, Irvine. Library. Special Collections and Archives. Irvine, California 92623-9557
Abstract: This collection comprises approximately 875 photographs of Katherine Dunham, the renowned dancer, choreographer, teacher, anthropologist, and humanitarian, and of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. The collection contains photographic prints, proofs, contact sheets, and postcards depicting performances, rehearsals, portraits publicity efforts, and candid moments. The collection also contains typewritten letters concerning payment for photographs and other logistical matters of the Company.
Access
The collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Photograph collection on Katherine Dunham. MS-P047. Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California. Date accessed.
For the benefit of current and future researchers, please cite any additional information about sources consulted in this collection, including permanent URLs, item or folder descriptions, and box/folder locations.
Acquisition Information
Processing History
Biography
Katherine Dunham was a choreographer, dancer, teacher, writer, anthropologist, social activist, and one of the founders of the anthropological dance movement. She was the creator of the Dunham Technique, which blends African and Caribbean-based rhythm with classical movement and greatly influenced American modern dance.
Born in 1909, Dunham came from a multi-ethnic background. Her mother was of Native American, French Canadian, English, and possibly African ancestry, and her father was of Madagascan and West African ancestry. This multi-ethnicity contributed to Dunham's interest in the culture and dances of Africa and the West Indies. She was also inspired early in life by the Terpsichorean Club at her high school, which taught modern dance techniques based on the ideas of Jaques-Dalcroze and Rudolf von Laban, and by her ballet studies with Russian ballerina Ludmilla Speranzeva.
Dunham attended the University of Chicago to study anthropology. There she earned a Rosenwald Fellowship to travel to the West Indies to undertake research on Caribbean dance cultures. This first-hand experience developed into her master's thesis, entitled "The Dances of Haiti: Their Social Organization, Classification, Form, and Function." While in Chicago, Dunham continued to pursue dance and formed one of the first African American ballet companies, Ballet Nègre, as well as a dance school, the Negro Dance Group. She was also a member of the Works Progress Administration's Mid-West Federal Writers' Project.
In 1938 Dunham left the university to pursue dancing and choreography in New York. There she formed the Katherine Dunham Dance Company, one of the first self-supporting African American dance companies. From the early 1940s until the mid-1960s, the Company toured as a concert dance group, introducing African and Caribbean dance and culture to United States and international audiences. Many of the works performed were dance representations of Caribbean, African, or American cultural events. Dunham's most celebrated choreographed pieces included L'Ag'Ya, a story of a tragic love triangle based on a Martinique fighting dance; Barrelhouse, an Americana piece based on a Florida swamp shimmy; and Shango, based on a vodoun ritual. During this time Dunham also choreographed and danced in a number of Hollywood movies, including Stormy Weather (1943).
In 1946 Dunham returned to New York and founded the Katherine Dunham School of Arts and Research. The school's emphasis was on interdisciplinary study and included the Dunham School of Dance and Theater, the Department of Cultural Studies, and the Institute for Caribbean Research. Courses included general anthropology, introductory psychology, ballet, modern dance, history of drama, and Caribbean folklore. Among students who attended the school were James Dean, Peter Gennaro, Marlon Brando, Chita Rivera, Eartha Kitt, and José Ferrer.

Dunham continued to tour with her company from the 1940s until the mid-1960s. Later in life she took on the role of humanitarian and scholar, living in Haiti for a time, serving as an adviser to the cultural ministry of Senegal, and working as artist-in-residence at Southern Illinois University, where she later became professor and director of the Performing Arts Training Center. In 1983 Dunham was awarded a prestigious Kennedy Center Honor alongside Frank Sinatra and James Stewart for her lifetime contribution to the arts and American culture. She also received the United States National Medal of the Arts in dance in 1989 "for her pioneering explorations of Caribbean and African dance, which have enriched and transformed the art of dance in America."

Dunham was also known for taking political stands. In 1944 she informed her audience in Lexington, Kentucky that she would never dance there again because it was a segregated theater. In 1951 her troupe performed *Southland*, a controversial piece in which a black man hangs from a rope while a woman sings the anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit." Remarkably, at the age of 82, Dunham staged a 47-day hunger strike in protest of the United States ordering the return of starving Haitian refugees to Haiti. She ended the strike only after a visit from the ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Dunham died in 2006 at the age of 96.

**Biography/Organization History**

1909 June
Katherine Mary Dunham born in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

1928
Entered University of Chicago.

1933
Appeared with Chicago Opera in *La Guiablesse*.

1935
Awarded a Rosenwald Travel Fellowship and began fieldwork in West Indies.

1936
Earned Ph.B. in Social Anthropology from University of Chicago.

1938
Federal theater performance of *L’Ag’Ya*.

1939
Choreographed *Carnival of Rhythm* (Warner Bros.).

1940
Choreographed and performed *Cabin in the Sky*.

1940
Formed the Katherine Dunham Dance Company.

1940-1941
First U.S. tour with *Cabin in the Sky*.

1941
Married John Pratt.

1941-1947
Second tour in United States and Canada, choreographed and performed *Tropical Revue, Carib Song*.

1942
Choreographed *Pardon My Sarong* (Universal Pictures).

1942
Appeared in *Star Spangled Rhythm* (Paramount Pictures).

1943
Choreographed and appeared in *Stormy Weather* (Twentieth-Century Fox).

1945
Opened Katherine Dunham School of Dance in New York.

1947-1949
Toured Mexico and Europe.

1948
Choreographed and appeared in *Casbah* (Universal Pictures).

1950
Toured South America.

1950
Appeared in *Botta e Riposta* (Ponti-De Laurentiis).

1950
Purchased Habitation Leclerc.

1951-1953
Toured Europe, North Africa.

1951
Adopted four-year-old Marie-Christine.

1954
Choreographed and appeared in *Mambo* (Paramount Pictures).

1954
Choreographed and appeared in *Liebes Sender* (Germany).

1955
Choreographed and appeared in *Música en la Noche* (Mexico).

1956-1957
Toured South Pacific and Far East.

1957
Wrote *A Touch of Innocence*.

1958
Choreographed *Green Mansions* (M.G.M.).

1959-1960
Third European tour.

1960
Choreographed and appeared in German television special *Karaibishe Rhythmen*.

1962
*Bamboche* opened after recruitment in Morocco.

1963
Choreographed *Aida*.

1964
Choreographed "Sodom and Gemorah" scene in *The Bible* (De Laurentiis / Twentieth-Century Fox / Seven Arts).
1964-1965  Choreographed Faust.
1965  Dissolved company to become adviser to the cultural ministry of Senegal.
1966  Represented United States at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar.
1967  Jailed in East St. Louis for disorderly conduct following a meeting with local gang members promoting her Performing Arts Training Center to inner-city youth.
1979  International opening of the Katherine Dunham Museum.
1982  Retired from Southern Illinois University.
1983  Received Kennedy Center Honors Award.
1986  Husband John Pratt died.
2006 May 21  Died of natural causes at age 96.


Collection Scope and Content Summary
This collection comprises approximately 875 photographs of Katherine Dunham and of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company. The collection contains photographic prints, proofs, contact sheets, and postcards depicting performances, rehearsals, portraits, publicity efforts, and candid moments of Dunham's third European tour (1959-1960), tour of South America (1950), and some American performances. Particularly well represented are stage performances of L'Ag'Ya, Bahiana, Barrelhouse, Rites de Passage, Tropics, and Veracruzana. Of Dunham's feature films, only Mambo (1954) is represented within the collection. A few photographers are identified; if not stated, the photographer is unknown. The collection also contains typewritten letters concerning payment for photographs and other logistical matters of the Katherine Dunham Dance Company.

Collection Arrangement
This collection is arranged in four series.

Series 1. Publicity photographs, circa 1951-1959, undated. 0.6 linear feet
Series 2. Performance photographs, 1938-1954, undated. 0.6 linear feet
Series 3. Backstage and candid photographs, 1949-1954. 0.3 linear feet
Series 4. Correspondence, 1952-1959. 0.1 linear feet

Related Collections
Photographs, writings, and video recordings of Katherine Dunham and her dance company are also held by New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, the Library of Congress, the Missouri Historical Society, and the Katherine Dunham Centers for Arts and Humanities.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Dunham, Katherine -- Archives.
Dunham, Katherine -- Photographs.
Katherine Dunham Company -- Archives.
Katherine Dunham Company -- Photographs.
African Americans in the performing arts -- Photographs.
African American dance -- Photographs.
Dancers -- United States -- Photographs.
Choreographers -- United States -- Photographs.
Dance -- Archives.
Dance -- Photographs.
Modern dance -- Photographs.
Dance photography -- History -- Sources.

**Genres and Formats of Materials**
Photographic prints -- 20th century.
Contact sheets -- 20th century.
Postcards -- 20th century.
Letters -- 20th century.

**Occupations**
Choreographers.
Dancers.

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Series 1. **Publicity photographs circa 1951-1959, undated**

**Physical Description:** 0.6 linear feet

**Series Scope and Content Summary**
This series comprises approximately 300 publicity images taken of Dunham and her company between 1951 and 1959. It includes portraits of Dunham, photographs of the company in tourist locales, posed photographs of Dunham with her family, and artwork depicting Dunham and her dancers.

**Arrangement**
The series is organized alphabetically by subject.

**Florence, Italy**

Box : Folder FB-2 : 10-11

**Ballet: Ideario de la danza 1954-1955**

**Physical Description:** 11 black-and-white photographic prints

**Scope and Content Note**
From a Spanish-language magazine that featured Dunham.

Box : Folder 1 : 1-2

**Boboli Gardens 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 83 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 3

**Ferragamo's 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 14 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 4

**Ponte Vecchio 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 10 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 5

**San Miniato al Monte 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 12 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 6

**Settignano 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 7 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 7

**Villa I Tatti 1959 May**

**Physical Description:** 5 black-and-white photographic proofs

**Scope and Content Note**
Photographed with American art historian, Bernard Berenson.
Series 1. Publicity photographs circa 1951-1959, undated

Box : Folder 1 : 8

"Happy New Year" circa 1951
Physical Description: 13 black-and-white photographic prints
Scope and Content Note
Photographs by Studio Iris show Dunham with husband Pratt painting "Happy New Year" on a canvas.

Box : Folder 1 : 9

Notebook of publicity proofs by Annemarie Heinrich, Buenos Aires undated
Physical Description: 17 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 1 : 10-15

Portraits of Dunham undated
Physical Description: 124 black-and-white photographic prints and 3 black-and-white photographic proofs
Scope and Content Note
Photographs are of Dunham in various costumes. Photographers include Raymond Voinquel, Dora de Zucker, Studio Iris, B. M. Bernand, and Hector Garcia.

Box : Folder 1 : 16

Portraits of Dunham dancers undated
Physical Description: 3 black-and-white photographic prints
Scope and Content Note
Depicts two unidentified women and dancer Oscar Puente. Photographers include Foto-Semo, Nacho Lopez, and Fred Clark of Hollywood Studios.

Box : Folder 1 : 17

Souvenir drawings of Dunham and dancers by John Pratt and Waldo Glory undated

Box : Folder 1 : 18

Souvenir album of Dunham and dancers undated
Scope and Content Note
8 pages of black-and-white photographic proofs titled "Grande Serata di Gala al Teatro Sociale di Biella in Onore alla Grande Katherine Dunham."

Series 2. Performance photographs 1938-1954, undated

Physical Description: 0.6 linear feet
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series comprises approximately 350 photographs taken of Katherine Dunham Dance Company performances in the United States and abroad.
Arrangement
The series is organized alphabetically by title of dance or performance.

Box : Folder 1 : 19

Afrique circa 1949
Physical Description: 1 postcard and 7 photographic prints

L'Ag'Ya

Box : Folder 1 : 20

Germany 1954

Berlin, by Herbert Tobias 1954 May
Physical Description: 2 black-and-white contact sheets

Box : Folder 1 : 21

Unidentified city 1954
Physical Description: 1 black-and-white photographic print

Box : Folder 1 : 22

Rome, Italy undated
Physical Description: 3 black-and-white photographic prints and 3 black-and-white photographic proofs

United States
| Box : Folder 1 : 23-24 | **Chicago, Illinois, by Zoltan Glass and others 1938**  
| Physical Description: 28 black-and-white photographic prints |
| Box : Folder 1 : 25 | **Las Vegas, Nevada undated**  
| Physical Description: 11 black-and-white contact sheets |
| Box : Folder 2 : 1 | **Unknown location, by Studio Iris undated**  
| Physical Description: 2 black-and-white photographic prints and 1 black-and-white photographic proof |
| Box : Folder 2 : 2 | **Bahiana, by Studio Iris and others undated**  
| Physical Description: 11 black-and-white photographic prints |
| **Barrelhouse** |  
| Box : Folder 2 : 3 | **Paris, France: Théatre des Champs élysées, by B. M. Bernand undated**  
| Physical Description: 8 black-and-white photographic proofs |
| Box : Folder 2 : 4 | **Germany 1954**  
| Physical Description: 4 black-and-white photographic prints |
| Box : Folder 2 : 5 | **Las Vegas, Nevada undated**  
| Physical Description: 2 black-and-white contact sheets |
| Box : Folder 2 : 6-7 | **Unknown location, by Studio Bernand, Teddy Piaz, and others circa 1952 and undated**  
| Physical Description: 10 black-and-white photographic prints and 1 black-and-white contact sheet |
| **Batacuda (or Batucada)** |  
| Box : Folder 2 : 8 | **Lima, Peru 1951 January**  
| Physical Description: 4 black-and-white photographic proofs |
| Box : Folder 2 : 9 | **Unknown location undated**  
| Physical Description: 1 black-and-white contact sheet |
| Box : Folder 2 : 10 | **Choros undated**  
| Physical Description: 1 black-and-white photographic print |
| Box : Folder 2 : 11 | **Flaming Youth undated**  
| Physical Description: 1 black-and-white contact sheet |
| Box : Folder 2 : 12 | **Le Jazz Hot undated**  
| Physical Description: 2 black-and-white contact sheets |
| Box : Folder 2 : 13 | **Mambo 1954**  
| Physical Description: 6 black-and-white photographic prints |
| Box : Folder 2 : 14 | **Rites de Passage undated**  
| Physical Description: 42 black-and-white photographic proofs and 3 black-and-white contact sheets |
| Box : Folder 2 : 15 | **Shango undated**  
| Physical Description: 2 black-and-white contact sheets |
### Series 2. Performance photographs 1938-1954, undated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box / Folder</th>
<th>Title / Location / Date</th>
<th>Physical Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 : 16</td>
<td><em>Tropical Revue</em>, by Alfredo Valente circa 1943</td>
<td>1 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 : 17</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada undated</td>
<td>6 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 18-19</td>
<td>Unknown locations undated</td>
<td>17 black-and-white photographic prints and 2 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 20</td>
<td>Veracruzana undated</td>
<td>7 black-and-white photographic prints and 4 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 21</td>
<td><em>Woman with a Cigar</em>, Germany 1954</td>
<td>1 black-and-white photographic print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 22</td>
<td>Miscellaneous performances undated</td>
<td>16 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 23</td>
<td>Unidentified dances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 23</td>
<td>Palais de Chaillot undated</td>
<td>66 black-and-white photographic proofs pasted onto cardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 23</td>
<td>Théâtre des Champs élysées undated</td>
<td>13 black-and-white photographic proofs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 24</td>
<td>Germany 1954</td>
<td>6 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 25</td>
<td>Rome, Italy undated</td>
<td>11 black-and-white photographic proofs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 : 26-27, FB-2 : 13</td>
<td>Unknown locations, by Studio Iris, Gill Pax, Photo Chadel, and others undated</td>
<td>25 black-and-white photographic prints, 1 Technicolor photographic print, 11 black-and-white photographic proofs, and 1 postcard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Series 3. Backstage and candid photographs 1949-1954

- **Scope and Content Summary**: This series comprises approximately 225 photographs of Katherine Dunham, her family, and her dancers in candid situations, backstage before, during, and after performances, and in rehearsal.
- **Arrangement**: This series is organized alphabetically by subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box / Folder</th>
<th>Title / Location / Date</th>
<th>Physical Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 : 1</td>
<td>Miscellaneous candid photographs of Dunham undated</td>
<td>6 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Afrique, backstage at Teatro Municipal, Lima, Peru 1951 January
   Physical Description: 1 sepia-toned photograph and 26 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 3 : 2  L'Ag'Ya candid photographs, location unknown circa 1951, undated
   Physical Description: 5 sepia-toned postcards and 17 black-and-white photographic proofs

Assorted performances
Box : Folder 3 : 5  Berlin, Germany, by Herbert Tobias 1954
   Physical Description: 25 black-and-white photographic proofs and 19 black-and-white contact sheets

Box : Folder 3 : 6  Rome, Italy undated
   Physical Description: 25 black-and-white photographic prints and 10 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 3 : 7  Lima, Peru 1951 January
   Physical Description: 7 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 3 : 8  Unknown location undated
   Physical Description: 7 sepia-toned postcards

Rehearsals
Box : Folder 3 : 9  Brussels, Belgium 1949
   Physical Description: 49 sepia-toned photographic prints

Box : Folder 3 : 10  Berlin, Germany 1954 May
   Physical Description: 6 black-and-white contact sheets
Scope and Content Note
   Photographs by Herbert Tobias depict Dunham Dancers dancing on the Reichstag building.

Box : Folder 3 : 11  Rome, Italy undated
   Physical Description: 26 black-and-white photographic proofs

Box : Folder 3 : 12  Unknown location undated
   Physical Description: 4 black-and-white photographic prints

Series 4. Correspondence 1952-1959
Physical Description: 0.1 linear feet
Scope and Content Summary
   This series comprises letters written by Katherine Dunham, her secretary Margery Scott, photographer Hans Suter, and others. The letters mainly discuss logistical information, such as the transport of luggage and financial matters. Letters from Hans Suter concern photograph orders and ask permission to use photographs of Dunham in a Swiss magazine article.
Arrangement
   This series is organized chronologically.

Box : Folder 3 : 13  Letters 1952-1959