Guide to the Photograph Collection on Katherine Dunham MS.P.047

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Guide to the Photograph Collection on Katherine Dunham
MS.P.047
Contributing Institution: Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries
Title: Photograph collection on Katherine Dunham
Identifier/Call Number: MS.P.047
Physical Description: 1.6 Linear Feet (3 boxes and 4 oversized folders)
Date (inclusive): 1938-1959
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.
Language of Material: English.
Access
The collection is open for research.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
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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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1909 June 22</td>
<td>Katherine Mary Dunham born in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Entered University of Chicago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>La Guiablesse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Awarded a Rosenwald Travel Fellowship and began fieldwork in West Indies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Earned Ph.B. in Social Anthropology from University of Chicago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>L'Ag'Ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Carnival of Rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Cabin in the Sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1941</td>
<td>Formed the Katherine Dunham Dance Company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940-1941</td>
<td>Cabin in the Sky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Married John Pratt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1947</td>
<td>Second tour in United States and Canada, choreographed and performed Tropical Revue, Carib Song.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Pardon My Sarong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Star Spangled Rhythm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Stormy Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>Opened Katherine Dunham School of Dance in New York.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947-1949</td>
<td>Touried Mexico and Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Casbah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Touried South America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Botta e Riposta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Purchased Habitation Leclerc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Adopted four-year-old Marie-Christine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Mambo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Liebes Sender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Música en la Noche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956-1957</td>
<td>Touried South Pacific and Far East.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>A Touch of Innocence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Green Mansions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>Karaibishe Rhythmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Bamboche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Aida</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>The Bible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-1965</td>
<td>Faust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Dissolved company to become adviser to the cultural ministry of Senegal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Offered training, choreographed for Ballet National de Senegal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Represented United States at the First World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
1980  CBS grant for Children’s Workshop.
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.


Subjects and Indexing Terms
Choreographers.
Photographic prints -- 20th century.
Contact sheets -- 20th century.
Dance photography -- History -- Sources.
Modern dance -- Photographs.
Dance -- Photographs.
Dance -- Archives
Choreographers -- United States -- Photographs.
Dancers -- United States -- Photographs.
African American dance -- Photographs.
Dancers.
Postcards -- 20th century.
African Americans in the performing arts -- Photographs.
Letters -- 20th century.
Katherine Dunham Company -- Archives
Publicity photographs Series 1. circa 1951-1959, undated

Physical Description: 0.6 Linear Feet
General Physical Description note: no content
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.

Ballet: Ideario de la danza 1954-1955
General Physical Description note: 11 black-and-white photographic prints
Scope and Contents note
From a Spanish-language magazine that featured Dunham.

Florence, Italy

Ballet: Ideario de la danza 1954-1955
General Physical Description note: 11 black-and-white photographic prints
Scope and Contents note
From a Spanish-language magazine that featured Dunham.

Boboli Gardens 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 83 black-and-white photographic proofs

Ferragamo's 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 14 black-and-white photographic proofs

Ponte Vecchio 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 10 black-and-white photographic proofs

San Miniato al Monte 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 12 black-and-white photographic proofs

Settignano 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 7 black-and-white photographic proofs

Villa I Tatti 1959 May
General Physical Description note: 5 black-and-white photographic proofs
Scope and Contents note
Photographed with American art historian, Bernard Berenson.

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

Notebook of publicity proofs by Annemarie Heinrich, Buenos Aires undated
General Physical Description note: 17 black-and-white photographic proofs
### Portraits of Dunham undated
- **General Physical Description note:** 124 black-and-white photographic prints and 3 black-and-white photographic proofs
- **Scope and Contents note:** Photographs are of Dunham in various costumes. Photographers include Raymond Voinquel, Dora de Zucker, Studio Iris, B. M. Bernand, and Hector Garcia.

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

### Souvenir drawings of Dunham and dancers by John Pratt and Waldo Glory undated
- **Scope and Contents 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."

### Performance photographs Series 2. 1938-1954, undated
- **Physical Description:** 0.6 Linear Feet
- **General Physical Description note:** no content
- **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.

#### Afrique circa 1949
- **General Physical Description note:** 1 postcard and 7 photographic prints

#### L’Ag’Ya
- **Germany 1954**
- **Berlin, by Herbert Tobias 1954 May**
- **General Physical Description note:** 2 black-and-white contact sheets

#### Unidentified city 1954
- **General Physical Description note:** 1 black-and-white photographic print

#### Rome, Italy undated
- **General Physical Description note:** 3 black-and-white photographic prints and 3 black-and-white photographic proofs

#### United States
- **Chicago, Illinois, by Zoltan Glass and others 1938**
- **General Physical Description note:** 28 black-and-white photographic prints

#### Las Vegas, Nevada undated
- **General Physical Description note:** 11 black-and-white contact sheets

#### Unknown location, by Studio Iris undated
- **General Physical Description note:** 2 black-and-white photographic prints and 1 black-and-white photographic proof
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box and Folder</th>
<th>Performance</th>
<th>General Physical Description note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 2</td>
<td>Bahiana, by Studio Iris and others undated</td>
<td>11 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Barrelhouse</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 3</td>
<td>Paris, France: Théâtre des Champs élysées, by B. M. Bernand undated</td>
<td>8 black-and-white photographic proofs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 4</td>
<td>Germany 1954</td>
<td>4 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 5</td>
<td>Las Vegas, Nevada undated</td>
<td>2 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 6-7</td>
<td>Unknown location, by Studio Bernand, Teddy Piaz, and others circa 1952 and undated</td>
<td>10 black-and-white photographic prints and 1 black-and-white contact sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 8</td>
<td>Batacuda (or Batucada)</td>
<td>4 black-and-white photographic proofs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 9</td>
<td>Unknown location undated</td>
<td>1 black-and-white contact sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 10</td>
<td>Choros undated</td>
<td>1 black-and-white photographic print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 11</td>
<td>Flaming Youth undated</td>
<td>1 black-and-white contact sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 12</td>
<td>Le Jazz Hot undated</td>
<td>2 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 13</td>
<td>Mambo 1954</td>
<td>6 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 14</td>
<td>Rites de Passage undated</td>
<td>42 black-and-white photographic proofs and 3 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 15</td>
<td>Shango undated</td>
<td>2 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 16</td>
<td>Tropical Revue, by Alfredo Valente circa 1943</td>
<td>1 black-and-white photographic prints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 17</td>
<td>Tropics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>box 2, folder 18-19</td>
<td>Unknown locations undated</td>
<td>17 black-and-white photographic prints and 2 black-and-white contact sheets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance photographs Series 2.1938-1954, undated

box 2, folder 20  
**Veracruzana undated**
General Physical Description note: 7 black-and-white photographic prints and 4 black-and-white contact sheets

box 2, folder 21  
**Woman with a Cigar, Germany 1954**
General Physical Description note: 1 black-and-white photographic print

box 2, folder 22  
**Miscellaneous performances undated**
General Physical Description note: 16 black-and-white contact sheets

**Unidentified dances**

- **Paris, France**
  - **Palais de Chaillot undated**
    General Physical Description note: 66 black-and-white photographic proofs pasted onto cardboard

- **Théâtre des Champs élysées undated**
  General Physical Description note: 13 black-and-white photographic proofs

box 2, folder 24  
**Germany 1954**
General Physical Description note: 6 black-and-white photographic prints

box 2, folder 25  
**Rome, Italy undated**
General Physical Description note: 11 black-and-white photographic proofs

box 2, folder 26-27, box FB-002, folder 13  
**Unknown locations, by Studio Iris, Gill Pax, Photo Chadel, and others undated**
General Physical Description note: 25 black-and-white photographic prints, 1 Technicolor photographic print, 11 black-and-white photographic proofs, and 1 postcard

**Backstage and candid photographs Series 3. 1949-1954**
Physical Description: 0.3 Linear Feet
General Physical Description note: no content
Series 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.

box 3, folder 1  
**Miscellaneous candid photographs of Dunham undated**
General Physical Description note: 6 black-and-white photographic prints

**Performances**

box 3, folder 2  
**Afrique, backstage at Teatro Municipal, Lima, Peru 1951 January**
General Physical Description note: 1 sepia-toned photograph and 26 black-and-white photographic proofs

box 3, folder 3-4  
**L’Ag’Ya candid photographs, location unknown circa 1951, undated**
General Physical Description note: 5 sepia-toned postcards and 17 black-and-white photographic proofs

**Assorted performances**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>1954 May</td>
<td>Photographs by Herbert Tobias depict Dunham Dancers dancing on the Reichstag building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome, Italy</td>
<td>undated</td>
<td>General Physical Description note: 26 black-and-white photographic proofs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown location</td>
<td>undated</td>
<td>General Physical Description note: 4 black-and-white photographic prints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels, Belgium</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>General Physical Description note: 49 sepia-toned photographic prints.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>General Physical Description note: 49 sepia-toned photographic prints.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scope and Contents note**
Photographs by Herbert Tobias depict Dunham Dancers dancing on the Reichstag building.

**Correspondence Series 4. 1952-1959**
Physical Description: 0.1 Linear Feet
General Physical Description note: no content
Series 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.