Finding Aid for the Merle Armitage Collection 1919-1971

Processed by Jamie Henricks.
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Descriptive Summary

Title: Merle Armitage Collection, 1919-1971
Date (inclusive): 1919-1971
Collection number: Press coll. Archives Armitage
Creator: Armitage, Merle 1893-1975
Extent: 3 boxes (2.7 linear feet)
Repository: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library
Los Angeles, California 90018

Abstract: This collection contains correspondence, printed ephemera, articles, book designs, announcements, and other materials written by and about and designed by Merle Armitage. Most items relate to book design and the performing arts.

Physical location: This collection is stored at the Southern Regional Library Facility. Please contact Clark Library staff at least 2 weeks in advance if you would like to view the materials in this collection.

Language of Material: Collection materials in English

Access
Collection is open for research.

Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation

Acquisition Information
The provenance for this collection is not clear, though items may have been collected by the Clark Library over time. Some items were donated by Merle Armitage and Ward Ritchie. If a donor is known, their name is listed in the note associated with the item.

Processing History
Processed by Jamie Henricks, November 2009

Biography
Merle Armitage was born in 1893 on a farm outside Mason City, Iowa. He had many jobs over the years, but began his career as an engineer on the Kansas City, Mexico, and Orient Railroad (later the Santa Fe Railroad, and now the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway). He later took a job as a graphic designer for the Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit. His next career was as a set designer for New York theaters, which later turned into a long stint in the theater promotion business. Armitage also managed various performers and their concert tours. In 1924, he co-founded the Los Angeles Grand Opera Association and was its business manager for eight seasons. He then managed the Los Angeles Philharmonic auditorium, from 1933 to 1939, where he oversaw production of various plays and operas. In addition to his theater work, Armitage was involved with writing and designing books, as well as serving as the art director for various magazines (including 'Quick' and 'Look'). Over one hundred books are attributed to him. He had a short career in the Army Air Forces, working in the Material Center, and was a regional chairman for the Public Works of Art project during the Depression. In 1951, he was the president of the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Merle Armitage married four times and eventually retired to Yucca Valley, California, to a ranch he called Manzanita Ranch. He died March 15, 1975.

Scope and Content
This collection contains correspondence, printed ephemera, newspaper clippings, magazine and journal articles, hand-drawn book designs, announcements, and other materials written by and about and designed by Merle Armitage. Most items relate to book design and the performing arts. Items are primarily paper and most date from the late 1920s to late 1950s.

Arrangement
The collection was arranged previously by another individual; it was rearranged in November 2009. Series are organized chronologically.
The collection is organized into the following series:

Series 1. Correspondence, 1950-1958
Series 4. Speeches and Exhibits, 1929-1957
Series 5. Theater, Music, and Art, 1927-1947

Related Material
Merle Armitage papers, 1930-1974, MS 234, Main Library Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.
Papers of Merle Armitage, 1932-1964, MsC 558, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.
Merle Armitage Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California. (American art collected by Armitage)
Merle Armitage Art Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.

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

Subjects
Authors, American--20th century
Book designers--United States--20th century
Impresarios--United States--20th century
Theater--Los Angeles--20th century

Genres and Forms
Ephemera--California--20th century
Letters--California--20th century
Periodicals--United States--20th century

Series 1. Correspondence 1950-1958

Scope and Content Note
This series includes correspondence to and from Merle Armitage.

Arrangement
This series is arranged chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 1  Letter from A. Thangal Kunju Musaliar 1950

Note
A photograph of a letter and envelope from A. Thangal Kunju Musaliar (a cashew merchant from India) to Merle Armitage thanking him for a book design, expressing his delight in naming his guest house in India "Maison Armitage", and inviting the Armitages to visit South India.

Box 1, Folder 2  Industrial Arts Medal correspondence 1958

Note
Includes correspondence from individuals regarding the American Institute of Architects Industrial Arts Medal presented to Merle Armitage. This item is a gift of Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 3  Correspondence to Larry

Note
One letter to Larry (Lawrence Clark Powell?) from Merle Armitage on Santa Fe SuperChief stationery designed by Merle Armitage.
Series 2. Articles and Publications 1932-1971

Scope and Content Note
This series contains journals, magazines, and other publications that contain articles by Merle Armitage, about his work in the design field or arts, or related to books he designed.

Arrangement
This series is arranged chronologically by date of publication, with undated materials placed at the end of the series.

Box 1, Folder 4
Magazine articles 1932, 1941, 1951
Note
Includes one issue each of "Creative Art: A Magazine of Fine & Applied Art" (1932), "Bookbinding & Book Production" (1941), and "American Artist" (1951) with articles about Merle Armitage or relating to his books.

Box 1, Folder 5
"The American Magazine of Art" 1934
Note
Includes an article about the Public Works of Art Project; Merle Armitage was the chairman for the 14th region (Southern California).

Box 1, Folder 6
Report for Colonel Drake 1942
Note
Includes "Report for Colonel Alonzo M. Drake on the Activities and Accomplishments of the Industrial Planning and Production Engineering Sections" by Merle Armitage for the Central Procurement District in the Army Air Forces Material Center. Includes a few hand-drawn illustrations.

Box 1, Folder 7-8
"Publisher's Weekly" 1942, 1948, 1949, 1951
Note
Includes five issues of "Publisher's Weekly" with articles about Merle Armitage or relating to his books.

Box 1, Folder 9
"The Southwest Review" 1947
Note
Includes an issue of "Southwest Review" with an article by Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 10
"The American Printer" 1950
Note
Includes a photo of Merle Armitage in an issue of "The American Printer".

Box 1, Folder 11
Newspaper articles 1950, 1963, 1971
Note
Includes newspaper articles about Merle Armitage or relating to his books, and an article about his Manzanita Ranch in California.

Box 1, Folder 12
American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) publications ca. 1951
Note
Includes two issues of the AIGA journal, an annual report, and a magazine exhibition catalog.

Box 1, Folder 13
"Cowles Ink: Look Gets a New Cover" 1951
Note
Includes an issue of "Cowles Ink" describing Merle Armitage's work on the covers of "Look" magazine.
Series 2. Articles and Publications 1932-1971

Box 1, Folder 14  **Magazine articles 1956-1957**

Note
Includes six issues of "Western Family" with articles about Merle Armitage or relating to his books.

Box 1, Folder 15  **"The Man Behind the Smile: Doing Business With Henry Miller" / by Merle Armitage 1961**

Note
Reprinted from the Texas Quarterly. This item is a gift of Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 16  **Advertisement for "Modern Dance"**

Note
The book "Modern Dance", compiled by Virginia Stewart, includes an article by Merle Armitage titled "The Dance and Contemporary Expression".

Box 1, Folder 17  **"Form"**

Note
Includes a piece of ephemera praising Merle Armitage's work and achievements, printed by Kurt H. Volk, Inc.

Box 1, Folder 18  **"The Twelfth Book" / by Carl Haverlin**

Note
Mentions books designed by Merle Armitage.

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**Scope and Content Note**
This series contains materials related to book and ephemera design by Merle Armitage. Book layouts, pamphlets, announcements, keepsakes, Christmas greetings, and other items designed by Merle Armitage are included. Also included are catalogs from the American Institute of Graphic Arts and Duell, Sloane, and Pierce, Inc. advertising books for sale designed by Merle Armitage.

**Arrangement**
This series is arranged chronologically by date of publication, with undated materials placed at the end of the series. Book catalogs are placed at the end of the series and arranged chronologically as well.

Box 1, Folder 19  **"11 Books: designed by Merle Armitage, printed by Lynton R. Kistler" [1935?]**

Note
A pamphlet describing books designed by Merle Armitage in collaboration with Lynton R. Kistler.

Box 1, Folder 20  **"Notes on Modern Printing" prospectuses 1946**

Note

Box 1, Folder 21  **"Look Quick Flair, a report by Cowles Magazines Incorporated" 1949**

Note
These magazines (Look, Quick, and Flair) were under the design of Merle Armitage as art director.
Box 1, Folder 22

"The Growing Stature of Wendell Wilkie" pamphlet 1950

Note
A pamphlet designed by Merle Armitage for Gardner Cowles reproducing remarks made by Cowles at the Memorial Ceremonies for Wendell Wilkie in Indianapolis, February 18, 1950. Also includes a letter in the back of the pamphlet from Cowles thanking Armitage for his design.

Box 1, Folder 23

"The Magazine Show" 1950

Note
Includes two covers of "Look", a magazine with Merle Armitage as art director.

Box 1, Folder 24

Original book layouts [ca. 1950?]-1957

Note
Includes handwritten original book layouts for four books, including "Accent on America", "Fit for a Queen", "Young Shepherdess", and "Bread Upon the Sands". These items are a gift from Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 25

"Bent's Fort" / by David Lavender 1955

Note
Broadside drawn and designed by Merle Armitage for the friends of Lawrence Clark Powell.

Box 1, Folder 26

"Book Tradition" / by Merle Armitage 1955

Note
A printed keepsake of "Book Tradition", an address given to the Zamorano Club on October 5, 1955. The keepsake was designed by Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 27

Holiday greetings ca. 1956

Note
Includes various printed holiday greetings from Merle Armitage. One was sent to Lawrence Clark Powell.

Box 1, Folder 28

"Books For Our Time" prospectus

Note
Advertisement for "Books For Our Time", a publication about book design including some designed by Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 29

Merle Armitage Books list

Note
Typed lists of books designed by Merle Armitage (1933-1954), books with articles or forwards or edited by Merle Armitage (1932-1952), and books designed and written by Merle Armitage (1932-1952). Also includes marks that designate books selected for various exhibitions.

Box 1, Folder 30

"The Ceramics of Beatrice Wood" exhibition announcement

Note
An announcement designed by Merle Armitage for the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Box 2

Brochures for "Masterpieces" prints

Note
Includes large brochures for series of prints for members of the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Print series include "Modern Masterpieces of American Indian Art", "Masterpieces in Maya Art", and other individual crafts such as silver or textile arts. Each brochure explains the artist and background of the print.

"50 Books of the Year" catalogs 1933-1950

Note
Catalogs from the American Institute of Graphic Arts, each including book(s) designed or written by Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 34
"Books: Fall 1946, Duell, Sloan & Pearce, Inc." 1948

Note
A catalog advertising books for sale from Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, Inc., including "Fit for a King" by Merle Armitage.

Series 4. Speeches and Exhibits 1929-1957

Scope and Content Note
This series contains items related to speeches given by Merle Armitage for exhibits and other events. Items include transcriptions of the speeches, keepsakes, and invitations.

Arrangement
This series is arranged chronologically by event date.

Box 1, Folder 35
"The Aristocracy of Art: Merle Armitage" 1929

Note
Announcement for a book available for purchase reproducing the text of a speech given to the California Art Club Open Forum on March 4, 1929 by Merle Armitage.

Box 1, Folder 36
Invitation to exhibition opening lecture 1949

Note
An invitation to a lecture given by Merle Armitage for the opening of the 1948 Fifty Books of the Year exhibition, held at the Library of Congress in cooperation with the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

Box 1, Folder 37
"New Directions" advertising forum announcement 1949

Note
An announcement for a series of lectures with various speakers, including Merle Armitage on "New Directions in Editorial Planning".

Box 1, Folder 38
"Intelligence Cooperating" address finale 1950

Note
A typed copy of the finale to an address ("Intelligence Cooperating") made by Merle Armitage at the American Designers Institute banquet in Chicago, Illinois on June 20, 1950.

Box 1, Folder 39
"The Power of Pictures" 1950

Note

Box 1, Folder 40

Note
A printed text of a speech given by Merle Armitage about an exhibit and his books held by the Clark Library.
**Series 5. Theater, Music, and Art 1927-1947**

**Scope and Content Note**
This series contains items related to theater, music, and art ventures Merle Armitage was involved in. This includes concerts, exhibits, plays, and operas he managed. Most items are programs or announcements for events.

**Arrangement**
This series is arranged chronologically by date of publication.

**Box 1, Folder 41**
**Artist advertisements [ca. 1928]**

*Note*
Small paper entitled "from George Leslie Smith ... and ... Merle Armitage" describing individuals available to be booked for recitals or lectures.

**Box 1, Folder 42**
**"Opera 1927" 1927**

*Note*
Includes a bound program with advertisements and information about the 1927 season at the Los Angeles Grand Opera. Also includes lists of members of the chorus, season ticket holders, and short articles about the opera.

**Box 1, Folder 43**
**"Opera 1930" / by Merle Armitage 1930**

*Note*
Includes a large bound program with advertisements for the seventh season (1930) of the Los Angeles Grand Opera at the Shrine Civic Auditorium.

**Box 1, Folder 44**
**Advertisement for "5 Merle Armitage Concerts" 1934-1935**

*Note*
Includes details about five concerts presented by Merle Armitage including illustrations of the musicians.

**Box 1, Folder 45**
**Program for the play "Lady Precious Stream" 1937**

*Note*
A detailed program for the play "Lady Precious Stream", by S.I. Hsiung, presented by Merle Armitage and Paul Posz, starring Lotus Liu. The program includes explanations about theater in China, about the play itself (including an entry "Why We Produced the Play" by Merle Armitage), and many photographs of the characters.

**Box 1, Folder 46**
**Program for the opera "Porgy and Bess" [1938]**

*Note*
A detailed program for the opera "Porgy and Bess" with music by George Gershwin, presented by Merle Armitage and Paul Posz at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium. The program includes a biographical history of George Gershwin, a history of "Porgy and Bess", and a synopsis.

**Box 1, Folder 47**
**Photographs of movie titles 1947**

*Note*
Includes photographs of title designs for Loews Inc. / MGM movies made in 1947. There are multiple versions of some titles. Titles include "The Song of the Thin Man", "Merton of the Movies", "Living in a Big Way", "The Hucksters", "The Birds and the Bees", "Green Dolphin Street", "In High Barbaree", and "The Unfinished Dance". It is possible that Merle Armitage helped design some of the titles.

Scope and Content Note
This series contains items related to Merle Armitage which did not fit in other series. This includes scrapbooks of ephemera, pamphlets, announcements, and other items. Also included is a paper cutout and marker drawing by Merle Armitage for Ward Ritchie.

Arrangement
This series is arranged chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 48  
Miscellaneous ephemera 1944-1951

Note
Includes postcards, event announcements, and a book prospectus.

Box 1, Folder 49  
"Books for Late Fall 1948, William Morrow and Company" 1948

Note
A pamphlet advertising books for sale through the William Morrow Company.

Box 1, Folder 50  
"Quick" 1949

Note
Includes five issues of "Quick", published by Cowles Magazines Incorporated.

Box 1, Folder 51  
San Vicente Foundation Winter Newsletter [1949-1950]

Note
Includes a winter newsletter for the San Vicente Foundation of Santa Fe, New Mexico and an order form for books.

Box 1, Folder 52  
Announcement for Elise paintings exhibition [1950?]

Note
An announcement for an exhibit of Elise paintings at the Forsyte Gallery. Elise collaborated with Merle Armitage on the book "Fit for a King".

Box 1, Folder 53  
Merle Armitage items from H.R. Archer 1951

Note
Includes items related to Merle Armitage from H.R. Archer. This includes a note from Armitage to Archer, a copy of "Look's Fifth Dimension: Fragment of an Informal Address to the Advertising Convention at Shawnee, Pennsylvania, on June 4, 1951", a copy of the 1951 American Institute of Graphic Arts annual report, and a shooting script including details related to a Look Magazine photo essay about the Santa Fe railroad entitled "Big Chief of the Southwest".

Box 1, Folder 54  
Catalog 317: The Personal Library of Merle Armitage 1960

Note
A catalog offered by Dawson's Bookshop listing items for sale from Merle Armitage's personal library. Also included are reproductions of a Merle Armitage bookplate and a picture of him in Yosemite with Franz Geritz.

Box 1, Folder 55  

Note
Cites a Merle Armitage book and includes a Merle Armitage bookplate on the cover. This item is a gift of Merle Armitage.
Box Map Drawer  "Homage to Ward, a good Indian!"

Note
A drawing made of paper cutouts and marker with a Native American theme, drawn by Merle Armitage. "Homage to Ward, a good Indian!" is written at the bottom with Merle's signature. This item is a gift of Ward Ritchie.

Box 3  Scrapbooks ca. 1919-1930

Note
Six scrapbooks including miscellaneous ephemera related to the Los Angeles Grand Opera Association and events held at the Los Angeles Opera (including plays, operas, concerts, speeches, and other gatherings). Merle Armitage was the business executive for the Los Angeles Grand Opera Association, and designed some of the pieces of printed ephemera.