Guide to the Horace Bristol papers MS.329

Finding aid prepared by Mary deVries
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Title: Horace Bristol papers,
Identifier/Call Number: MS.329
Contributing Institution: University of California, Santa Cruz
Language of Material: English
Physical Description: 3.0 Linear feet
Date (inclusive): 1935-1997
Abstract: This is a small collection of correspondence, biographical materials, and 5 photographs taken by Horace Bristol in California in the 1930s.
Location: Special Collections and Archives
General Physical Description note: 2 boxes, 1 framed photograph.
Creator: Bristol, Horace
Access
Collection open for research
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Preferred Citation
Horace Bristol Papers. MS 329. Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.
Acquisition Information
Gift of Horace Bristol, 1992-1997
Biography
Photographer Horace Bristol is best known for his images of Depression era migrant families that inspired Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, compelling battle scenes of World War II, and portraits of post-war Japan and Southeast Asia. Bristol was born in 1908. He was raised in Whittier, California, attended the Art Center of Los Angeles, and began to teach himself photography while studying architecture in Munich and travelling through Europe with his wife, Virginia. In 1933 Bristol moved to San Francisco with his wife and two sons to pursue a career in photojournalism. His studio was close to a gallery run by Ansel Adams, and through Adams he came to know many photographers, including Edward Weston, Peter Stackpole, and Willard Van Dyke, and also became close friends with Imogene Cunningham and Dorothea Lange.
Horace Bristol's photographic career began to thrive in the late 1930s. After several assignments for Time, Sunset, and Fortune magazines he became one of the original staff photographers for Life magazine, joining such luminaries as Margaret Bourke-White, Alfred Eisenstaedt, and Peter Stackpole. After accompanying FSA photographer Dorothea Lange on many trips to California's Central Valley, Bristol's interest and concern for the plight of the migrant farm workers led him to propose a collaborative project to John Steinbeck to document life in and around Visalia during the Great Depression. Bristol's idea was that Steinbeck would provide the text for Bristol's photographs, which would be published as a book. After many weekends spent meeting, interviewing, and photographing the people who inspired the novel, The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck bowed out of the collaboration.
Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Edward Steichen recruited Bristol to be one of five photographers to document World War II naval warfare. Following World War II Bristol spent 25 years in Asia, where he founded the East-West Photo Agency and sold his photographs to magazines in the United States and Europe. He and his wife also began designing and building houses. When Bristol's wife died in 1956 he burned his negatives, packed away his photographs, and retired from photography. Bristol married Masako Yamashita in 1957 and they had two children. After leaving Japan and living for some years in Mexico, designing and building houses, he retired with his family to Ojai, California. It wasn't until 1985, when his son Henri came home from school with a copy of the book The Grapes of Wrath and asked his father if he'd ever read it, that Bristol's past as a photographer was revealed to his family, and his photographs came out of storage. Horace Bristol died in 1997.
Scope and Content of Collection
This is a small collection of correspondence, biographical materials, and five photographs taken by Horace Bristol in California in the 1930s. There are copies of three 1986 letters between Bristol and friends regarding his memoirs, a copy of his unpublished memoirs, and an NEH grant proposal by David Rabinovitch to make a documentary about Bristol's life, Lens on History: The Life of Horace Bristol, produced and released as The Compassionate Eye: Horace Bristol, Photojournalist in 2006. The collection includes journals and news clippings containing Bristol's story and photographs, along with ephemera and other materials related to exhibits of his work in the 1980s and 90s.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1</th>
<th>Personal and professional papers 1980-1997</th>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 1:1</td>
<td>Correspondence, 1986</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 1:2</td>
<td>Unpublished memoir, <em>Unpolished Nuggets From the Golden Age of Photography: 1930-1960</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 1:3</td>
<td>NEH grant proposal, 1991</td>
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<td>Box-folder 1:4</td>
<td>Articles, clippings and exhibit materials</td>
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<td>Box 2</td>
<td>Photographs 1930s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 2:1</td>
<td><em>Applying for Relief</em>, Grapes of Wrath series 1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 2:2</td>
<td><em>Tom Joad Chopping Wood</em>, Grapes of Wrath series 1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 2:3</td>
<td><em>Rose of Sharon</em>, Grapes of Wrath series 1938</td>
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<tr>
<td>Box-folder 2:4</td>
<td>Untitled print, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo performance, San Francisco 1935</td>
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<td>Framed 1221:329</td>
<td><em>Portrait of Erskine Scott Wood</em> undated</td>
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