

SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION

Interim Report to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission

The First Fifty Years: Detailed Processing of Five Key Collections in the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives

- Archives – Detailed Processing Project
 - Award #NAR09-RP-50022-09
 - Reporting Period: July 1, 2010 – December 31, 2010
 - Due Date: January 31, 2011
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PROJECT OVERVIEW & OBJECTIVES

On June 9, 2009, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) approved a detailed processing grant for two years to arrange, describe, selectively digitize, and make accessible five archives collections that document the administrative and exhibition history of the first 50 years of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The five archives collections being processed through this project are comprised of materials that provide unique insight into how the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and Museum evolved over five decades to assume leadership and prominence within the field of modern and contemporary art. These collections will reveal details of the Guggenheim's history and those who shaped its course, as well as the Museum's significant impact on twentieth-century art and cultural life in the United States since 1939.

Five collections are included in this project:

1. Hilla Rebay records (1939-1952), 60 cubic feet;
2. James Johnson Sweeney records (1952-1960), 39 cubic feet;
3. Thomas M. Messer records (1961-1987), 103 cubic feet;
4. Exhibition records (1939-1987), 246.1 cubic feet; and
5. Reel to Reel collection (1952-1990), 21 cubic feet.

For each collection, this project serves to accomplish three critical objectives: (a) initiate a detailed appraisal of the materials, (b) perform detailed arrangement and description of collections, and (c) create finding aids and encode in Encoded Archival Description (EAD), which will allow a record for each of the collections to be placed online and searched remotely. In addition, items in need of preservation are being given proper attention and historically important and frequently requested materials from series and folders are being digitized. The project will result in dedicated internal and external access to all materials in the collections.

KEY PERSONNEL

For this detailed processing project, the Guggenheim is utilizing in-house subject expertise by assigning existing Archives staff to key positions: Project Manager and Processing Archivist. To support these staff members, two Archives Assistants have been hired specifically for the project.

Project Leadership

Francine Snyder, Manager of the Library and Archives, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. Ms. Snyder, a full-time staff member of the Guggenheim since 2005, serves as Project Manager, providing direct oversight for all project-related activity and responsible for metadata entry guidelines, procedures for digitization, MARC21 records, and EAD troubleshooting.

Rachel Chatalbash, Archivist, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. To optimize institutional retention of knowledge gained from this project, Ms. Chatalbash, also a full-time staff member of the Guggenheim since 2005, serves as Project Archivist. She is responsible for processing of the collections, delegating tasks to hired staff, and assuring the project follows established processing guidelines and standards.

New Hires

In September and October 2010, the two Archives Assistants initially hired for the project vacated their posts due to personal reasons, providing an opportunity for two new staff to join the project.

Shirin Khaki, Project Archives Assistant, joined the project team on October 4, 2010. Before joining the project, Ms. Khaki worked as an archive assistant for Estate of Maxwell B. Starr (artist), archives intern with the Guggenheim Museum Archives and the Joseph Kosuth Studio, and intern at the Hans Hofmann Catalogue Raisonné Project. She received her BFA in Studio Art and Art History from New York University in 2008.

Amanda Brown, Project Archives Assistant, joined the project team on October 18, 2010. Prior to joining the project as an archives assistant, Ms. Brown was the NHPRC project intern at the Guggenheim. In addition, she worked as an archives technician at the National Park Service, archives intern at the Guggenheim Museum Archives, and research/curatorial assistant at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Ms. Brown has her MA in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University and will receive her MLIS from Pratt Institute in 2011.

Former Project Staff

Pete Asch, Project Archives Assistant, worked on the project team from September 21, 2009 through August 1, 2010.

Martha Horan, Project Archives Assistant, was part of the project team from October 16, 2009 through September 16, 2010.

Project Support

Gregory Gestner, Assistant Editor for Web Site. Mr. Gestner works weekly with the project team to post “findings,” objects of interest found in the collections, on the Museum website. Started October 12, 2010.

Kim Riback, Associate Editor for Web Site. Ms. Riback works weekly with the project team to post “findings,” objects of interest found in the collections, on the Museum website. Until October 8, 2010.

Chris Borkowski, Intranet Portal Developer. Mr. Borkowski created the web platform for the findings, and is instrumental in assisting with the display of online digitized content. Until December 1, 2010.

Jeffrey Warda, Associate Conservator, Paper. Mr. Warda meets regularly with project team to advise on preservation and conservation methods.

Lauren Hinkson, Associate Curator for Collections. Ms. Hinkson works with project team to contact and clear artists’ copyright for audio selected for future online access.

WORK PLAN

The original work plan consists of three stages—Stage One: Preparations (3 months, June – August 2009); Stage Two: Project Staff (18 months, September 2009 – February 2011); and Stage Three: Conclusion (3 months, March – May 2011).

To date, Stage One is complete and Stage Two is in process. Due to project staff turnover, Stage Two will take longer to complete than indicated on the original work plan. The modified plan below was submitted to the NHPRC in October 2010.

Stage One: Preparations (3 months, June – August 2009);

Stage Two: Project Staff (**Modified timeline: 20 months**)

- a) Survey and Preliminary Documentation (2 months, September 2009 - October 2009)
- b) Processing Collections (Modified timeline: 10 months, November 2009 – August 2010, with original project staff; plus 4 months, October/November 2010 – January 2011, with new project staff¹)
- c) Digitization and Records Update (Modified timeline: 4 months, February 2011 – May 2011) and

Stage Three: Conclusion (**Modified timeline: 1 month, June 2011**)

Despite these adjustments, the project is still targeted to be completed within budget by the end of the grant cycle in June 2011. Details on adjusted dates are listed below.

Stage One: Preparations (3 months, June - August 2009)

Goals: Project Manager and Processing Archivist perform the following:

- query pre-existing MS Access Archives database and match paper records to electronic versions;

¹ This timeline is extended two months, as one of the new hires worked part-time throughout 2010. On January 1, 2011, the position transitioned to full-time.

- prepare recall timeline and box numbers for materials that are stored off-site;
- interview and hire project staff (start date September 2009).

Status: Stage One of the work plan was successfully completed on schedule. Project staff members were hired and box numbers of the materials in the collections identified. As new hires started later than indicated in the work plan, records were recalled from off-site storage in Stage One to allow project staff to immediately focus on surveys and processing plans in Stage Two.

Stage Two: Project Staff/Part A (2 months, September 2009 – October 2009)

Goals: Survey and Preliminary Documentation

- Processing Archivist schedules deliveries of off-site boxes from the Iron Mountain, Inc. storage facility and updates database;
- Project Manager and Processing Archivist survey collections with new project staff to:
 - assess condition and identify processing needs;
 - confirm order and priority in which collections will be processed;
 - create processing plan for each collection.
- Project staff create preliminary MARC21 and EAD records/templates for each collection.

Status: Stage Two, Part A was completed on time. Detailed processing plans were created that outline scholarly and administrative uses for each collection, proposed arrangements including series and subseries information, and preservation recommendations. Archives Assistants prepared preliminary MARC21 and EAD templates for collections.

Stage Two: Project Staff/Part B (~~12 months, November 2009 – October 2010~~)

Modified timeline: 14 months (10 months, November 2009 – August 2010, with original project staff; plus 4 months, October/November 2010 – January 2011, with new project staff)

Goals: Processing Collections

- Starting with the first collection, project staff members arrange and describe each of the Hilla Rebay records, James Johnson Sweeney records, Thomas M. Messer records, and Exhibition records according to current industry standards. Steps include:
 - address preservation issues and place records in archival quality housing and acid-free boxes;
 - update archives database as needed;
 - using the appropriate template, create folder list for each collection's finding aid.
- Project staff review the finding aid for the Reel to Reel collection making any modification learned from processing other collections.
- Project Manager oversees outsourced audio conversion by Safe Sound Archive.

Status: Stage Two, Part B is progressing. Mid-way through, new project staff members were hired and trained. The processing for the Hilla Rebay records, James Johnson Sweeney records, and Thomas M. Messer records is complete. The Exhibition records are in process.

In addition, reel to reel tapes from the Reel to Reel collection have been digitized by Safe Sound Archive and New York Public Radio. See details in Project Activities and Accomplishments: Digitization.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Preparations

To prepare for the project, 179 boxes of records in off-site storage were identified as related to the project and recalled. Database records were confirmed and updated.

Cost sharing funds were used to purchase select acid-free folders, mylar enclosures, and archives boxes for year two of the project.

Processing: Ongoing

Due to staff turnover in August 2010, the processing of collections is now scheduled to be completed in January 2011. This accounts for lapses in project staffing, new hire orientation, and scheduling accommodations.

By the end of December 2010, the following processing had been completed:

- Hilla Rebay records (60 cubic feet) – completed;
- James Johnson Sweeney records (39 cubic feet) – completed;
- Thomas M. Messer records (130 cubic feet) – completed; and
- Exhibition records (246.1 cubic feet) – 180 cubic feet completed.

Processing: Integration

As mentioned in prior interim reports, the record surveys completed in late 2009 identified several boxes of records that were incorrectly attributed to Guggenheim directors. These records are now correctly identified as those of key administrative personnel who worked closely with directors during respective periods of tenure.

The Grace McCann Morley records (.55 cubic feet) were processed as a series in the James Johnson Sweeney records.

The Office of Business Administration records (24 cubic feet), containing the papers of Clinton N. Hunt, Henry Berg, and Glenn Easton, were processed as a unique collection, and its finding aid will be complete by the end of the grant project.

The Jean Xceron records (1.25 cubic feet) was processed as a unique collection and the finding aid is available online: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/library-and-archives/archive-collections/A0061/>

The H. Harvard Arnason records have been integrated into the existing Arnason collection (6.5 cubic feet) and the amended finding aid is available online: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/library-and-archives/archive-collections/A0012/>

Digitization

Digitization of the reel to reel tapes was completed in June 2010. Reels have been returned to cold storage. Each digital file has a unique identifier and embedded metadata. The project team has begun encoding the EAD finding aid to allow for digital display of selected audio in the folder list of the finding aid.

Due to an increase in costs, all the audiotapes within the Reel to Reel collection could not be digitized within the approved budget. To help make up the difference, we partnered with WNYC Archives, New York Public Radio, to digitize a subset: Round and About the Guggenheim. This series, consisting of approximately 70 audiotapes, was jointly produced in the 1970s by the Guggenheim and WNYC. In exchange for digitizing this series, they retained a copy of the master digital files for the WNYC Archives, broadening the possibility of access and use for this collection.

Out of the 675 audiotapes in the Reel to Reel collection, there remain approximately 100 that have not been digitized due to prohibitive costs.

Project Website

Web pages were created on the Guggenheim website:

<http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/library-and-archives/nhprc-grant>.

The pages include several sections, including an overview of the project, details on the collections in the project, copies of reports submitted to the NHPRC, and findings.

The findings section provides an opportunity for the project staff to highlight objects of interest. Once a week, project staff post a “finding” of an object of interest found in the collections. Findings can be viewed directly at: <http://www.guggenheim.org/nhprcfindings>. As of December 31, 2010, forty-three findings have been posted online.

Publicity

The Guggenheim Museum Archives widely publicizes information about the project, including a press release announcing the grant sent to news organizations, LISTSERVS, and other community peers. Project staff members are also committed to disseminating information about the project through newsletter articles, announcements, and conference presentation. To date, the following is a list of released or scheduled marketing activities:

1. Guggenheim Press Release, June 2009.²
2. “Guggenheim Archives Awarded NHPRC Grant,” *Museum Archivist: Newsletter of the Museum Archives Section*, February 2010.
3. "The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum on an International Stage: The First Fifty Years," New York Archives Conference (NYAC) presentation, June 2010.
4. “Blogging while Processing,” *NHPRC News*, June 2010.

² A copy of the press release is available online at: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/press-releases/press-release-archive/2009/2873-archives-release>.

5. “‘Findings’ from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives Now Online,” *Metropolitan Archivist*, Summer 2010.
6. “Research Collections from Archives Collections Now Available Online,” *Current Museum News*, Summer 2010. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/news/current-museum-news/research-findings>
7. “The Reel to Reel Collection: [Historic audio clips](http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/interact/listen/the-reel-to-reel-collection) from the Museum Archives,” July 2010. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/interact/listen/the-reel-to-reel-collection>
8. “Reel to Reel Collection: Historic Audio Online,” *Ten Five Minute Repository Updates*, Society of American Archivists Museum Archives Section Business Meeting, August 2010
9. Grant completion presentation, New York Metropolitan Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NY) presentation, forthcoming, changed to June 2011.
10. Grant completion announcement, NYART newsletter, forthcoming, June 2011.

CONCLUSION

The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation is grateful to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for its Archives – Detailed Processing grant to arrange, describe, selectively digitize, and make accessible five archives collections that document the administrative and exhibition history of the first 50 years of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the evolution of the Guggenheim Foundation since 1939. Undertaking this work will broaden access routes to information pertaining to the curatorial direction of the Guggenheim’s first three directors—Hilla Rebay, James Johnson Sweeney, and Thomas Messer—and the Museum’s scholarly and curatorial contributions to the development of modern and contemporary art in America as documented in a complete exhibition history from 1939 to 1987 and a reel to reel audio collection of lectures and symposia from 1952 to 1990.

The Guggenheim will continue to keep the NHPRC apprised of work completed on this project and shall submit a final narrative and financial report on September 30, 2011.