

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the
John Gutmann Miscellaneous Acquisitions collection,
AG 242

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Creator

Center for Creative Photography

Abstract

Materials related to the photographer and teacher, John Gutmann (1905-1998).

Quantity/ Extent

1 linear feet

Language of Materials

English

Biographical/ Historical Note

John Gutmann (1905–1998) was one of America’s most distinctive photographers. Born in Germany where he trained as an artist and art teacher, he fled the Nazis in 1933 and settled in San Francisco, reinventing himself as a photo-journalist. Gutmann captured images of American culture, celebrating signs of a vibrant democracy, however imperfect. His own status as an outsider—a Jew in Germany, a naturalized citizen in the United States—formed his focus on individuals from the Asian-American, African-American, and gay communities, as well as his photography in India, Burma, and China during World War II. Gutmann’s interests in painting and filmmaking, his collections of non-Western art and artifacts, and his pedagogy, all figure in a body of work at once celebratory and mysterious.

Gutmann was born to prosperous German-Jewish parents, in Breslau, Germany (since 1945, Wrocław, Poland). At age twenty-two, he graduated from the regional Academy of Arts and Crafts, where he studied with leading Expressionist painter Otto Müller. In 1927 Gutmann moved to Berlin, where he taught art to schoolchildren, participated in group exhibitions, and in 1931 had a solo show at the prestigious Gurlitt Gallery. However, his career was interrupted by the rise to power of the National Socialists in early 1933. While his family made plans to immigrate to New York, Gutmann set out on his own with San Francisco as his destination, and photography as his new profession. Before departing Germany, he acquired a Rolleiflex camera, hastily shot three rolls of film, and managed to secure a contract from the Berlin office of Presse-Photo. Making the most of a bad situation, he explored a new life as a foreign correspondent who would supply the very modern European illustrated press with views and reports from

the American West.

By 1936, he had broken his contract with the Berlin press agency and made a new one with Pix in New York. By 1937, he had begun to teach art regularly at San Francisco College (later San Francisco State University), and this became his primary profession after a World War II era stint in the U.S. army. Gutmann retired his professorship in 1973 and began to reassess his body of work, sorting through boxes of negatives and making new prints of selected examples from the 1930s. It was a well-timed exercise: not only did Gutmann's images satisfy a growing historical appetite for Depression-era photography, they also seemed compatible with certain kinds of experimental photography then emerging in the contemporary art scene. Before his death in 1998, Gutmann had seen his work featured in gallery and museum exhibitions, catalogues, and monographs.

By bequeathing his rich archive of nearly 5000 modern photographic prints, negatives, tearsheets, letters, and some drawings and early art prints to the CCP, John Gutmann has left us with the task of pursuing the rich knots, braids, tangles and threads in his complex life and work that unfolded over a most tumultuous and provocative century of modernity.

Scope and Content Note

Materials include six film reels that were given to Nicholas Cominos by John Gutmann.

Arrangement

Subgroup 1: 16mm Film Reels

Names and Subject Terms

Gutmann, John [<http://vocab.getty.edu/ulan/500033208>]

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

Access to this collection requires an appointment with the Volkerding Study Center.

Conditions Governing Use

It is the responsibility of the user to obtain permission from the copyright owner (which could be the institution, the creator of the record, the author or his/her transferees, heirs, legates or literary executors) prior to any copyright-protected uses of the collection.

The user agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Arizona Board of Regents, the University of Arizona, Center of Creative Photography, including its officers,

employees, and agents, from and against all claims made relating to copyright or other intellectual property infringement.

Provenance

Subgroup 1, Gift of Joan Cominos, 2013.

Related Materials

AG 173 – John Gutmann Archive, circa 1930s – 1990s

Preferred Citation

John Gutmann Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection. AG 242. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Finding aid updated by Alexis Peregoy in 2018.

Container List

Subgroup 1: 16mm Film Reels

Note: Gift of Joan Cominos, 2013. These films were created and given by John Gutmann to Nicholas Cominos.

Box	Item	
1	1	7" reel: "Chinese Peasant Goes to Market"
	2	12" reel: "Journey to Kunming," composite print
	3	7" reel: China "no good"
	4	9" reel: China "original"
	5	12" reel: China "original"
	6	12" reel: China "original"