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Finding aid for the
Irene Shwachman Collection, circa 1930-1992

AG 91

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Creator

Shwachman, Irene (1915-1988)

Abstract

Papers and photographic materials, circa 1930-1992, of and collected by photographer and book artist Irene Shwachman, 1915-1988. In addition to materials by and about Shwachman, the collection also contains materials related to photographer Berenice Abbott, documenting Shwachman's and Abbott's working relationship and friendship. The collection includes correspondence, monographs, clippings, book project materials, negatives, transparencies, and contact sheets. Shwachman projects documented include "Boston Document," her photographic documentation of the city of Boston from 1959-1968, as well as several books including *Photography for Girls: 1882* and *We Grew Up In Manhattan: Notes for an Autobiography*.

Quantity/ Extent

18 linear feet

Language of Materials

English

Biographical Note

Irene Shwachman, born Irene Shirley Quinto on July 30, 1915, in New York City, was the first of four daughters of clothing manufacturer Oscar Quinto and Eva Rosenberg Quinto. Shwachman, who grew up in Manhattan, graduated in 1932 from the Calhoun School, an independent, coeducational, college preparatory school located in New York City's Upper West Side. She also attended New College, Columbia University for three years studying theatrical production and education. Upon leaving New College, Shwachman worked at B. Altman and Company, a New York City-based department store while pursuing theater work.

Shwachman first picked up a camera in 1927, when, at age 12, she borrowed her father's Kodak No. 3A Autographic Folding Camera and entered an Eastman Kodak photo contest. In 1937 Shwachman married Arnold Dreyfuss and, that same year, she began photographing again, this time using a twin-lens reflex Voiglander camera. In 1938-1939 Shwachman spent time in Puerto Rico and Tucson, Arizona, before attending

secretarial school in southern California in 1940 where she lived until she moved back to New York City after Arnold Dreyfuss died of rheumatic heart disease in 1942.

In 1944 Shwachman met and married Harry Shwachman, M.D., a Boston physician with whom she had would eventually have three children. In 1945, the same year their daughter Elizabeth was born, the family moved to Puerto Rico where Irene Shwachman began photographing using 35mm color film. By 1946 the Shwachmans had settled in Massachusetts where Harry Shwachman was director of the Children's Hospital's clinical laboratories in Boston. In May 1951, two of her photos were included in a Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibit *Abstraction in Photography*. From the time of the MoMA exhibit until 1968 Shwachman worked as a freelance photographer while taking photography courses, teaching photography courses, and working for the Boston Redevelopment Authority. In 1959 Shwachman met Berenice Abbott eventually working for Abbott for eight years. Irene Schwachman continued to photograph and teach photography until her death in 1988.

Chronology

- 1915 Irene Shirley Quinto born 30 July in New York City.
- 1927 Borrows father's folding Kodak to enter a photographic contest.
- 1932-1935 Attends New College at Columbia University, New York City majoring in theatrical production and education.
- 1935-1936 Works as a sales clerk at B. Altman, NYC.
- 1936-1937 Studies art and literature independently and looks for jobs in the theater.
- 1937 Script girl for Kino Art Film Producing Company, Yiddish language film, Gruene Felder; salesperson Bonwit Teller, NYC; begins amateur photography using a twin-lens reflex Voiglander camera; marries Arnold Dreyfuss, City Hall, NYC (27 August).
- 1938-1939 Lives in Puerto Rico.
- 1939 Returns to NYC then moves to Tucson, Arizona.
- 1940 Settles in southern California; attends secretarial school.
- 1941-1942 Clerical work at the California Institute of Technology; Arnold Dreyfuss dies of rheumatic heart disease, (July); returns to NYC after husband's death.
- 1942-1944 Clerical work for Arnold Constable, and Company, NYC.
- 1944 Marries Harry Shwachman (20 June).
- 1945 Daughter Elizabeth born (April).

- 1945-1946 Lives in Puerto Rico; begins photographing again using 35mm color film.
- 1946 Settles in Boston; son Alan Mark born (30 July); joins Boston Camera Club.
- 1948 Daughter Joan born (August).
- 1949 Lives for next 27 years in Newton Center, MA.
- 1951 MoMA includes two of her photographs in the exhibition Abstraction in Photography (May).
- 1951-1968 Free-lance photographer in Boston.
- 1952-1953 Takes evening photography classes at Franklin Technical Institute, Boston and studies black/white photography; builds small darkroom at home.
- 1954 Produces book with Jean Dietz, a Boston Globe writer, about the Mason School in Newton Center, MA.
- 1959 Meets Berenice Abbott (May); begins The Boston Document.
- 1959-1961 Helps Carl Siembab begin exhibiting photography; member of photography discussion group which meets at the gallery.
- 1959-1968 Continues The Boston Document.
- 1960 Builds large professional darkroom.
- 1962 Exhibition in Boston, Boston Athenaeum, Boston Today: The Changing Face of the City, 1959-1961, 4 January-16 February (first exhibition of The Boston Document).
- 1962-1963 Photographer for the Boston Redevelopment Authority.
- 1965 Exhibitions of The Boston Document at the Boston Public Library and the New York Public Library.
- 1966 Dr. John F. Enders' portrait published in World Book Encyclopedia Supplement, photograph was taken during Children's Hospital project.
- 1966-1968 Photography consultant for the Curriculum Center, Wellesley Public Schools.
- 1966-1979 Instructor in photography at School of the Worcester Art Museum, Worcester, MA.
- 1967 Workshop with Minor White (May-June); exhibition in Boston, Emmanuel College; joins Society for Photographic Education (SPE).
- 1969 Exhibition in Lexington, MA, Cary Memorial Library, (November-December).

- 1971 Exhibition in Boston, Carl Siembab Gallery.
- 1972 Harvard summer school course in visual studies with Robert Heinecken (July-August); begins *We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for An Autobiography*; exhibitions in Durham, NH, University of New Hampshire and Worcester, MA, Worcester Art Museum.
- 1973 Exhibition in Cambridge, MA, Imageworks.
- 1973, 1975 Member of the advisory panel on the visual arts, Massachusetts Council on the Arts.
- 1978 Exhibition in Brockton, MA, Brockton Art Museum, *Sightlines*, (1 November-31 December).
- 1979 Decides to concentrate on book works; admitted to University Without Walls, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA.
- 1979-1984 Honorary Curator of Photographs, Brockton Art Museum.
- 1980 Produces artist book titled, *Temple of Knowledge*.
- 1981 Exhibition in Boston, Carl Siembab Gallery.
- 1982 Produces artist book titled, *Photography for Girls, 1882*.
- 1984 Produces artist book titled, *We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for an Autobiography* funded by an Artist's Book Production Grant from the Photographic Resource Center, Boston.
- 1985 Receives National Endowment for the Arts, Book Artists' Fellowship.
- 1986 Harry Shwachman dies of a stroke (9 September).
- 1987 Produces artist book titled, *Now You Know: This is Serious Photography. A Photo Workbook*.
- ca. 1988 Awarded MacDowell Colony residency to work on artist's books.
- 1988 Irene Shwachman dies (August).
- 1989 Retrospective exhibition in Boston, Photographic Resource Center (November).

Scope and Content Note

The Irene Shwachman Collection is divided into four series: Biographical Materials, 1930-1988; Activity Files, 1959-1992; Photographic Materials, 1930s-1980s; and Berenice Abbott Materials, 1959-1986. Although sparse in information about Shwachman's personal life, the Biographical Materials series includes information about

the Quinto family; several copies of her resume; and materials related to her studies at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, the Visual Studies Workshop at Harvard in 1972, and the University Without Walls. Of particular interest are notes from a Visual Studies class taught by Robert Heinecken in 1972. The series also includes two audio interviews with Shwachman, one in 1978 with the Brockton Art Center done in conjunction with an exhibition of her work there titled "Sightlines" and one in 1983 with Connie Springer. Additional information about Shwachman's personal life can be found in her pseudo autobiographical manuscript, "Prior Learning Portfolio", in the Activity Files Series.

The Activity Files series includes announcements, exhibition catalogs, and label text for exhibitions featuring Shwachman's work, including information about "Sightlines" at the Brockton Art Center in 1978, as well as for exhibitions she curated. There is minimal material in the series related to Shwachman's teaching but there are some class outlines and notes as well as 35mm transparencies culled from images she used in the classroom. There are several manuscripts in this series including handwritten notes about life in Puerto Rico during 1945 as well as two drafts of "Prior Learning Portfolio," Shwachman's pseudo autobiography/extend vita. Shwachman appeared to keep notes her entire life about possible projects so additional writings by her appear throughout the collection and not just in the Activity Files. This series also includes several work logs, 1961-1988, as well as negative registers for prints purchase by the Boston Athenaeum which were part of an exhibition of Shwachman's photographs titled "Boston Today: The Changing Face of the City, 1959-1961," at the Athenaeum in 1962

The bulk of the materials in the Activity Files series is contained within the subseries Photographic and Book Projects and documents several projects, published and unpublished, undertaken by Shwachman. The "Boston Document" materials (1959-1987) documents Shwachman's project to photograph the city of Boston from 1959-1968 and is tied with her work with and interest in the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Included is correspondence with Ellie Reichlin, 1985-1987, of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, about printing the "Boston Document." The project, however, was never completed. Other projects documented in this subseries includes books written by Shwachman – Photography for Girls: 1888 consisting of correspondence, notes, grant proposals, 35mm transparencies, and book dummies; We Grew Up In Manhattan: Notes from an Autobiography, consisting of family correspondence, a book dummy, a transcript of an oral history interview, and a bound copy of the finished book inscribed to Ellie Reichlin in 1987; and Now You Know. This Is Serious Photography, consisting of correspondence, transparencies, proof prints, book dummies, and a monograph

The Photographic Materials series, which includes both family photographs and Shwachman's own work, consists of study prints, contact sheet, negatives and

transparencies arranged, when possible, by format and then by date and/or subject. The materials related to Shwachman's family is arranged separately within the series. The majority of the materials are 35mm transparencies and 2 1/4 negatives.

Of particular note in the collection are the materials related to Shwachman's working relationship and friendship with photographer Berenice Abbott found in the Berenice Abbott Materials series. Shwachman kept a detailed account of her relationship with Abbott in the form of typed and handwritten notes rather than a formal journal. Beginning with a detailed account their first meeting in May 1959, events and conversations with Abbott are described by Shwachman in a personal and interpretative manner through 1986. The majority of the notes were written between 1959 and 1967, the most active years of their relationship. Additional materials include exhibition announcements and catalogs, newspaper and magazine clippings – most of which pertain to Abbott, writings by Berenice Abbott, publications, correspondence, and photographic materials. Shwachman planned a book about Abbott which would use the journal notes and selected photographs made by Shwachman but the project was never completed.

The Berenice Abbott Materials series also includes information on the beginnings of photographic exhibitions at the Carl Siembab Gallery in Boston in 1959. Included in the Carl Siembab Gallery files is correspondence from and information about gallery and museum people and photographers including Grace Mayer, Edward Steichen, Helen Gee, Paul Caponigro, and Aaron Siskind. This series also contains numerous New York exhibition catalogs from the 1960s and 1970s, information about Abbott's deliberations concerning the sale of the Atget collection, and Abbott's writings on Atget.

Photographic materials in the Abbott materials produced by Shwachman consist of contact sheets, prints, and negatives. Abbott is pictured in a variety of domestic situations as well as in formal portraits from 1960-1978. These materials are numbered and described as part of Shwachman's planned book project about Abbott.

NOTE: Boxes 5 and 6 were combined with other materials at time of reprocessing in 2014. Boxes 5 and 6 no longer exist but box numbers were not reused.

NOTE on Appendix: The index lists only correspondence contained in the Berenice Abbott Materials series. Correspondence with museums at universities is listed under the museum name. Folders are labeled with the date span of the materials they contain therefore the month and year of each article of correspondence is listed after the name of the correspondent to make locating the material easier.

Arrangement

Series 1: Biographical materials, 1930-1988, undated (Box 1)

Series 2: Activity files, 1959-1992 (Boxes 3-4, 7-10, 13)

Series 3: Photographic materials, 1930s-1980s, undated (Boxes 14-26)

Series 4: Berenice Abbott materials, 1959-1986 (Boxes 11-12, 27-28)

Names and Subject Terms

Shwachman, Irene, 1915-1988

Photography

Abbot, Berenice, 1898-1991

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

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

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright is held by the heirs of Irene Shwachman.

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

Gift of Alan Mark Shwachman, 1989.

Preferred Citation

Irene Shwachman Collection, circa 1930-1992. AG 91. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Collection was partially reprocessed and the finding aid updated in 2014 by Leah Rios, Ruth Ann Richwine, and David Benjamin. NOTE: Boxes 5 and 6 were combined with other materials at time of reprocessing in 2014. Boxes 5 and 6 no longer exist – these box numbers were not reused.

Finding aid updated by Meghan Jordan in May 2016.

Container List

Series 1: Biographical Materials, 1930-1988, undated

Box Folder

- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| 1 | 1 | Quinto Family Materials, 1930, 1966, undated |
| | 2-3 | Resume, 1966-1967, 1988 |
| | 4 | New College Reunion Publication Materials, 1985, 1987 |
| | 5 | SPE Statement for Ballot, 1978 |
| | 6 | Worcester Art Museum Biennial Report, 1986-1988 |
| | | Education |
| | 7 | University of Massachusetts-Boston, 1967-1969 |
| | 8-9 | Visual Studies Workshop, Harvard, Notebooks, 1972 July-August |
| | | University Without Walls |
| | 10 | Admission Materials, 1979-1980 |
| | 11 | Correspondence, 1979-1981 |
| | 12 | Essays for Introductory Seminar, 1979-1980 |
| | 13 | Readmission Materials, 1985-1986 |
| | 14 | Penland [School of Crafts] Notes, 1987 |
| | | Interviews |
| | 15 | Brockton Art Center, 1978 November [audiocassette] |
| | | Connie Springer, 1983 |
| | 16 | [Audiocassette] |
| | 17 | Correspondence |
| | 18 | Photograph of Shwachman by Springer, 1983 April |
| 2 | | Newspaper Clippings Notebook [by and about Shwachman] |

Series 2: Activity Files, 1959-1992

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| | | Exhibitions |
| 3 | 1 | "Boston Today, 1959-1961", Boston Athenaeum Exhibition, 1962 |
| | 2 | Announcements, Wall Text, Proposals, 1965-circa 1980 |

- 3 "Sightlines" Brockton Museum of Art, 1978 November-December
4 Curated by Shwachman, 1971, 1981, 1983
Teaching
- 5 Worcester Art School Class Notes and Outlines, 1969, 1972, 1974-
1975
- 6 Brockton Art Museum, History of Photography (Proposed), 1982-
1983, 1985
- 7-8 Slides, Duplicates and Not Selected, 1983
- 9 Lecture on Photography, Mead Middle School, Brighton, Massachusetts,
1978
Manuscripts, 1949, 1960s-1980s
- 10 Puerto Rico, 1945
- 11 Notes for Writings, 1969, 1979-1980
- 12-13 Prior Learning Portfolio, 1979-1980
- 4 1-3 Photo Work Logs, 1961, 1963-1971, 1976-1981
- 4 Photo and Book Work Log, 1983-1988 / Lectures, 1982
- 5 Negative Registers for Prints Purchased by the Boston Athenaeum, 1959-
1963
Photographic and Book Projects, 1983-1987
"Boston Document"
- 6 Correspondence, 1983-1985, 1987
- 7 Prints Borrowed, 1985
- 8-9 Negative List, Compiled 1980, 1987
- 10—12 [Prints]
- 7 *Photography for Girls: 1888*
- 8 *We Grew Up in Manhattan: Notes for an Autobiography*
- 9 *Now You Know. This Is Serious Photography.*
- 10 Miscellaneous Project Materials
- 13 1-2 Publications, 1964-1965, 1984-1985, 1992

Series 3: Photographic Materials, 1930s-1980s, undated

NOTE: Includes study prints, contact sheets, negatives, and transparencies arranged in chronological order and by subject in some instances. Negatives and contact sheets depicting family are arranged separately. The majority of the photographic material consists of 35mm and 2 ¼ negatives.

Family Negatives

14 1930s-1950s and undated

15 1950s-1970s

Negatives, 1930s-1970s, undated

2 1/4 and 35mm

16 Undated

17-18 1953-1978

19 2 1/4, 35mm, 4x5 and transparencies, 1959-circa 1980

20-22 Contact Sheets, 1956-1976

22 Family, 1954-1968

23 Transparencies

24 [Possible Book Project Materials]

25 Color Proofs and Negatives

26A-B Negatives and Contact Sheets

Container List

Series 4: Berenice Abbott Materials, 1959-1986

Journal, 1959-1986

11A 1-26 1959 May 17 – 1962 September 4

11B 1-24 1962 September 26 – 1970 September 1

12A 1-11 1970 November 24 – 1986 August 19

12 Samples of Original Negative Sleeves from Journal

Research Materials

13 Notes on Abbott Book Project / List of Photographs from
Contact Sheets

14 Drawing "for Irene, Self-Portrait, Berenice Abbott" [photocopies]

15-20	Carl Siembab Gallery – Inception, 1959
12B 1	Abbott Correspondence, 1959-1960 [carbon copies, possibly typed for Abbott by Shwachman]
2	Print list of Atget photographs used in <i>A Vision of Paris</i> , 1960 ed. of Arthur Trottenberg
3	Writings by Abbott, 1940, 1951-1952, 1961
4	Abbott Medical Records , 1958-1966, 1978
27	Contact Sheets and Photographs
28	Negatives