

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the
Alma Lavenson Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection,
1948-1952
AG 273

Alma Lavenson Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1948-1952

AG 273

Creator

The Center for Creative Photography

Abstract

Materials related to the life and career of Alma Lavenson (1909-1989), photographer.

Quantity/ Extent

Fraction of a linear foot

Language of Materials

English

Biographical Note

Alma Lavenson was born in San Francisco in 1897. She was the only child of Albert Lavenson and Amy Furth. Albert Lavenson was the son of German immigrants and the co-owner of the successful Capwell Department Store in San Francisco. Lavenson attended private and public schools in San Francisco and later graduated from UC Berkeley in 1919 with a degree in psychology. At this time she began to take her first photographs.

In 1922 Alma travelled all over Europe for seven months and kept a careful travel journal which she later typed and illustrated entitled "My Discovery of Europe". By 1923 Lavenson had learned to develop and print her own photographs by watching a technician at a drug store. She later acquired a homemade enlarger from a friend and set up a darkroom in her home. She photographed with a 3 ¼ x 4 ¼ Ensign Popular Reflex camera which she outfitted with a soft-focus Waterbury lens (in collection). Lavenson had no formal photographic training, but avidly read photography magazines and books on composition. By 1926 Lavenson was photographing extensively in the Bay Area, including industrial subjects. Lavenson's father was friends with art Patron Albert Bender, who was instrumental in introducing Lavenson to the San Francisco photographic community (1930), and encouraged Lavenson to meet and purchase work by Diego Rivera when she travelled to Mexico (1926).

In 1927 Lavenson's piece *The light beyond* (Zion Canyon) was published on the front cover of *Photo-era magazine*. Throughout the early 1930s Lavenson's work was frequently published in *Photo-era* and *Camera craft*. In 1930 Lavenson's father, by then

a prominent figure and philanthropist in the Oakland community, died from a heart attack. At this point Albert Bender supplied Lavenson with letters of introduction to Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, and Consuelo Kanaga. Lavenson befriended Kanaga and Cunningham, and the three photographed extensively together

Cunningham became a life-long friend and a great influence on Lavenson's photography. The archive contains photographs of Lavenson and her family by Cunningham. Based on critiques from Edward Weston and urging from Cunningham, Lavenson eventually abandoned her soft-focus lens and began working in straight photography.

By 1931 Lavenson was exhibiting in pictorialist salons nationally and internationally. In April, 1932 she had a one-person exhibit at the California Camera Club. Later in 1932 Lavenson was included in three important exhibitions: *Showing of hands, California trees* and the inaugural exhibit of the *f/64* group all at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco. In 1933 Lavenson had one-person exhibits at the Brooklyn Museum and the de Young Museum. Lavenson's early exhibitions are documented in her scrapbooks, correspondence, and exhibition files.

In 1933 Lavenson married attorney Matt Wahrhaftig. She changed her name to Alma Wahrhaftig, but continued to use Lavenson for all photographic work. Alma and Matt had two boys Paul and Albert. Matt Wahrhaftig died in 1957 and Lavenson never remarried. Lavenson's personal life is documented in biographical materials and extensive prints of Lavenson and her family.

Lavenson's long-term project photographing gold-rush ghost towns in the Mother Lode region began around 1933 and spanned over forty years. The Alma Lavenson Archive includes an extensive collection of negatives from the Mother Lode, in addition to project files relating to a proposed book on the Mother Lode in collaboration with historian Richard Dillion in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1978, Jean Tucker, University of Missouri-St. Louis, organized a recreation of the 1932 *f/64* exhibition, which triggered a renewed interest in the photography of Alma Lavenson and retrospective exhibits of her work. A second scrapbook, included in the Lavenson Archive, documents this second prolific phase in Lavenson's career as a photographer.

Lavenson travelled extensively throughout her life, including: Africa, Asia, Central and South America, Mexico, Haiti, Hawaii, Europe, and across the USA including many National Parks. The archive contains a separate collection of travel negatives organized by country or region and many travel journals and letters written to her family, sometimes on foreign hotel stationery.

Scope and Content Note

Collection consists of materials collected from separate sources at different times.

Subgroup One, contains three calendars belonging to Roi Partridge and containing images by Alma Lavenson.

Arrangement

Subgroup 1: Three calendars with Lavenson images

Names and Subject Terms

Lavenson, Alma <https://lccn.loc.gov/n79083704>

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

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

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright for unpublished materials resides with the author and must be researched before research copies can be made.

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 Meg Partridge, Imogen Cunningham Trust, 2019

Related Materials

Alma Lavenson Archive (AG212)

Preferred Citation

Alma Lavenson Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1948-1952. AG273. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Finding aid prepared by Leslie Squyres in March 2019.

Container List

Subgroup 1: Three calendars with Alma Lavenson images that belonged to Roi Partridge / not used

Box Folder

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | The California Calendar for Engagements, week-by-week, 1948 |
| | 2 | The California Calendar for Engagements, week-by-week, 1949 |
| | 3 | The California Calendar for Engagements, week-by-week, 1952 |