

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the
Sonya Noskowiak archive, 1928-1974

AG 3

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Creator

Noskowiak, Sonya, 1900-1975

Abstract

Papers and photographic materials, 1928 - 1974, of Sonya Noskowiak (1900 - 1975), photographer. Includes correspondence with Edward Weston and other photographers; reviews and announcements of photography exhibitions, including two of Group f/64, of which Noskowiak was member; clippings about Noskowiak, Edward Weston, her photography and other topics; negatives and contact prints made by Noskowiak, and reference prints made by the CCP staff.

Quantity/ Extent

10 linear feet

Language of Materials

English

Biographical/ Historical Note

Sonya Noskowiak (1900–1975) began her photographic career as studio assistant to Johan Hagemeyer in 1925 and within less than a decade exhibited alongside Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, and Imogen Cunningham. Like her Group f/64 counterparts, she produced sharp-focus studies of natural and man-made objects, which emphasized photographic presentation rather than subject matter. Following an intense period as a creative photographer, Noskowiak maintained a portrait studio and pursued documentary photography.

Noskowiak was born in Leipzig, Germany, and spent her childhood years in Chile, Panama, and California, as her father sought employment in gardening and landscape design. At age 19 she moved to San Francisco, enrolled in secretarial school, and then worked at photographer and horticulturalist Johan Hagemeyer's Los Angeles studio.

Through Hagemeyer, Noskowiak met Edward Weston, and began her photographic career in earnest. From 1929 to 1935 they had a close personal and professional relationship; she lived with him as a companion, model, and mother to his children. He offered her artistic and technical expertise, and shared in the enthusiasm of her first successes. He inspired Noskowiak to notice the visual potential of her surroundings and taught her the rudiments of interpreting them with her camera.

Noskowiak was attracted to bold feats of urban engineering—the giant pylons of city bridges, curving highways, and massive water tanks—and underscored the power of these structures, both physical and visual, with her aesthetic approach. She also fixed her lens on the recurring patterns of nature. Like Weston, she concentrated on discrete objects photographed at close range: the inside of a flower, the veins of a plant, the lined surface of a rock. The effect was to magnify and abstract nature, allowing its physical properties to become the basis for her compositions.

Critical attention came early for Noskowiak. By the middle 1930s, her work had appeared at the M. H. de Young Museum, and at the Ansel Adams, Denny-Watrous, and Willard Van Dyke's 683 Brockhurst galleries.

When Noskowiak's relationship with Weston broke apart in 1935, her life and work changed considerably. Eager to leave Carmel, she moved back to San Francisco, where she established a portrait studio and was one of eight photographers hired for the California region of the Federal Art Project (FAP), a division of the Works Progress Administration, from 1936 to 1937. It is unclear whether the social concerns of the FAP caused the shift in Noskowiak's work, but by the mid-1930s she was photographing in a new way, replacing her intimate studies of nature with far more expansive and distant views of rural and urban landscapes. The shift was both stylistic and conceptual. Noskowiak no longer perceived the land in strictly aesthetic terms but as a place where people lived and worked. Where the photographer had once rejected all references to a broader context, she became increasingly inclusive and specific, using the camera to describe rather than fragment her surroundings.

Noskowiak found many opportunities in San Francisco. Many of her friends were there, as well as a small but important community of women artists – including Imogen Cunningham, Dorothea Lange, and Alma Lavenson. Noskowiak's studio on Union Street attracted a distinguished clientele of artists, writers, actors, and musicians. She had learned the art of portraiture in Carmel and knew how to exploit the subtleties of posing to evoke moods or emotions. Her ability to allude to her sitters' interior worlds was matched by her understanding of and admiration for external beauty.

Business was always precarious for Noskowiak, however. She often divided her time among several jobs and had little time for creative work. It seems likely that Noskowiak stopped making artistic photographs sometime in the mid-1940s. Commercial work ensued throughout the 1950s, but business plummeted in the early 1960s. In 1965 she was diagnosed with bone cancer and died ten years later in Marin County.

The collection of 454 prints by Noskowiak in the Center's holdings includes early nature

studies, landscapes, architectural views, and a wealth of portraits of both known and anonymous subjects. Her archive was the third to enter the Center's collection, and features correspondence with Edward Weston and other photographers; reviews and announcements of exhibitions, including Group f/64; clippings about Noskowiak; and negatives and contact prints. Related material can be found in the Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Willard Van Dyke Archives.

Chronology

1900	Born in Leipzig, Germany, 25 November, raised in Chile
1915	Family settles in California
1922	Naturalized citizen of United States
1929	Works as receptionist in Johan Hagemeyer Photography Studio in Los Angeles
1929-34	Works as darkroom assistant for Edward Weston
1932	Organizing member of Group f/64
1935	Opens own studio in San Francisco, commercial work includes fashion, portraits, products, architecture and landscape
1975	Dies in Greenbrae, California, 28 April

Scope and Content Note

The bulk of the Sonya Noskowiak Collection is publications, periodicals, clippings, exhibition reviews and announcements, correspondence, and negatives. It also includes handmade Christmas cards and an account ledger.

The papers document best Noskowiak's commercial work, including her portrait work for *Opera News* and the San Francisco art and music community of the nineteen thirties and forties, and the architectural photography that she did for home furnishing periodicals from the 1940s until the 1960s.

With the exception of photographs of relatives and friends, there is little in these papers that lends insight into her personal life or her art, although several printed announcements and reviews highlight her exhibitions. The correspondence is mostly related to business affairs. There are six pieces of personal correspondence: brief notes from Imogen Cunningham, Jadwiga Noskowiak, Willard Van Dyke, Edward Weston, and Henri Cartier - Bresson.

There are several clippings and other printed materials, ranging from 1930 to 1971 that concern Edward Weston. Of special interest are two small pamphlets: *Photography*, written by Weston in 1934 for the "Enjoy Your Museum" series; and *The Photographer*,

a photocopy of a booklet written in 1948 by Willard Van Dyke for a film about Edward Weston.

Other materials of interest include a newsletter, exhibition announcements, clippings, and correspondence relating to the San Francisco Society of Women Artists and their annual exhibitions of 1939 and 1940.

Noskowiak's extensive negative files have been organized in two groups - small commercial portrait negatives and 8x10 in. negatives. Nitrate negatives have been removed from the collection and stored separately. Contact prints were made for all nitrate negatives, and are available for research. In addition, Noskowiak's own work prints have been organized and made available for study.

Arrangement

The Sonya Noskowiak Collection has been designated Archive Group (AG) 3. The papers are divided into boxes and then into folders. Thus, AG 3:1/2 indicates the second folder in the first box of the collection.

The papers are arranged alphabetically by record types. Newspaper clippings and other fragile papers were photocopied, and the originals filed in AG 3:6.

Names and Subject Terms

Art photography [<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/aat/300178594>]

Cunningham, Imogen [<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/ulan/500115187>]

Lavenson, Alma [<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/ulan/500004581>]

Noskowiak, Sonya [<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/ulan/500068312>]

Weston, Edward [<http://vocab.getty.edu/page/ulan/500003372>]

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

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

Nitrate negatives have been isolated from the collection and placed into cold storage.

[Access to these materials requires a two-week advanced notice.](#)

Conditions Governing Use

Arthur Noskowiak holds the copyright to his sister's photographs and writings.

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

Sonya Noskowiak's brother, Arthur Noskowiak, gave the Sonya Noskowiak Papers to the Center for Creative Photography in 1976 and 1977.

Related Materials

See also published Guide No. 5, Edward Weston papers.

Preferred Citation

Sonya Noskowiak archive, 1928-1974. AG 3. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Finding aid was updated by Susan Mergenthal and Alexis Peregoy in 2016.

Container List**Series 1: Greeting Cards, n.d., 1958**

Box	Folder	
1	1	Christmas cards, n.d., 1958

Series 2: Clippings, 1928-1948, 1971-1975

Box	Folder	
1	2	Theater activities, 1928, 1932
	3	Miscellaneous topics, n.d., 1948
	4	Relating to Edward Weston, 1930-1971
	5	Relating to photography, 1975

Series 3: Correspondence, 1933-1974

Box	Folder	
1	6	Imogen Cunningham, 1974
	7	Monroe E. Deutsch, 1935
	8	Hurley Marine Works, 1945
	9	Marina Losenzini, 1953
	10	Museum of Modern Art (New York), 1943-44
	11	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> , 1935
	12	San Francisco Society of Women Artists, 1936
	13	Mrs. S. Thompson, 1955
	14	Willard Van Dyke, 1933
	15	Edward Weston, n.d., 1957
	16	Miscellaneous, 1942, 1958

Series 4: Exhibitions, 1932-1965

Box	Folder	
1	17	Exhibition announcements, etc., 1932 - 1963
	18	Exhibition reviews, 1933 - 1952

Series 5: Miscellaneous Materials, n.d., 1931-1961

Box	Folder	
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2	1	Miscellaneous, n.d., 1936, 1938
	2	Notes on photography by Noskowiak, n.d.
	3	Photographs in collections, n.d.
	4	Published photographs, 1931 - 1961
	5	Prizes, 1942
	6	Translations by Noskowiak, 1931
	7	Anonymous poem about Edward Weston, n.d.

Series 6: Financial Records, 1949-1964

Box	Folder	
3	1	Account book, 1949 – 1964

Series 7: Publications, 1937-1950s

Box	Folder	
3	2	Brancusi [home furnishings catalog], 1950s <i>The Coast</i> , December 1937 Damron – Kaufmann, Inc.[home furnishings catalogs], ca. 1950s <i>Housing Magazine of Homes and Gardens</i> , October 1940 <i>Sunset</i> , September, October, November 1942 April, May 1943 May 1947
23		Color tearsheets

Series 8: Photographic Materials

Subseries 1: Snapshots

Box	Folder	
3	3	Snapshots of Noskowiak, 1935 - 1966

Subseries 2: Negatives

Note: Negatives have been placed in cold storage and require a two-week notice for access.

Box	Folder	
4		Negatives, small commercial portraits: Alder -- Gerstle
5		Negatives, small commercial portraits: Gerstle -- Vye
6		Negatives, small commercial portraits: Wallace -- Zoudie
		Negatives, small commercial portraits: Unknown men and women
		Negatives, small commercial portraits: Commercial, theatrical

- 7 Negatives, small commercial portraits: Miscellaneous personal (art)
Negatives, 8x10 in.: Negatives that match fine prints
Portraits
Federal Art Project
Commercial
- 8 Negatives, 8x10 in.: Commercial
- 9 Negatives, 8x10 in.: Commercial, architecture and products
- 10 Negatives, 8x10 in.: Commercial, theatre, dance, copied art works,
fashion and Advertising
- 24 Diacetate negatives
- Subseries 3: Transparencies
- Box
- 11 Color transparencies
- Subseries 4: Contact Prints
- Box
- 11 Contact prints by Sonya Noskowiak from small portrait negatives
Contact prints by Sonya Noskowiak from 8x10in. Negatives:
negatives that match fine prints
Portraits
Federal Art Project
Architecture
- 12-15 Contact prints made by Sonya Noskowiak from 8x10 in. negatives:
Commercial -- furniture and interiors
- 16 Original sleeves for small portrait negatives (A -- Levy)
- 17 Original sleeves from small portrait negatives (Linahart -- Z)
- 18 Contact prints by CCP staff from small nitrate negatives (boxes 2 - 20)
- 19 Contact prints by CCP staff from small nitrate negatives (boxes 21 - 33)
- 20 Contact prints by CCP staff from small nitrate negatives (boxes 34 - 41)
- 21 Contact prints by CCP staff from small nitrate negatives (boxes 43 - 49)
- 22 Contact prints by CCP staff from 8x10 in. nitrate negatives (boxes 50-end)
- 23 Photographs by Sonya Noskowiak that because of condition issues or
lesser quality duplicates were not added to the fine print
collection (TF5305). All are gelatin silver and signed by Noskowiak
except where noted.
Attributed to Sonya Noskowiak, Barbara, undated, unsigned [portrait of
toddler with curly hair]

Sonya Noskowiak, Galt Family House, 1938 [Anton Noskowiak in front of house]

Sonya Noskowiak, untitled, undated [portrait of boy]

Sonya Noskowiak, untitled, undated [portrait of girl]

Sonya Noskowiak, untitled, undated [portrait of boy and girl]

Sonya Noskowiak, Barbara, undated [portrait of toddler]