

PACSL/CLIR Hidden Collections Project

Courtney Smerz's remarks to the Philadelphia Museum of Art Library Committee

As Holly noted already, we worked here at the Philadelphia Museum of Art for about 5 months, and processed 6 collections: records of the Department of Community and Urban Outreach, Marketing and Public Relations Department records, Evan Turner records, Stella Kramrisch records, FOCUS archives, and the Julien Levy papers.

With the exception of the Julien Levy papers, the records groups Susie selected for inclusion in the project documented different aspects of the Art Museum's institutional history, with a particular focus on the 1960s and 1970s. We learned that thanks to Museum leaders like Evan Turner and Stella Kramrisch, during that time, the Museum was transformed both physically, with a new climate control system and renovated galleries, and intellectually, with new departments formed for collection development as well as to make the Museum a more inclusive institution.

EVAN TURNER / DEPARTMENT OF URBAN OUTREACH / MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT

As you may already know, Turner was responsible for the new climate control system, which meant completely closing the Museum for a year in the mid 1970s! Among other accomplishments, Turner is responsible for the creation of new art departments for American and 20th Century Art, as well as the innovative Department of Community and Urban Outreach, which worked to make art a part of daily life for children and adults across the City of Philadelphia. One of the Department of Community and Urban Outreach's main activities was mural painting.

With all these amazing changes and activities taking place, the Marketing and Public Relations department was there to publicize it all! We found photographs, and newspaper and magazine clippings depicting the Museum at its best -- during fundraising and promotional events, showcasing special exhibitions, and out in the community teaching everyday Philadelphians about the importance and value of art.

STELLA KRAMRISCH

Some of you may remember Stella Kramrisch, who served as Curator of Indian Art here at the PMA from 1954 to 1972, and as Curator Emeritus until her death in 1993.

Stella devoted her entire adult life to the study and appreciation of Indian art and made significant contributions to Indian Art scholarship -- at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Stella built the Indian art collections and staged several ground-breaking exhibitions, which earned for the museum much acclaim and recognition. In 1968, "Unknown India: Ritual Art in Tribe and Village," showcased 500 religious and secular objects. In 1981, after twelve years of planning, research and negotiations, another ground-breaking exhibition, "Manifestations of Shiva" opened. It was the first major exhibition in this country to examine the religious deity and to explore the multiple interpretations of its meaning.

As Sarah Newhouse, one of the collection's processors, succinctly put it, Stella was a force to be reckoned with -- she had a unique and forceful personality, and, it appeared to us, as far as Indian Art was concerned, she always got exactly what she wanted. Next time you visit the Indian and Himalayan art galleries, check out the provenance of the objects on display. Many of them were acquired by Stella Kramrisch, bought with funds in her name, or were part of her personal collection, which was bequeathed to the museum after her death. Clearly, the PMA would not be the institution it is today without her.

The Stella Kramrisch papers mostly consist of her research and writing, some correspondence, and photographs of Indian art. The collection also houses some personal items, like these photographs of Stella and her beloved cats lounging amongst her collection, and her pet hyena. Yes, that's what I said, her pet hyena.

FOCUS Archives

"FOCUS: Philadelphia Focuses on Women in the Visual Arts" was a city-wide arts program that lasted for 2 months in 1974. The program included art exhibitions, juried shows, panels, lectures, workshops, demonstrations and film viewings, and was completely organized by Philadelphia-area women involved in the arts, including painter Diane Burko and PMA's own, Anne d'Harnoncourt. The central event of the FOCUS program was "Women's Work: American Art," a contemporary art exhibition financed by and held in the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center.

FOCUS was successful in its celebration of women in the arts; however, the event was not without controversy. Artist, Judith Bernstein's

entry, a charcoal drawing entitled, "Horizontal," was banned from the "Women's Work" exhibition by the Civic Center Museum because of its "overly sexual" content. Needless to say, this censorship provoked protest and backlash from the FOCUS organizers as well as the local arts community.

The FOCUS archives is a small collection, but a rich resource, nonetheless. It fully documents this amazing effort to highlight women artists at a time when women were fighting for recognition and equality in all sectors of our society.

JULIEN LEVY

We processed 125 collections in this project, and the Julian Levy papers easily ranks among the top 5 of those collections -- at least if you ask me.

It is a truly star-studded collection, documenting the contemporary art world of the 1930s and 1940s, through the correspondence of Julien Levy and the administrative records of his New York City art gallery - the Julien Levy Gallery.

At first, like Steiglitz, Levy wanted to showcase photography as an art-form, but he quickly expanded his focus to include other art, most notably, surrealism and film. In fact, he is perhaps most famous for his 1932 show featuring the works of Salvadore Dali, thereby introducing the surrealist art movement to New York City.

The Julien Levy Gallery became a haven for artists and art lovers, and its atmosphere was likened to that of Paris in the late 19th century. Levy's shows featured (and frequently introduced) other important artists including Alfred Stieglitz, Max Ernst, Arshile Gorky, Diego Rivera, Man Ray, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Alberto Giacometti, Henri Matisse and Frida Kahlo, among others. Levy's professional relationships with many of these artists quickly developed into personal friendships, and the letters in the Julien Levy papers reflect this fact. Pictured here, are two letters from Frida Kahlo, with whom Levy developed a very close relationship.

CONCLUSION

So, as you can see, the archival holdings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art are nothing short of amazing -- it was an absolute privilege to work with these collections, as well as with Susie Anderson. If you have any questions or comments, Holly and I would be happy see if we can answer them.