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Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

AICA USA records

1968-2003 (bulk 1991-1999)

MssCol 6201

Compiled by Leslie Reyman, August 2010

Summary

Creator: International Association of Art Critics. American Section

Title: AICA USA records, 1968-2003 (bulk 1991-1999)

Size: 7.3 linear feet (16 boxes)

Source: Donated by International Art Critics Association, United States section in 2005 and 2006

Abstract: The International Association of Art Critics (AICA) was founded in 1950 in Paris as a partner with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). AICA USA, which also began in 1950, is headquartered in New York City. It is the largest national section, with a membership of over 400 distinguished critics, curators, scholars, and art historians. The administrative records of AICA USA document the activities engaged in and issues faced by the organization in its efforts to promote the visual arts and advance the aims of art history and scholarship.

Access: Advanced notice required. Apply at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>

Sound recordings are unavailable pending preservation transfer.

Copyright information: Donor retains all copyright and other intangible intellectual property rights.

Preferred citation: AICA USA Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator history

AICA USA is the United States Section of The International Association of Art Critics (AICA), which was founded in 1950 in Paris as a partner with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). Some of the objectives of AICA are: promoting the field of visual arts; protecting the ethical and professional interests of art critics; improving international exchanges in the field of visual arts; a closer understanding of differing cultures. Currently there are 64 member countries. The annual AICA International Congress is held in a different nation each year.

AICA USA, is headquartered in New York City. It is the largest national section, with a membership of over 400 distinguished critics, curators, scholars, and art historians. Each year AICA USA presents awards in excellence to museums and gallery exhibitions. They also present a series of lectures and programs, including the AICA Distinguished Critic Lecture and the AICA Commemorative Lecture. They partner with the College Art Association on panels at yearly CAA conferences. The group has an active Professional Issues Committee which concerns itself with working conditions for critics. An Advocacy Committee investigates issues of concern to the profession and advises the board and the membership on actions to take.

During the 1970s the organization began to wane because of a perceived problem between UNESCO and the state of Israel. Members stopped going to meetings and paying dues. John Perrault was elected President in 1978. During his presidency (1978-1981) he helped reestablish ties to the parent organization International Association of Art Critics. At the time, the American section (as it was then known) had ceased to participate with the International group because of its perceived biases against the state of Israel. One issue was about the exclusion of Israel from regional UNESCO activities. In reality Israel asked to be included as a part of the European region instead of not being listed in any regional group. This request was denied. Israel was listed in "Western Europe" along with USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand for purposes of Executive Board elections. Another issue concerned cultural heritage sites in Jerusalem. Excavations and modification to cultural and historical sites within Old Jerusalem were continuing despite requests from UNESCO to desist. Financial aid from UNESCO for specific programs was suspended.

Other topics that needed to be addressed was the two-tiered membership system: full and passive. Full members were the more active members as a whole, while passive members paid dues but didn't participate in activities. The American section chose to eliminate the passive member category from their by-laws. Perrault solicited help from fellow members on how to create and establish goals for the American section and what topics for discussion should be included in general meetings, programs and on the agenda for the National Conference. During this time the group also affiliated themselves with the College Art Association.

Presidents elected during the 1980s; Jeanne Siegel, David Bourdon, Ellen Lubell, and Phyllis Tuchman, built upon what Perrault had started. Some of the concerns dealt with during this time were: fair wage/minimum payments; hosting the international congress; initiating awards; panel discussion topics; book publishing; and applying for not-for-profit status. Topics at panel discussions included: "The Education of Art Critics" and "Realities and Options: Can LA Support a World Class Art Magazine". The 1990s brought more members, more issues and more visibility outside the art world. Presidents elected during these years included; Kim Levin, Phyllis Braff, Tuchman again; Alexandra Anderson-Spivy; and co-presidents Judith Stein and Amei Wallach.

Scope and content note

The administrative records of AICA USA document the activities engaged in and issues faced by the organization in its efforts to promote the visual arts and advance the aims of art history and scholarship. It consists of correspondence, meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, awards and call for papers. The material reflects issues of the day, including fair wage/minimum payments; hosting the international congress; awards; panel discussion topics; book publishing; applying for not-for-profit status; professional standards; strategies for survival; writers contracts; licensing fees and fair use; art critics and artists of color; and group health insurance.

The material is arranged by terms of Presidents. A list of known Presidents follows: Irving Sandler, 1968; John Perrault, 1978-1981; David Bourdon, 1981-1984; Ellen Lubel, 1984; Phyllis Tuchman, 1987-1991 and 1993-1995; Kim Levin, 1991-1992; Phyllis Braff, 1992-1993; Alexandra Anderson-Spivy, 1995-1997; Judith Stein, co-president 1998-1999. Also included is material from Jane Gollin who was administrative assistant during Amei Wallach's presidency, 2001-2003. The bulk of the material spans the years 1987-1993, and includes the presidencies of Tuchman, Levin and Braff. The records also reflect the various other positions that the Presidents held including; vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and they chaired or were members of the following committees: program, membership, nominating, international and national congress. Levin and Tuchman were also elected to the international body.

The most useful material in the collection are the newsletters which describe in detail issues, topics, and controversies and include transcripts, membership information, and lists the members of the executive board.

A controversy in 1996 involving AICA member Max Kozloff's publication of Richard Avedon photographs without permission resulted in the establishment of an ethics committee. (See the files of Alexandra Anderson-Spivy's and Judith Stein).

Sound recordings of general meetings and the lecture following are also included in the collection. These recordings are unavailable pending preservation transfer.

Key terms

Subjects

Art

Art critics -- Congresses

Art critics -- United States

Names

International Association of Art Critics. American
Section

Container list

b.1 f.1-2 Irving Sandler, 1968

The material in the collection reflects the administration records of a not-for-profit arts organization. It consists of correspondence, meeting agendas and minutes, newsletters, awards and call for papers. The material reflects issues of the day, including fair wage/minimum payments; hosting the international congress; awards; panel discussion topics; book publishing; applying for not-for-profit status; professional standards; strategies for survival; writers contracts; licensing fees and fair use; art critics and artists of color; and group health insurance.

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