



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Richard Harrison Senie papers

1920s-1964

*T-Mss 1986-017

Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2015

Summary

Creator: Senie, Richard Harrison

Title: Richard Harrison Senie papers

Date: 1920s-1964

Size: 4.6 linear feet (14 boxes, 2 volumes)

Source: Donated by the Estate of Richard Senie, 1986

Abstract: Richard Harrison Senie (1916-1986) was an artist and scenic designer. The Richard Harrison Senie papers, dating from the 1920s to 1964, document his life and career through stage and set designs, visual art, photographs, programs, letters, scrapbooks, and writings.

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Preferred citation: Richard Harrison Senie papers, *T-Mss 1986-017. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Processing note: Compiled by Matthew Snyder, 2015

Related Materials:

Richard Harrison Senie Set Designs, *T-Vim 2011-068. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

Creator History

Richard Harrison Senie (1916-1986), a visual artist and scenic designer, was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and grew up in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Starting in 1934, he studied design at the Yale University Department of Drama for a year, after which he spent three years in Europe studying at the Austrian and Hungarian State Theatres. Senie also worked as a consultant at theaters and opera houses in Austria, Hungary, and the Soviet Union.

Senie returned to the United States in 1938 and continued his theater career, designing for local playhouses in New Hampshire from 1938 to 1941. Beginning in 1940, his sculptures were exhibited at the New York Society of Ceramic Art, the National Arts Club, and other galleries.

In 1941, Senie enlisted in the United States Army. From 1942 to 1944, he oversaw the production of training manuals and film strips for the Anti-Aircraft Artillery School in Camp Davis, North Carolina. From 1944 to 1946 he was assigned to the Allied Force Headquarters in Italy as an intelligence officer, and was honored with a Bronze Star Medal for his service.

After his army discharge, Senie worked as a freelance designer in New York and California from 1946 to 1948. He designed the sets for the 1947-1948 season at the Stratton Theatre in Middletown, New York, and for the 1949 summer season at the Deertrees Theatre in Harrison, Maine.

In 1951, Senie designed the sets for a Broadway production of Saint Joan at the Cort Theatre; the following year he did the same for the first American tour of the Dancers of Bali at the Fulton Theatre. Shortly afterward, Senie began to work steadily in television, designing sets for the CBS and NBC networks. These included the series and anthologies Doorway to Danger, I Remember Mama, The All Star Revue, The Gabby Hayes Show, The Campbell Summer Soundstage, Armstrong's Circle Theatre, Someone New, Goodyear Playhouse, the Walter Winchell Show, Suspicion, and Studio One Summer Theatre. In the 1960s, Senie worked for ABC, where he designed sets for The Patty Duke Show and the first season of The Price Is Right.

Richard Harrison Senie died in 1986 in New York City.

Scope and Content Note

The Richard Harrison Senie papers, dating from the 1920s to 1964, document the artist's life and career through stage and set designs, project files, visual art, photographs, programs, letters, scrapbooks, and writings.

The bulk of the collection consists of project files dating from 1946 to 1964. They contain sketches, stage and set designs, hanging plots, programs, scripts, memos, clippings, and publicity material regarding theatrical or television productions. These include the Broadway production of Saint Joan (1951); the NBC productions Big Story (1952), Doorway To Danger (1952), The Campbell Summer Soundstage (1953-1954), Armstrong's Circle Theatre (1954), Someone New, Suspicion (1958), T. Men (1952), The Walter Winchell Show (1956), and Goodyear Playhouse (1956); the CBS production Studio One Summer Theatre (1957); and The Patty Duke Show (1963) and The Price Is Right (1964), both on the ABC network. Some scripts contain Senie's notes. Memos are from the producer or director to all production staff and are not generally addressed to Senie specifically. One file, for the Deertrees Theatre, includes a scrapbook of photographs, programs, and Senie's resume.

Senie's art, which dates from 1931 to 1956, comprises much of the rest of the collection. His works include numerous color and black pastel drawings, many of which are of unidentified stage designs or costumed figures; watercolors; a few oil paintings; and five ceramic sculptures. Among the drawings are characters from Norman Bel Geddes' 1931 staging of Hamlet (see box 1, folder 2). The art is also showcased by a scrapbook from the early 1940s containing clippings and photographs of Senie's sculptures.

The programs are for stage productions and art exhibits, including gallery catalogs. One is for a Theresa Bernstein exhibit, signed by the artist.

Photographs mostly document Senie, his family, and his friends. The earliest image of Senie dates from 1931. No other persons are identified. The photographs also hold prints of instructional filmstrips produced by Senie for the Army's Anti-Aircraft Artillery School (circa 1944), and prints and negatives of Senie's art.

The letters, dating from 1927 to 1963, are from Senie's mother, friends, and potential employers.

The writings contain two essays by Senie: A Plan for an American Repertory Theatre (1930s), and Statement of the Theatre Project (undated).

More set designs can be found in the Richard Harrison Senie Set Designs (see the related collection note). That collection primarily contains designs for NBC television programs such as Armstrong's Circle Theatre, The Campbell Summer Sound Stage, The Colgate Comedy Hour, and Toast of the Town. It also holds designs and a three-dimensional stage model for Saint Joan. See the finding aid for further details.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged by format.

Key Terms

Occupations

Artists (visual artists)
Scenographers

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Drawings (visual works)
Letters (correspondence)
Oil paintings (visual works)
Photographs
Programs (documents)
Scrapbooks
Sculpture (visual work)
Technical drawings
Watercolors (paintings)

Subjects

Television plays
Theater -- United States -- 20th century

Container List

Art and Designs

Drawings and Paintings

- b. 1 f. 1-4 1931-1933, undated
- b. 2 f. 1-3 1933-1937, undated
- b. 1 f. 5 1939, undated
- b. 3 f. 1 1940-1941, undated
- b. 3 f. 2 1958, undated
- b. 3 f. 3-4 Undated
- b. 2 f. 4-6 Undated
- b. 4 f. 1-3 Undated
- b. 5 f. 1-3 Undated
- b. 13 Undated
- b. 14 Undated
- v. 2 Undated
- b. 11 f. 5 Sculpture Scrapbook 1941-1942
- b. 4 f. 4 Letters 1927-1963, undated

Photographs

- b. 4 f. 5 1920s-1952, undated
- b. 4 f. 6 Army Film Strip Prints circa 1942-1944
- b. 6 f. 1-2 Art undated
- b. 6 f. 3 Programs 1930-1952

Project Files

Armstrong's Circle Theatre

- b. 6 f. 4-5 1954
- b. 3 f. 5 1954
- b. 3 f. 6 Big Story 1952

The Campbell Soundstage

- b. 6 f. 6 1953-1954
- b. 3 f. 5 1953-1954
- b. 7 f. 1-2 1953-1954

Deertrees Theatre

- b. 6 f. 7 1949
- v. 1 Scrapbook 1949

Doorway to Danger

- b. 2 f. 7 1952
- b. 14 1952
- b. 8 f. 6 Gabby Hayes 1951
- b. 8 f. 1-5 The Goodyear Playhouse 1956
- b. 8 f. 7 Ivory Soap Commercial undated

Project Files (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 3 Jewel Box undated
- b. 8 f. 8 The Patty Duke Show 1963
- b. 7 f. 4 Pianorama World undated
- b. 9 f. 1-5 The Price is Right 1964
- b. 11 f. 1 Rensselaer Production Company 1946
Saint Joan
- b. 11 f. 2 1951
- b. 13 1951
- b. 9 f. 6 The Shy One 1953
Studio One Summer Theatre
- b. 10 f. 1 1957
- b. 11 f. 3 1957
- b. 12 f. 1 Suspicion 1958
- b. 14 T.Men 1952
- b. 10 f. 2 Walter Winchell Show 1956
Woodstock Playhouse
- b. 10 f. 3 1950
- b. 12 f. 2 1950
- b. 11 f. 4 Unidentified 1952
- b. 12 f. 3-4 Unidentified undated
- b. 10 f. 4 Writings 1930s, undated