



The New York Public Library  
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

**Rouben Ter-Arutunian papers**

1910-1991

(S) \*MGZMD 277

Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2011.

## Summary

**Creator:** Ter-Arutunian, Rouben, 1920-

**Title:** Rouben Ter-Arutunian papers

**Date:** 1910-1991

**Size:** 17.68 linear feet (43 boxes, 1 tube)

**Source:** Bequest of the Estate of Rouben Ter-Arutunian, 1992.

**Abstract:** Rouben Ter-Arutunian (1920-1992) was a scenic and costume designer whose work was represented in ballet, opera, theater, and television. The Rouben Ter-Arutunian papers contain personal and professional materials from his 40 year career as a designer. The collection holds address books, contracts, correspondence, date books, design files, exhibit materials, family papers, notebooks, photographs, scrapbooks, slides and writings.

**Access:** Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:  
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

### Conditions Governing Access:

To request materials, please contact the Jerome Robbins Dance Division ([dance@nypl.org](mailto:dance@nypl.org)) in advance. Inquiries regarding audio and video materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio/visual materials may be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

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**Preferred citation:** Rouben Ter-Arutunian papers, (S) \*MGZMD 277. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Lea Jordan, 2011. Medical and financial records removed. Duplicate materials and magazines removed. Collection rehoused and arranged by subject.

## **Creator History**

Rouben Ter-Arutunian (1920-1992) was a scenic and costume designer whose work was represented in ballet, opera, theater, and television. He was born in Russia and educated at the Reimann Schule, Berlin and in Paris. His first opera production was *The Bartered Bride* for the Dresden Opera in 1942. Two years later, he designed the Vienna Opera's production of *Salome*. Following World War II, he worked for the Special Services of the United States Third Army in Bavaria and Heidelberg as a designer. He immigrated to the United States in 1951 and became a citizen in 1957.

His first major work in the United States was for the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut in 1956. While acting as a designer for the festival, he designed costumes and scenery for *King John*, *Measure for Measure* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, among many others. He also designed the permanent stage at the festival.

Ter-Arutunian's work for the Broadway stage included *New Girl in Town*, *Advise and Consent*, and *A Passage to India*. He won the 1959 Tony Award for Best Costume Design for the musical *Redhead*, and was nominated for the Tony Award three times for Scenic Design and once more for Costume Design. Television provided another showcase for Ter-Arutunian's talent. Among his televised design credits are *Noah and the Flood* (1962), the Hallmark Hall of Fame's *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Tempest*. He also designed sets and costumes for NBC's Opera Theatre.

Ter-Arutunian's assignments for the operatic stage include productions for the Hamburg Opera, the San Francisco Opera, The Los Angeles Civic Light Opera and the New York City Opera. He also designed *Pelléas et Mélisande* for the 1966 Spoleto Festival.

Ter-Arutunian was most famous for his productions for the ballet stage such as the New York City Ballet's *Souvenirs*, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, *Swan Lake*, *Ballet Imperial*, *Harlequinade* and *The Nutcracker*. He also designed for the American Ballet Theatre, The Harkness Ballet, The San Francisco Ballet, The Pennsylvania Ballet, The Robert Joffrey Ballet, Martha Graham, and the Paul Taylor Dance Company.

In the 1970s and 1980s Ter-Arutunian's costume and set designs were exhibited in galleries, museums, and libraries. He resided in New York City until his death in 1992.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Rouben Ter-Arutunian papers contain personal and professional materials from his 40 year career as a designer. The collection holds address books, contracts, correspondence, date books, design files, exhibit materials, family papers, notebooks, photographs, scrapbooks, slides and writings.

Ter-Arutunian's correspondence consists of professional and personal letters. Notable correspondents include Alexander Cohen, George Cukor, Marlene Dietrich, Katharine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, and many others. Correspondence is arranged by date with few exceptions. Some letters were separated by individual by Ter-Arutunian; these remain separated and are filed by name. Business and personal correspondence often overlap.

Since Ter-Arutunian was not tied to one institution, the contracts are useful for ascertaining exactly where he was working at any given time. As a designer he was often involved in more than one project

simultaneously. He also negotiated contracts for re-use of his designs.

The majority of Ter-Arutunian's designs can be found in his design portfolios which have been maintained as a separate collection at the New York Public Library's Jerome Robbins Dance Division. The design files found here are small collections of letters, inspiration, sketches and other materials put together by Ter-Arutunian while working on a specific production. These also include a full design blueprint for the set of the New York City Ballet's 1964 production of *The Nutcracker*. The exhibit materials hold flyers, mailings, photographs, slides and correspondence relating to the many gallery and museum exhibits mounted featuring Ter-Arutunian's work. The inspiration files consist of clippings saved for reference when designing a show in a specific style. Many of the images come from *Life Magazine*.

Ter-Arutunian's family papers include identification cards, war documents describing his family as Aryan, a draft of his will and his personal copy of his 1978 oral history, which was conducted through the New York Public Library's Library for the Performing Arts. His legal papers consist of various contract disagreements, as well as a 1986 court battle relating his ability to keep two rent-controlled apartments.

The photographs contain professional and personal photographs. The professional shots depict set designs, sketches, mock ups, rehearsals and the final product. The images are sorted by genre or by production. The personal photographs hold some family snapshots and a large quantity of professional headshots of Ter-Arutunian.

The scrapbooks consist of one small volume of personal snapshots and a larger design book showing examples of his work. The larger book has had some images removed prior to donation. It includes photographs of ballet and opera costume and set design, as well as set models and performance shots. Notable are photographs of a 1960 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* starring Katharine Hepburn.

The slides primarily consist of facsimiles of Ter-Arutunian's design notebooks, probably used in presentations. There are also slides of the actual productions, most photographed by Martha Swope. Where slides were identified by production they are arranged by name, otherwise they are arranged as they were stored.

The writings hold articles and drafts Ter-Arutunian wrote in the 1980s. Some of these may have been intended as lectures, but are not marked as such. Of interest is *Designing for Balanchine*.

The collection also contains cassette tapes containing opera and ballet scores that Ter-Arutunian used for inspiration, as well as several radio interviews he gave in the later part of his life.

Inquiries regarding audio and video materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division. Audio/visual materials may be subject to preservation evaluation and migration prior to access.

**Arrangement:** Alphabetical by subject.

## **Key Terms**

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Address books

Contracts

Photographs

Programs

Scrapbooks

Slides

**Subjects**

Design -- History -- 20th century

Set designers

## Container List

### Address Books

- b. 1 f. 1 1930-1940
- b. 1 f. 2-3 1955-1980
- b. 1 f. 4-5 Undated
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Undated
- b. 43 Awards undated  
Plaque and small trophy.

### Contracts

- b. 2 f. 3 1942-1960
- b. 2 f. 4 1961-1968
- b. 2 f. 5 1969-1974
- b. 3 f. 1-2 1975-1980
- b. 3 f. 3 1981-1987
- b. 3 f. 4 1988-1991

### Correspondence

#### By Date

1950-1970

- b. 4 f. 1-4 General
- b. 4 f. 5 Agents and Representation
- b. 5 f. 1 Dance
- b. 5 f. 2 Opera
- b. 5 f. 3 1971
- b. 5 f. 4 1972
- b. 5 f. 5 1973
- b. 6 f. 1 1974
- b. 6 f. 2 1975
- b. 6 f. 3-4 1976
- b. 6 f. 5 1977
- b. 7 f. 1 1977
- b. 7 f. 2-3 1978
- b. 7 f. 4 1979
- 1980
- b. 7 f. 5 Personal
- b. 7 f. 6 Professional
- b. 8 f. 1 1981
- b. 8 f. 2 1982
- b. 8 f. 3 1983
- b. 8 f. 4 1984
- b. 9 f. 1 1984
- b. 9 f. 2-3 1985

Correspondence (cont.)

By Date (cont.)

b. 9 f. 4 1986

1987

b. 10 f. 1 Personal

b. 10 f. 2 Professional

1988

b. 10 f. 3 Personal

b. 10 f. 4 Professional

1989

b. 11 f. 1 Personal

b. 11 f. 2 Professional

1990

b. 11 f. 3 Personal

b. 12 f. 1 Professional

1991

b. 12 f. 2 Personal

b. 12 f. 3 Professional

By Individual

b. 13 f. 1 Albee, Edward 1962-1966

b. 13 f. 2 Folenia, Franco 1974-1976

b. 13 f. 3 Gielgud, John 1961-1970

b. 13 f. 4 Hewize, Hans 1963-1968

b. 13 f. 5 Kirstein, Lincoln 1953-1967

b. 13 f. 6 Stravinsky, Igor 1967

b. 13 f. 7 Von Einem, Gottfried 1971-1974

b. 13 f. 8 Dance Encyclopedia Conference 1976

Date Books

b. 13 f. 9 1962-1964

b. 13 f. 10 1965-1966

b. 13 f. 11 1967-1968

b. 13 f. 12 1969-1970

b. 14 f. 1-10 1971-1980

b. 15 f. 1-8 1981-1986

b. 16 f. 1-6 1987-1991

Design Files

b. 16 f. 7 *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* undated

t. 1 Blueprints 1964

b. 16 f. 8 *Der Ring* 1990

b. 17 f. 1 New York City Ballet 1965-1980

b. 17 f. 2 *Noah and the Flood* 1962

b. 17 f. 3 *Pelléas et Mélisande* 1973

b. 17 f. 4 *Such Good Friends* 1971

- b. 17 f. 5-7 Education
- b. 18 f. 1-4 Exhibits 1958-1980
- b. 19 f. 1-3 Exhibits 1958-1980
  - b. 19 f. 4 Family Papers 1910-1989
- b. 20 f. 1-6 Family Papers 1910-1989
  - Inspiration Files
    - b. 21 f. 1 Art Deco undated
    - b. 21 f. 2 Britain undated
    - b. 21 f. 3 Egypt undated
    - b. 21 f. 4 Flemish Art undated
    - b. 21 f. 5 Germany and Switzerland undated
    - b. 21 f. 6 Greece undated
    - b. 22 f. 1 Japan undated
    - b. 22 f. 2 New York undated
    - b. 22 f. 3 Paris undated
    - b. 22 f. 4 Russia undated
    - b. 22 f. 5 Spain undated
    - b. 22 f. 6 Victorian Architecture undated
  - Legal
    - b. 22 f. 7 1963-1968
    - b. 23 f. 1-4 1986-1987
    - b. 23 f. 5-7 Notebooks undated
    - b. 24 f. 1-2 Notebooks undated
  - Photographs
    - Design
      - By Genre
        - b. 24 f. 3 Ballet 1954-1980
        - b. 25 f. 1 Ballet 1954-1980
        - b. 42 f. 2 Ballet - Oversized 1954-1980
        - b. 25 f. 2-5 Film and Television Work 1957-1980
        - b. 26 f. 1-3 Opera 1957-1990
        - b. 26 f. 4 Theater 1960-1980
      - By Production or Institution
        - b. 26 f. 5 *Adagio Lamentozo* undated
        - b. 26 f. 6 *Celebration Sporeto* 1973
        - b. 26 f. 7 *The Charge of the Light Brigade* undated
        - b. 26 f. 8 *Coppelia* 1974
        - b. 26 f. 9 *Dido and Aeneas* 1979
        - b. 27 f. 1 *The Duchess of Malfi* 1985
        - b. 27 f. 2 *Firebird* 1967
        - b. 27 f. 3 *Hansel and Gretel* 1953

Photographs (cont.)

Design (cont.)

By Production or Institution (cont.)

- b. 27 f. 4 Harkness Ballet Company 1967-1968
- b. 27 f. 5 *Harlequinade* 1965
- b. 27 f. 6-9 *The Loved One* 1964  
Research and inspiration photographs.
- b. 28 f. 1 *Mozartiana* undated
- b. 28 f. 2-3 New York City Ballet 1955-1979
- b. 28 f. 4-5 *Noah and the Flood* 1962
- b. 28 f. 6 *The Nutcracker* 1964
- b. 42 f. 1 *The Nutcracker - Oversized* 1964
- b. 29 f. 1 *Orpheus and Eurydice* 1963
- b. 29 f. 2 *Pelléas et Mélisande* 1966
- b. 29 f. 3 *The Relativity of Icarus* 1974
- b. 29 f. 4 Santa Fe Opera 1968-1975
- b. 29 f. 5 *Souvenirs* 1963
- b. 29 f. 6 Stratford Festival 1956-1961
- b. 29 f. 7 *Swan Lake* 1964
- b. 29 f. 8 *Tricolore* 1978
- b. 29 f. 9-10 *Unicorn* undated
- b. 30 f. 1 *Union Jack* 1976
- b. 30 f. 2 *Vienna Waltzes* 1977

Personal

- b. 30 f. 3 1910-1930
- b. 30 f. 4 1930-1949
- b. 30 f. 5 1960-1979
- b. 30 f. 6 1980-1989
- b. 31 f. 1-4 1989
- b. 31 f. 5-7 1990
- b. 42 f. 3 Oversized 1960-1989
- b. 32 f. 1-4 Portraits and Headshots 1950-1989
- b. 33 f. 1-4 Portraits and Headshots 1950-1989

b. 33 f. 5-6 Programs

Scrapbooks

- b. 40 Design 1960-1982
- b. 41 Personal Photographs 1950-1970

Slides

- b. 34 f. 1-5 General 1948-1988
- b. 35 f. 1-2 General 1948-1988
- b. 35 f. 3 *Bassarids* undated
- b. 35 f. 4 *Carmen* undated
- b. 35 f. 5 *Coppelia* 1974
- b. 35 f. 6 Costumes undated



Slides (cont.)

- b. 35 f. 7 *Danaë* undated
- b. 35 f. 8 *The Devils of Loudon* undated
- b. 35 f. 9 *Dybbuk Variations* undated
- b. 35 f. 10 *Fidelio* undated
- b. 35 f. 11 *I'm Solomon* undated
- b. 35 f. 12 *Makarova* undated
- b. 35 f. 13-14 New York City Ballet 1955-1979
- b. 35 f. 15 *Noah and the Flood* 1962
- b. 35 f. 16 *The Nutcracker* 1964
- b. 35 f. 17 *Orpheus and Eurydice* 1963
- b. 35 f. 18 *Pulcinella* undated
- b. 36 f. 1 Santa Fe Opera 1968-1982
- b. 36 f. 2 *Seven Deadly Sins* 1958
- b. 36 f. 3 *Souvenirs* 1955

Theater Plans

- b. 36 f. 4-6 Broadway Theaters undated
- b. 37 f. 1 Opera and Ballet
- b. 37 f. 2-3 Other Theaters
- b. 38 f. 1-2 Other Theaters

Writings

- b. 38 f. 3 General
- b. 39 f. 1 *The Art of Theatre Design* 1984
- b. 39 f. 2 *The Art of Theatre Design Drafts* undated
- b. 39 f. 3 *Designing for Balanchine* undated