Summary

Title: Shirley Carter Burden Papers  1947-1989

Size: 7.5 linear feet

Source: Estate of Shirley Carter Burden, 1992

Access: Unrestricted

Description: Correspondence, collected material and information on published photographic essays, records of exhibitions and publications, and other related documents of the prominent American photographer, Shirley Carter Burden (1908-1989).
Biographical Note

Shirley Carter Burden was born on December 9, 1908, in New York City. The youngest of three children, he was the son of William Armistead Moale Burden and Florence Vanderbilt Burden (Twombly), and through his maternal descendance was a great-great-grandson of the famous nineteenth-century entrepreneur Cornelius Vanderbilt. Raised in Manhattan, Burden was educated at the Browning School in New York City up to 1926. He did not attend college after his high school graduation.

In 1924 Courtland Smith, the president of Pathé News, gave Burden his first job as a contact man for this newsreel company. His duties included minor news coverage and varied technical arrangements for the photographer and sound man at Pathé. Two years later he assisted his cousin, Douglas Burden, in producing *The Silent Enemy*, a motion picture which documented the life of an Indian tribe in Ontario, Canada. In 1927, Burden also accepted a job as an errand boy from Walter Wanger at Paramount Studios in Astoria, Queens. It was in 1929, before Burden realized his passion for still photography, that he met Edward Steichen, a monumental photographic artist himself, while having portraits made of himself for his mother at Steichen's studio in New York. While only a brief encounter, Burden would later again meet up with Steichen who, as the young Burden's mentor, acted as an influential catalyst in his future as a still photographer.

Finding no enthusiasm nor a possibility for advancement within his previous work, Burden decided to venture to Hollywood where his desire for motion picture directing might be better fulfilled. In 1929 he left for California as an assistant to Merian C. Cooper, whom he met while doing production work on *The Silent Enemy*. Cooper at the time was producing for RKO. From 1929 to 1934 Burden also worked as associate producer on several films for RKO. His most prominent production work came with the filming of *She*, which was based on the book by Rider Haggard, and its cast included Helen Gahagan Douglas, Randolph Scott, and Nigel Bruce. While not a huge box-office success, *She* did managed to garner an Academy Award nomination. Burden continued his associate production work on films written by Robert Benchley and Philip MacDonald.

From 1934 to 1941 Burden's life focused on more familial matters. In 1934 he married Flobelle Fairbanks, a niece of Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. Two years later their first child was born, a daughter named Margaret Florencel; their first son was born in 1941 and was named Shirley Carter Burden, Jr.

In 1942 Burden formed his own commercial motion picture company which he named Tradefilms, Incorporated. With Tradefilms, Burden established a lucrative business producing motion picture training films, which were in high demand during the war years by the United States Navy, the United States Office of Education, and Lockheed Aircraft. After the conclusion of the war in 1945, all government contracts were cancelled and Tradefilms was all but defunct.

Having been forced to close down Tradefilms due to the lack of post-war business, Burden teamed up with a former Tradefilms photographer and friend, Todd Walker, and opened a photography studio in Beverly Hills, California in 1946. The two initially specialized in still
photography for both advertising and architectural clientele such as *Arts and Architecture*, *Architectural Forum*, *House and Garden* magazines. Once again, Burden was unsatisfied with his work and wanted his photography to be more personal. By 1950, Burden had abandoned his photography business and became solely interested in photography as a fine art. It was also in this year that Burden converted to Catholicism, a decision which influenced much of the ideology behind his later photographic work.

In 1952 Burden met Minor White, an already established fine arts photographer, and began a lifelong friendship and association as a patron with Aperture, Inc., in Millerton, New York, which was a publisher of photographic books and the avant garde photography magazine, *Aperture*. Further involvement in the photography world came when "Captain" Edward Steichen requested Burden's assistance in collecting photographs from the Los Angeles area for the "Family of Man" exhibition Steichen was preparing in 1955. At this time, Steichen also introduced Burden to Dorothea Lange who was also collecting similar photographs for Steichen's "Family of Man" exhibit from the San Francisco area. Lange would play an influential role throughout Burden's life both in and out of the photography world.

In 1956 Grace Mayer, who was the Curator of Prints and Photography at the Museum of the City of New York, allowed Burden to exhibit a pictorial essay he had photographed on Ellis Island a year earlier. Later that same year Burden submitted some of his other photographic work to his mentor, Edward Steichen, who was at this time the head of the Photographic Department of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and these photographs were exhibited in Steichen's "Diogenes With a Camera IV". Burden's notoriety continued thanks to Steichen who, now as Curator of Photography, exhibited Burden's photographic essay on the Weehawken ferry at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1958. From this time on Burden's photographic works were displayed in museums and art exhibits, too large a list to name here, both in the United States and abroad.

In 1959, upon Steichen's suggestion, Burden photographed the life of the Trappist monks at the abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani near Louisville, Kentucky. A year later this work was made into a book, Burden's first, *God Is My Life*, published by Renal and Company in New York with an introduction by Thomas Merton, a friend of Burden and a Trappist monk himself.

After hearing the inspiring lectures made by Winifred Feely in 1960 on Saint Bernadette and the town she lived in, Lourdes, France, Burden and his wife decided to visit Lourdes. While Flobelle, who was a friend of Winifred Feely, worked in a local hospital for a month in Lourdes, Burden and his camera were busy photographing the town and landscape. By the end of their visit Burden had produced enough pictures for a photographic essay on Lourdes and its saintly aura. *Behold Thy Mother* was later published by Double Day in 1965, two years after their return to the United States. In 1963, he photographed *I Wonder Why*, a pictorial story of a young black girl's encounters with racial prejudice. This book was highly publicized and garnered much acclaim for Burden and his work, both his pictures and his words. A television version of *I Wonder Why* appeared on both the *Red Skelton Show* and *The Tonight Show*. A German edition, *Ich Frag' Mich*, was also published in 1964.
After continued success as a fine arts photographer, Burden's life was severely disturbed upon the death of his wife Flobelle on January 5th, 1969. In order to quell his grief, Burden traveled to Japan with his brother William and did extensive photographic work while touring the country. Two years later, on January 23rd, 1971, Burden married Julietta V. Lyon.

After his second marriage, Burden, while not abandoning his photographic projects, became profoundly involved with several important photography and fine art committees and programs throughout the United States. In 1974 he joined the board of trustees of the Friends of Photography based in Carmel, California. In 1975 he was appointed the chairman of the Photography Committee at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and was also a trustee. In 1976 he became a member of the advisory panel of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art in California. From 1978 to 1981 he assisted his friend, Don Wier, in teaching a course entitled "Point of View" at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California.

While his works were being exhibited in museums across the country, by the Los Angeles Art Association in 1976 and the Witkin Gallery in New York in 1977 to name just two, Burden was also compiling more photographs for other pictorial essays. Presence was published in 1981 as was The Vanderbilts in My Life which was a photographic tribute to his historically popular American ancestors. In 1985, now a chairman of Aperture, Inc.'s board of trustees, Burden was responsible for the organization's relocation to New York and as a sign of appreciation for his life-long support of Aperture and of photography as a fine art, Aperture opened the Burden Gallery in New York in his honor. Chairs, Burden's final photographic essay, was also published in 1985. His work on photographic essays never ceased and Aperture, Inc. was to have posthumously published two of his finals projects, The Mary I Love and Ellis Island: Echoes from a Nation's Past.

Burden died of Lou Gehrig's disease on June 3, 1989, while in an airplane en route from Los Angeles to New York. Shirley Carter Burden was 80 years old.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The twenty boxes comprising the Shirley Carter Burden Papers contain correspondence, collected material and information on his published photographic essays, and collected material and information on his many exhibitions, publications, and other photographic projects; the collection also includes Burden's records from his photography studio in Beverly Hills, various records on his personal collection of other artists' works, and special files he kept on other photographers such as Ansel Adams and Dorothea Lange who were both good friends of Shirley Burden. Practically all of the material found within the Burden Papers provides evidence of the degree to which Burden's life was dedicated to photography and the fine arts. The fact that the number of boxes of prints and negatives, over 69 boxes of which were transferred to the Photography Department upon initial accession, far exceeds the number of boxes of his papers is proof positive of how engrossed in the photographic world Burden's life really was. Included also is a large amount of fan-mail from colleagues, friends, and the public as well pertaining to his photographic books and life long support of photography in general.
ARRANGEMENT NOTE

The Burden collection is arranged in the following six series:

Series 1: Correspondence (2 boxes)
Series 2: Published Books and Photographic Essays (6 boxes)
Series 3: Exhibitions, Publications, and Projects (7 boxes)
Series 4: Photography Business Records (2 boxes)
Series 5: Photographic Collection Records (1 box)
Series 6: Subject Files (2 boxes)

Upon receiving the Burden Papers much of the folders included were placed into a somewhat logical series order but upon further examination many inconsistencies existed within each series. This may have been due to Burden's own unique reasoning behind his filing system or to misfiling which may have occurred during the three years in between his death in 1989 and the accession of this collection by The New York Public Library in 1992. The arrangement imposed upon the collection after the accession provides a more ordered and congruous structure to the series defined above.
SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series 1: Correspondence

The majority of the correspondence series deals with letters to and from friends and for the most part concerns business related subjects during his early career as a studio photographer.

Series 2: Published Books and Photographic Essays

Series 2 deals with Burden's published works. Box 3 includes all information compiled during his work on Behold Thy Mother. Collected here are the negative index for the book, copies of the proposed text for the book, correspondences with friends in France regarding Lourdes and the book, and other miscellaneous photographic data. Also included is a book gift-list for his friends, royalty records, book-review articles, and insurance records.

Box 3 and Box 4 contain the collection of materials related to The Chairs. Similar to the previous book, included here are samples of text to be used, a negative index, and book review articles. Also included here are correspondences with the publisher, Aperture, various publishing information, a complete photocopied version of the book, and information concerning the use of some of his 'Chairs" photographs at the Ledel Gallery in New York in 1987.

Box 4 and Box 5 contain Burden's files on his ongoing Ellis Island projects. He was enthusiastically involved in the restoration efforts during the 1970's and 1980's and his lifelong passion of photographing this landmark of American heritage can be deduced from these lengthy files. Included are several negative indexes of the many photographic exhibitions which featured his Ellis Island and Weehawken ferry works as well as the correspondences with the museums which featured these works. Of special interest here are the articles and correspondences Burden kept regarding the Statue of Liberty Project which funded the preservation attempts to restore the much neglected Ellis Island. Also included are many requests from museums and other exhibitors throughout the country for the use of his Ellis Island photographs from his private collection which included photographs taken by other artists during the turn of the century.

Box 5 and Box 6 include the information regarding Burden's work on God Is My Life. Again, contained here are copyright information, a sample text and photographic layout, a book gift-list, letters of praise from Burden's friends as well as many prominent and lesser religious figures both in the United States and abroad, review articles, and a publication contract. Of special interest here is the extensive correspondence Burden maintained with the Trappist monks from 1957 up to 1981, as well as collected Trappist literature and several photographic Trappist calendars which Burden helped create.

Box 6 and Box 7 contain Burden's collected information on I Wonder Why. As before, included here are a negative index and other picture layouts, contract and publishing information,
book gift-list, several letters from various agencies requesting permission to use some of his "I Wonder Why" photographs, and several book review articles from various publications. Also included is information regarding the use of some of his photographs on The Red Skelton Show which aired February 23, 1965 with other various files concerning television show and film offers. There is also publishing and general information on the German version of the book, Ich Frage Mich. Burden received many letters of praise from friends and the public which are included here but surprisingly enough it is the file labeled "Not to be Answered" that is most striking. This folder contains several negative public responses to an abbreviated version of I Wonder Why which appeared in Reader's Digest in February, 1964. All letters of this sort were from prejudiced and racist readers across the country and their content is quite shocking and gives clear evidence of the extremely prejudiced sentiments people harbored during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's. One such critic went so far as to send Mr. Burden a pamphlet of white-supremist literature and propaganda which is also included here.

Box 8 contains the information related to Presence. Included here are contract and publishing information, a book gift-list, the negative index and photographic layouts, a copy of the full text, responses from the public, royalty records, and files on some proposed titles for this work and some initial sample text for each chapter.

Box 9 contains Burden's collected material on the history of his Vanderbilt ancestors and his work on The Vanderbilts in My Life. Here also are publishing records and receipts, photographic layouts, and a preliminary book jacket with some sample pages with photographs from the publisher. Of special interest here are Burden's collected material on the history of Cornelius Vanderbilt and his descendants including an extensive family tree of the Vanderbilt family and his notes and research data on this subject.

Series 3: Exhibitions, Publications, and Projects

Series 3 is arranged chronologically beginning with the year 1953 and continuing up to his death. The largest of all the series, it is indicative of how popular Burden and his work was to the photography world.

Those files relating to his exhibitions include royalty receipts, shipping and handling receipts, review articles, floor plans and layouts of his exhibits, invitations Burden sent to his friends to the opening of some of his shows, the brochures of his shows, and general correspondences with museum curators. Burden also saved the guest sign-in book from his Witkin Gallery show and it is included here.

Those files related to publications found in this series in which his work appeared whether it was on television, in periodicals, or in books, mainly deal with letters of request from various publishing agencies to use his photographs. Also included are payment receipts for the use of his photographs, and copies of some of the periodicals in which Burden's work appeared. A phonograph recording of an interview of Burden regarding his book Behold Thy Mother, is also included.
Series 4: Photography Business Records

Series 4 contains records for the photography studio he operated in Beverly Hills. While Burden never truly abandoned his business here, the marked reduction in files after 1957 related to his studio business is evidence of the amount of time Burden focused on his photographic essay projects and other fine arts works. Included here are files of jobs to be billed or waiting for payment, billing statements, and customer receipts.

Series 4 also contains information on the photographs and photographic material Burden mailed to museums, friends, and customers. Included here are records on the various negatives and photographs both shipped and received by Burden during the years 1962 to 1985. Of interest here are the works mailed to the monks at Gethsemani, shipping information on the photographs taken by Dorothea Lange of his daughter's wedding, and information on the many prints shipped which were used in various publications and the insurance claim forms that went with them.

Box 17 contains the information Burden collected on equipment maintenance and photographic preservation. Included are warranty records for cameras and other equipment, articles on archival film storage and photograph preservation, equipment catalogues, various owner manuals, receipts for the delivery and mounting of his photograph collection, rental receipts for equipment used, sales receipts for equipment purchased, and information on film storage and retouching.

Series 5: Photographic Collection Records

Series 5 relates to the information on Burden's private collection of other photographers' works as well as his attempts to collect their works. Included also are correspondences and materials related to Burden's efforts to collect fine arts photography for the American Society of Magazine Photographers. Included here are information on the attempts to purchase Edward Weston's collection and the Eugene Atget collection of historical photographs. Also included here is the information regarding the various art shows which used materials from his private collection in their exhibits.

Series 6: Subject Files

The last series contains information Burden collected on other photographers and other miscellaneous subject files. Burden dedicated the most space to information on Dorothea Lange, but the photographer files also contain the information Burden collected on Lewis Hine, Ansel Adams, Wynn Bullock, Minor White, and some other lesser known photographers and artists. The miscellaneous files in Box 20 are best explained by their folder title in the Container List below.
CONTAINER LIST

BOX  CONTENTS

Series 1:  Correspondence
1  Correspondence, 1947-1958
2  Correspondence, 1959-1972

Series 2:  Published Books and Photographic Essays
3  Behold Thy Mother and The Chairs
4  The Chairs and Burden's Ellis Island works
5  Ellis Island works and God Is My Life
6  God Is My Life and I Wonder Why
7  I Wonder Why
8  Presence and The Vanderbilts in My Life

Series 3:  Exhibitions, Publications, and Projects

Those exhibits, publications, and projects which featured Shirley Carter Burden's work and assistance exclusively including those publications and projects which were denied use of his works:

Folders
9  Family of Man
"Always the Young Strangers," Museum of Modern Art, 1953
Student YMCA
Museum of Modern Art exhibition in Tokyo, 1954
Pictures Submitted, 1954
Family of Man, Steichen, 1954
Byron Dobell
Erwin Scharp
Children's Hospital, Los Angeles, 1956
"Diogenes with a Camera IV", Museum of Modern Art, 1956
Gifts to the Long Beach Municipal Art Center and Exhibition, 1956
Department of Municipal Art
Museum of the City of New York, 1957
US Information Agency Show - Nancy Newhall - Ansel Adams
Family of Man (Expenses)
Campbell Ewald Co., Detroit, 1958
Subjektive Photografie 3, 1958
Museum of the City of New York
3 Transparencies of Sir Alec Guiness by Ben Shahn
Chaplin Family Photographs, 1959
Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1959
Photography in the Fine Arts, Ivan Dmitri, 1959
Museum of Science and Industry - Weehawken and Monuments of Men, 1959
Eastman House Tenth Anniversary Exhibition, 1959
Long Beach Museum Show, 1960
Modern Photography, 1960
George Eastman House - Dead Pigeon picture, 1960
Photography in the Fine Arts III, 1961
Limelight, 1961

Miscellaneous Showings, 1961
Carl Siembab Gallery
Family of Man - Use of Photographs by Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1962
Miscellaneous notices on Photographic Shows, 1962
Photographic Shows, 1962
Art Directors Club Show, 1962
ASMP Show, 1962
Photography in the Fine Arts, 1962-1963
Way Out West Conference - Professional Photographers of Northern California, 1962-1963
Los Angeles Municipal Art Department Show, 1963
Three For the Show - Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, 1963
Art Forum, 1963
Long Beach Museum of Art, 1963
Assorted Exhibition and Publication Records, 1963
Carl Siembab Gallery
Photographs given to museums
National Conference on Social Welfare, 1964
Photographic, D'Arcy Advertising, 1964
United Presbyterian Church, 1964-1965
Festival Theatre - San Anselmo, California, 1964
Los Angeles Art Association, 1964
"The Camera and the Pencil", Los Angeles Art Association, 1964
"World Famous Artists" series, 1965
U.S. Camera Annual, 1965
"Open End Interview", phonograph recording, 1965
United Jewish Welfare Fund awards, 1965
"About New York: Nigh and Day", 1965
Prints given to Lou Jacobs, Jr., 1965
Junge Gemeinde, 1965
"Taste of Angels", Otis Art Institute of Los Angeles County, 1966
PFA, Photography in the Fine Arts
Shows and Exhibitions, 1966
Columbia Records, 1966
Bonnard Exhibit, 1966
Photography Annual, 1966
Los Angeles Country Club Art Show, 1966
International Photographic Exhibition - Expo 1967
Information on Traveling Exhibits, 1967
"Camera", Romeo Martinez, 1967
Pomona Fine Arts Festival, 1967
Shows and Exhibits, 1967
Hamilton T. Burden's Hitler Book - Record of finished prints and negatives, 1967
Focus Gallery, 1967-1968
Grace Mayer - Infinity article, 1967-1968
Exhibitions and Publications, 1968
Den Lee's, Inc., Exhibit, Danbury, Connecticut, 1968
Photographs sent to Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968
Kennedy Galleries - Fosburgh Portrait of Margaret Childs, 1968
Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968
Thomas Merton Foundation and Projects
Camera article, 1969
Camera, February, 1969 issue
Time-Life Books, 1971

California Historical Society, 1971-1972
Hallmark Gallery, 1972
Time-Life Books - Family of Man Exhibitions, 1972
Art Center School, 1973
Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, "The Silent Enemy", 1973
Art Center Show - General Information, 1973-1974
Newsweek magazine - Photography issue, 1974
Santa Barbara Museum of Art - "Ellis Island" show, 1974
Bi-Centennial Photographic Survey of the U.S., 1976
Los Angeles Art Association - "Photography Then and Now", 1976
Preamble of Shirley Carter Burden Shows
Brooklyn Museum, 1976
Lewis Hine Pictures
Los Angeles Art Association Talk
Witkin Gallery Pictures
Witkin Gallery, 1977-1980
Work Papers for the Witkin Show
Witkin Show pictures and negative numbers
Photography Annual - Time-Life Books
Instituto Chileno Norteamericano - Emanuelle Barasso
Instituto Chileno Norteamericano de Cultura, 1977-1984
Prints list from Chile show, 1977
Fourth World Exhibition of Photography, 1977
San Francisco Camerawork, Inc.
Tamagawa University Press - Children's Encyclopedia, 1979

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Los Angeles Art Association Gallery, 1980
Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1980
Los Angeles Art Association Show, Publicity, 1980
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980
Galleries-Workshops, 1980
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Slide Show information
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Slide Show, 1981
 Former Address Lists - Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1981
 WNET, Channel 13 Auction, 1981
Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1982
Subjectif Photografie - San Francisco Museum, 1983
L.A. Art Association Party, 1983
Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1983
Los Angeles Art Association Show - Ellis Island, 1983
Brooks Foundation Show, 1983-1984
Brooks Foundation Show - Print and negative information
L.A. Art Association Show - Students, 1984
Burden Gallery Show, 1984
Los Angeles Art Association Show - Statements and Photographs information, 1984
Santiago, Chile Show, 1984
Santiago, Chile Show, 1984
Brooks Foundation Show, 1984
Sao Paulo, Brazil Show, 1985
Hollywood Archives Exhibition
Los Angeles Art Association - Ellis Island, 1986
Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1986
Brazil Show

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Los Angeles Art Association - "American Celebrations", 1986
Los Angeles Art Association Party and show opening, 1987
Brooklyn Museum
Bakersfield College Show - Ellis Island, 1987
Los Angeles Art Association Show, 1987
Los Angeles Art Association Show - Swimmers Show, 1989
G. Ray Hawkins Show, 1988-1989
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Exhibitions
Brochures of Shows, 1968-1987
Articles regarding photographic works
City of New York Museum - Weehawken Ferry

Exhibits, publications, and projects which did not feature Burden's work but were still of major interest to Burden:

1959-1967

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Series 4: Photography Business Records

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Series 5: Photographic Collection Records

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   Atget Collection, 1960
   Laguna Art Association Show, 1965
   Fullerton Jr. College Show, 1967
   Photographic Collection donated to the Pasadena Art Museum, 1970
   Collection List - Dorothea Lange and Abbé
   Fortune magazine - Photographic collection, 1976
   Photographic collection, 1976
   Photographic collection
   Santa Barbara Museum of Art
   Photographic collection information, 1977-1979
   Paintings and Photographs - Price list
   Photographic collection - Archival notes
Series 6: Subject Files

Folders

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   Photographers, 1986
   Ansel Adams
   Wynn Bullock
   Joel Greenberg
   "America and Lewis Hine"
   Eva Rubinstein
   Murray Smith
   Minor White

   Information dealing exclusively with the photographer Dorothea Lange:
   Dorothea Lange, 1964
   Museum of Modern Art, Retrospective Lange Show 1965-1966
   Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1968
   Project One
   Dorothea Lange, General information
   Biography on Lange - Milton Meltzer, 1975-1976
   Archival Prints, Lange Exhibit on Oakland Museum, 1975-1983
   Dorothea Lange Book
   Dorothea Lange pictures, Photographic collection
   Julia Kessler news article
   Hills Gallery, Colorado
   Foundation for Photography, Dorothea Lange
   Dorothea Lange Fellowship

20 Miscellaneous information:
   International photographers, 1946
   Book list
   Irish Story
   Photographic Business, 1977
   "Loves of Sonya"
   She
   Rosie Swale
   Photograph magazine
   Diane Lyon
   Insurance information