

**The New York Public Library
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Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Pierre F. Simon Collection of Artists' Letters
1787-1978
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Summary

- Main entry:** Simon, Pierre F.
- Title:** Pierre F. Simon Collection of Artists' Letters, 1787-1978
- Size:** .5 linear feet (1 box)
- Source:** Donated by Jacqueline Albert Simon
- Abstract:** Collected by Pierre F. Simon beginning in the 1960s, the letters in this collection represent approximately sixty artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, spanning many of the major artistic movements and schools of the period. Primarily the creation of French painters, the collection also includes the correspondence of Europeans whose careers encompassed other media. The letters are often surprisingly personal, offering small glimpses into the humanity of each artist. Several letters include illustrations.
- Most letters are in French, with a small number in German or English.
- Access:** Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
- Letters reproduced in the book *A Century of Artists' Letters; Notes to Family, Friends and Dealers: Delacroix to Léger* by Jacqueline A. Simon and Lucy D. Rosenfeld are restricted. Researchers are directed to request the book to view these letters. Restricted letters are identified by an asterisk in the container listing of this finding aid.
- Preferred citation:** Pierre F. Simon Collection of Artists' Letters, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats** Illustrated letters
- Alternate formats:** Many of the letters in the collection are reproduced in the book, *A Century of Artists' Letters; Notes to Family, Friends and Dealers: Delacroix to Léger*.

Provenance note

The letters were collected by Pierre F. Simon and donated to The New York Public Library by Jacqueline A. Simon in 2003.

Biographical note

Pierre F. Simon, industrialist in the electronics and aircraft industries, and art enthusiast, began his collecting efforts in 1968 with the purchase of Claude Monet's 1923 letter to Emile Bernard. In this letter, Monet questioned Bernard about cataract surgery and its effect on one's ability to perceive color. This fortuitous purchase marked the beginning of Simon's passion for collecting, and led to thirty years of his careful pursuit of artists' letters. Pierre F. Simon passed away December 2, 1998.

The letters thus collected are particularly interesting for the degree to which they display the interwoven social networks in which the artists operated. Many letters reference contemporaries, and several were addressed to other well-known artists or art dealers, such as Antoine Triade. One letter included in the collection was itself written by the famous dealer Ambroise Vollard. The letters also include discussion of the artists' work and exhibitions, their quotidian lives and finances, the quest for patrons, responses to art critics, and gossip regarding friends and competitors.

In 2004, Simon's wife and journalist Jacqueline Albert Simon, and Lucy D. Rosenfeld published an analysis of the letters of forty of the artists, entitled *A Century of Artists' Letters; Notes to Family, Friends and Dealers: Delacroix to Léger*. The book offers photographic reproductions of the letters chosen, as well as French transcriptions and English translations. These are followed by biographical sketches and contextual discussion of the letters presented, images of the artists or selections of their work, and a graphological study of the artists' handwriting. The book is available for use in the Manuscripts Reading Room.

The letters presented in *A Century of Artists' Letters*, however, are not an absolute representation of the Pierre F. Simon collection at The New York Public Library: a few of the letters featured in the book are not included in the collection, and many letters in the collection are not found in the book. For a complete listing of the artists represented herein, please refer to the container listing at the end of this finding aid.

Several of the letters have also been featured in exhibits, including at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University, the Grey Art Gallery and Study Center of NYU, and the Muse Matisse.

Scope and content note

The collection consists of letters from approximately sixty artists, arranged alphabetically, with most artists being represented by one or two items. Claude Monet and the painter and printmaker Maxime Maufra are the best represented individuals within the collection, with five and six items respectively. A small file of unidentified letters is included following the alphabetical series.

The artists' letters display common experiences shared by many artists, as well as entirely unique elements of their personalities. A significant number of the letters reference the financial struggles often experienced by artists, such as do Pierre-Auguste Renoir's undated request for the loan of 37 francs "before noon," and Pierre Bonnard's 1885 letter to his father indicating his decision to enroll in law school in place of pursuing a life of art.

Another common theme found in the letters is that of health problems conflicting with the artistic muse, such as Monet's aforementioned concern regarding his cataracts, and Cézanne's 1906 announcement to his son Paul of his depression, which he refers to as "cerebral difficulties" resulting in him seeing "most things as black."

The artists' individual personalities, while not starkly evident in every letter in the collection, do shine through significantly in a large number of them. The following are samplings of several that are particularly engaging.

In Emile Bernard's 1889 letter to Albert Aurier, he discusses at length the life and madness of his friend Vincent Van Gogh. His discussion includes an account, as described to him by Gauguin, of the events leading up to Van Gogh's severing of his ear, and subsequent hospitalization.

Camille Pissarro's 1891 letter to Claude Monet suggests their mounting an exhibition with Mary Cassatt, and makes reference to the untimely death of Georges Seurat.

Perhaps the best example of a letter containing an illustration is the 1917 letter from Pablo Picasso, which features a prominent ink illustration of a picador fighting an angry bull. This letter was written upon return from a trip to Spain.

André Derain's amusing 1921 letter to his friend André Salmon recounts a scene he claimed to witness during a visit to the Musée de Lyon. Viewing the Jacques Blanche triptych "The Car Breakdown," a woman mistakenly took a section of the painting, labeled "Ladies side," for the door to the ladies room. This mistake resulted in her being ejected from the museum.

Orthon Friesz, in a 1924 letter to his friend Leon Pédrón, displays the age-old hostility between artists and art critics, as he scathingly complains about a critic who attacked his work. He debates publishing a response to the review, fearing that it would serve to dignify the criticism.

Raoul Dufy's 1937 letter to dealer Etienne-Jean Bignou includes discussion of his visit to the United States to serve on the jury for the Carnegie Prize. He offered Bignou the insider information that Georges Braque had been chosen to receive the prize, which he mentioned "strictly privately in case it may profit you in some way." He also described his plans to visit various American museums, and referenced dining with the architect of the Empire State building, although he does not specify with whom of the trio Shreve, Lamb, and Harmon he dined.

The Henri Matisse folder is followed by correspondence related to his 1946 letter, in which he requested a photograph of the door to a law office where he had worked in his youth. The two items in question reference his previous employment at the law office, and represent Simon's efforts to retrieve a box of materials Matisse was said to have left with the office.

Finally, in a tongue-in-cheek typewritten letter from Jean Dubuffet to a book dealer in 1978, Dubuffet

declined to provide an autograph, stating he did not want “to enter into this game of autographs and signatures as do actors and boxers...I ask you to kindly pardon me.” Dubuffet then signed the letter.

Correspondence from Mary Cassatt is in English, and Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky's letters are written in German.

Arrangement note

The Pierre F. Simon Collection of Artists' Letters is arranged alphabetically by the artist's name.

Container list

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
1	1	Émile Bernard, 1889 January* (1 item)
	2	Pierre Bonnard, 1885*, 1920* (2 items)
	3	Eugène Boudin, ca. 1866, 1867* (2 items)
	4	Émile-Antoine Bourdelle, 1917 March 12* (1 item)
	5	Georges Braque, 1946 February 20* (1 item)
	6	Mary Cassatt, undated* (1 item)
	7	Paul Cézanne, 1906 September 22* (1 item)
	8	Marc Chagall, 1933*, n.d.* (3 items)
	9	Henri Cross, 1893 March 26* (1 item)
	10	Caran D'Ache (Emmanuel Poiré), undated (1 item)
	11	Edgar Degas, 1895 December (1 item)
	12	Eugène Delacroix, 1846*, 1855* (2 items)
	13	André Derain, 1921 August 3*, n.d. (2 items)
	14	Edouard Detaille, 1889 April 18 (1 item)
	15	Jean Dubuffet, 1978 March 20 (1 item)
	16	Raoul Dufy, 1937*, 1944*, n.d. (4 items)
	17	André Dunoyer de Segonzac, 1957, 1968* (4 items)
	18	Max Ernst, ca. 1949* (1 item)
	19	Henry Fantin-Latour, 1879, 1888, 1901 (3 items)
	20	Jean-Louis Forain, undated (1 item)
	21	Orthon Friesz, 1924*, n.d. (2 items)
	22	Paul Gauguin, 1900, 1901* (2 items, & transcript)
	23	Diego Giacometti, 1972 July 20 (1 item)
	24	Albert Gleizes, 1936 September 16, n.d. (2 items)
	25	Juan Gris, 1918*, 1922*, n.d. (3 items)
	26	J.B. Jongkind, 1888 February 26 (1 item)
	27	Wassily Kandinsky, 1912 November 14 (1 item)
	28	Paul Klee, 1921 December 1* (1 item)
	29	Marie Laurencin, 1938*, n.d. (4 items)
	30	Henri Lebasque, undated* (1 item)
	31	Fernand Léger, 1918*, 1955* (3 items)
	32	Jacques Lipchitz, 1941 December 22 (1 item)
	33	Aristide Maillol, undated (1 item)
	34	Edouard Manet, 1876*, n.d. (2 items)
	35	Albert Marquet, 1920 December 2* (1 item)
	36	Henri Matisse, 1937, 1946* (2 items)
	37	In re: Henri Matisse, 1972, 1976 (2 items)
	38	Maxime Maufra, 1887, 1899, 1900, 1908, n.d. (6 items)
	39	Ernest Meissonier, 1869, n.d. (2 items)
	40	Joan Miro, 1934 January 3* (1 item)
	41	Amedeo Modigliani, 1908* (1 item)
	42	Claude Monet, 1864, 1882, 1888*, 1889, 1923* (5 items)
	43	Berthe Morisot, ca. 1887*, n.d. (2 items)
	44	Jules Pascin, 1924 July 28 (1 item)
	45	Francis Picabia, ca. 1928* (1 item)
	46	Pablo Picasso, 1917 November 20* (1 item)
	47	Camille Pissaro, 1887*, 1891, 1897, 1901* (4 items)
	48	Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, 1897 May 20 (1 item)
	49	Odilon Redon, 1889 July 30*, n.d.* (2 items)
	50	Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1911, n.d.* (3 items)
	51	Auguste Rodin, ca. 1880, 1888, 1910* (3 items)
	52	Georges Rouault, undated* (1 item)
	53	Henri Rousseau, 1906* (1 item)

- 54 Paul Signac, 1891*, ca. 1893* (2 items)
- 55 Albert Sisley, 1888* (2 items)
- 56 Chaim Soutine, 1934 March 26* (1 item)
- 57 Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, ca. 1884* (1 item)
- 58 Louis Valtat, 1926 February (1 item)
- 59 Jacques Villon, 1942 June 1 (1 item)
- 60 Maurice de Vlaminck, undated (1 item)
- 61 Ambroise Vollard, 1906* (1 item)
- 62 Edouard Vuillard, 1914, undated (2 items)
- 63 Unidentified, 1787, 1914, 1950, n.d. (8 items)

*Items marked with an asterisk are reproduced in *A Century of Artists' Letters; Notes to Family, Friends and Dealers: Delacroix to Léger* by Jacqueline A. Simon and Lucy D. Rosenfeld.