



The New York Public Library
Jerome Robbins Dance Division

Guide to the

Marilyn Wood papers

1950s-2016

(S) *MGZMD 546

Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Summary

Creator: Wood, Marilyn, 1929-

Title: Marilyn Wood papers

Date: 1950s-2016

Size: 4.37 linear feet (11 boxes); 14.1 gigabytes (3,206 computer files)

Source: Donated by Marilyn Wood in 2019.

Abstract: The Marilyn Wood papers, dating from the 1950s to 2016, consist of photographic materials, programs, notes, notebooks, journals, posters, fliers, interviews, press clippings, and video recordings created and collected by Wood over the course of her career as a dancer, choreographer, artistic director, and producer. The bulk of the papers detail Wood's work as the artistic director and choreographer of worldwide site-specific, festival-like performances that she called celebrations.

Conditions Governing Access:

Inquiries regarding audio and moving image materials in the collection may be directed to the Jerome Robbins Dance Division (dance@nypl.org). Audio and moving image materials will be subject to preservation assessment and migration prior to access.

Preferred citation: Marilyn Wood papers, (S) *MGZMD 546. Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Amy Lau in 2021.

Creator History

Marilyn Wood (born in 1929 in Columbus, Ohio) was a dancer, choreographer, intermedia artist, artistic director, and producer, who spent her childhood in Puerto Rico. Her exposure to Puerto Rican culture influenced her future artistic career. After high school, Wood attended Oberlin College where she met

and married Robert Wood, a musician. She graduated from Oberlin College with a degree in art history in 1950 and intended to pursue a career in the visual arts. After Oberlin College, Wood attended the Moholy-Nagy Bauhaus Institute of Design in Chicago, Illinois to study the visual arts. While at the Institute, she took a student improvisation dance class which inspired her to switch her vocational focus from the visual arts to dance. Wood spent the next two summers in Colorado taking dance classes from Hanya Holm.

Wood moved to New York City and danced with the Alwin Nikolais Company from 1951 to 1957. During this time, Robert Wood got a job as a school teacher and created instructional workshops, sometimes called gatherings, to teach children and adults how to make instruments from scratch. In 1958, Marilyn Wood was invited by Merce Cunningham to join the, then titled, Merce Cunningham and Dance Company. She toured and performed with the company for five years, leaving the company in 1963.

While teaching dance classes at her children's elementary school, Wood met Elaine Summers. Summers's movement approach, kinetic awareness, taught Wood to focus on the intent behind her dance choreography. Summers and Wood formed an improvisation group whose members included Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton. The group met for approximately two years. Around this time, Wood also took a San Francisco-based workshop run by Anna and Lawrence Halprin, a choreographer and architect respectively. During the workshop, participants were given a choreographic score and asked to "go create theater in the city." The workshop inspired Wood to view city spaces as potential theater places and to continue to score choreography.

One of Wood's first commissions was an exhibition called, *CitySenses*, at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. Wood created ten site-specific choreography scores that visitors picked up at the exhibit and then went out into the city to perform. Visitors then returned to the museum to create art (i.e. record a song, write an essay, draw a picture, etc.) about their experience performing the score.

In 1968, Wood created Marilyn Wood and the Celebration Group which consisted of dancers, musicians, visual artists, architects, and filmmakers. Wood collaborated with the Group to create site-specific performances, that Wood's friends called "happenings," which were directed and choreographed by Wood.

Wood's most famous performance took place in 1972 at the Seagram Building in New York City. Unlike her earlier commissions, Wood had complete artistic control of the project and called it a "celebration" (a term that she would use for all of her subsequent projects). The Seagram Building celebration featured thirty-five dancers, film projections, and original music. It utilized the building's thirty-eight-story façade, lobby, and plaza. The finale of the performance involved inviting the audience to dance on the plaza. The success of the Seagram celebration earned Wood an honorary membership in the American Institute of Architects and helped launch her career as an intermedia artistic director and choreographer. She received commissions to create celebration projects in cities around the United States as well as Australia, Europe, Southeast and Western Asia, and South America.

A year after the Seagram Building celebration, Wood was commissioned to create a celebration project in Adelaide, Australia. Due to budget issues with the project, she decided to dissolve the Celebration Group. For the rest of her career, Wood created celebration projects in conjunction with local dancers, artists, musicians, architects, and lighting designers. The performances were always free and accessible to the public and often included audience participation.

In 1987, Wood separated from Robert Wood and moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she established the International Center for Celebration, or ICC. The ICC was a worldwide network of different types of artists who worked the environmental and cultural history of each performance site

into each celebration project. Wood worked with the Center's artists to plan and perform each celebration project with local artists. Over the following years, the Center received multiple grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, and Wood was honored with the first NEH Creative Artist Fellowship. She used the fellowship's funds to spend a year in Japan studying community festivals.

Wood died in 2016.

Custodial History

The donor, Marilyn Wood, signed a deed of gift with NYPL in 2013, and died in 2016 before donating the collection. Leslie Wood, Marilyn Wood's daughter, shipped the collection to NYPL in 2019.

Scope and Content Note

The Marilyn Wood papers, dating from the 1950s to 2016, chronicle her professional life as a dancer, choreographer, producer, and artistic director of celebration projects. The collection contains mostly slides, negatives, digitized color prints, and ephemera from Marilyn Wood's celebration projects and Robert Wood's musical instrument workshops. Through newspaper clippings, event programs, and photographic material, the papers thoroughly record Marilyn Wood's worldwide celebration projects from 1969 until the 1990s. The collection also holds some photographs from Wood's movement workshops, and features some transcribed speeches and photographs from conferences where Wood spoke about her celebration projects. Present are Wood's notebooks and journals that disclose her interest in astrology and yogic teachings; interviews where Wood talks about specific celebrations and her career; and video footage of Wood's Seagram Building celebration project.

The Happenings and Celebration Performances grouping dates from 1969 to 2014, and is made up of photographs, programs, fliers, newspaper clippings, correspondence, posters, and contracts created in the course of producing Wood's happenings and celebration projects. The group contains some choreographer scores and slides from Wood's pre-Seagram Building happenings. The celebration project files include mainly photographs and contracts, although some project files also contain programs, posters, and newspaper clippings. Wood's seminal work, *Celebrations in City Places: The Seagram Building and Its Plaza*, is minutely detailed via video recording, photographic materials, fliers, newspaper clippings, interviews, and Wood's correspondence and contracts. The group is filed chronologically by event date.

The Workshops and Teaching Events grouping spans from the 1970s to 2014, and describes the movement and musical instrument workshops conducted by Marilyn Wood and Robert Wood, respectively. Most of the photographic materials that depict the musical instrument workshops were shot and created by Robert Wood. The group also includes slides of an instrument exhibition; photographs of Wood teaching at Downtown Community School; and photographs of the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women. The group is filed alphabetically by workshop or event title.

The Dance Companies and Personal Files grouping dates from the 1950s to 2016, and constitutes largely notes, notebooks, journals, interviews, newspaper clippings, and photographs from Marilyn Wood's professional and personal life. The group holds multiple drafts of Wood's biography and resume which reveal the evolution of her thoughts about her career as a dancer, choreographer, producer, and artistic director. There are some fliers and correspondence about Wood's work as the artistic director of Marilyn Wood and the Celebration Group and the International Center for Celebration. Included are a small number of candid photographs of Wood's family and posters from Wood's research on community

festivals. Of note are photographs of Wood dancing during the nascent years of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; an oral history interview with Wood conducted in 2008; and various choreographer scores created by Wood. The group is filed alphabetically by topic, dance company, or material type.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged in the following three groupings: Happenings and Celebration Performances; Workshops and Teaching Events; and Dance Companies and Personal Files.

Key Terms

Subjects

Artistic collaboration
Festivals
Modern dance
Women choreographers

Occupations

Artists.
Dancers.
Theatrical directors.

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Dance programs
Diaries
Filmed performances
Fliers (Ephemera)
Interviews
Negatives (photographs)
Notebooks
Photographs
Posters
Scores

Geographic Names

Seagram Building (New York, N.Y.)

Names

Wood, Marilyn, 1929-
Wood, Robert
International Center for Celebration
Marilyn Wood & the Celebrations Group
Merce Cunningham Dance Company
Museum of Arts and Design (New York, N.Y.)

Container List

- Happenings and Celebration Performances 1969-2014
- b. 1 f. 1 City-Day 1969
b. 11 f. 1
- Unidentified Performances
- b. 1 f. 2-4 1970s-1980s
b. 11 f. 2
- er. 3 Photographs 1970s-1980s
(324 computer files 1.35 gigabytes)
- Various Performances
- b. 1 f. 5-6 1970-1997
er. 17 Photographs 2013
(4 computer files 16.9 megabytes)
- b. 1 f. 7-8 Press 1970-2013
b. 6 f. 2
- b. 1 f. 9 Astrofest Union Square 1970
b. 11 f. 3
- b. 11 f. 4 Midtown Day 1970
- Museum of Contemporary Crafts Banner Festival
Event took place in 1970.
- b. 1 f. 10-11 1970-1973
er. 32 Photographs 2013
(42 computer files 169 megabytes)
- b. 1 f. 12-13 Ford Foundation Building New York City 1971
b. 1 f. 14 Minneapolis, Minnesota 1971
- Museum of Contemporary Crafts CitySenses Exhibition*
Event took place in 1971.
- b. 1 f. 15-17 1971
b. 11 f. 5
- er. 31 Photographs 2013
(47 computer files 194 megabytes)
- b. 1 f. 18 New Year's Eve Central Park 1970-1972
b. 11 f. 6
- b. 1 f. 19 Avant-Garde Festival 1972
- Fourth of July in Old New York Festival
Event took place in 1972.
- b. 11 f. 7 1972
er. 22 Photographs 2013
(1 computer files 8.54 megabytes)
- b. 1 f. 20 London, England 1972
- Early New York City Projects
- b. 2 f. 1-2 1972-1976
er. 15 Photographs 2013
(64 computer files 503 megabytes)
- Seagram Building
Celebration took place in 1972.

Happenings and Celebration Performances (cont.)
Seagram Building (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 3-10 1972-2009
- er. 10 Photographs 2013
 (451 computer files 1.85 gigabytes)
- b. 2 f. 11 1973
- Cincinnati, Ohio
 Celebration took place in 1973.
- b. 2 f. 12-13 1973
- er. 36 Photographs 2013
 (46 computer files 204 megabytes)
- Eeyore's Birthday Party
- b. 2 f. 14 1973
- er. 9 Photographs 2013
 (8 computer files 37.2 megabytes)
- Fairleigh Dickinson University
 Event took place in 1973.
- b. 2 f. 15 1973
- er. 25 Photographs 2013
 (5 computer files 33.6 megabytes)
- Lincoln Center
- b. 2 f. 16-17 1974
- er. 30 Photographs 2013
 (85 computer files 278 megabytes)
- b. 3 f. 1 Little Rock, Arkansas 1975
- Tulsa, Oklahoma
- b. 3 f. 2 1975
- er. 5 Photographs 1975
 (40 computer files 128 megabytes)
- Adelaide, Australia
 Celebration took place in 1976.
- b. 3 f. 3-8 1976-2010
- er. 8 Photographs 2013
 (47 computer files 192 megabytes)
- b. 3 f. 9 Ithaca, New York 1977
- Tehran, Iran
 Celebration took place in 1977.
- b. 3 f. 10-12 1977
- er. 13 Photographs 2013
 (246 computer files 813 megabytes)
- Cambridge, Massachusetts
 Celebration took place in 1978.
- b. 4 f. 1 1978
- er. 34 Photographs 2014
 (150 computer files 808 megabytes)
- b. 4 f. 2 Fourth of July Festival 1978

Happenings and Celebration Performances (cont.)

Kansas City, Missouri

Celebration took place in 1979.

- b. 4 f. 3-4 **1979-1983**
- er. 29 **Photographs 2013**
(175 computer files 610 megabytes)

Tokyo, Japan

Celebration event took place in 1980.

- b. 4 f. 5 **1978-1988**
- er. 14 **Photographs 2014**
(16 computer files 48.5 megabytes)

- b. 4 f. 6 **Caracas, Venezuela 1981**

Hong Kong

Celebration took place in 1982.

- b. 4 f. 7-8 **1979-1982**
- b. 11 f. 8
- er. 27 **Photographs 2013**
(107 computer files 590 megabytes)

Edmonton, Canada

Celebration took place in 1983.

- b. 4 f. 9-11 **1983**
- b. 11 f. 9
- er. 24 **Photographs 2013**
(114 computer files 675 megabytes)

- b. 4 f. 12 **Santa Fe, New Mexico City Streets 1983-1985**

Columbus, Ohio

- b. 4 f. 13 **1984**
- er. 21 **Photographs 2013-2014**
(123 computer files 618 megabytes)

Summer Solstice Central Park

Happening took place in 1985.

- b. 5 f. 1-2 **1984-1986**
- er. 11 **Photographs 2013**
(96 computer files 394 megabytes)

Berlin, Germany

Celebration took place in 1986.

- b. 5 f. 3-5 **1985-1987**
- b. 11 f. 10
- er. 33 **Photographs 2013**
(172 computer files 1.33 gigabytes)

- b. 5 f. 6 **Aspen, Colorado Environmental Dance Symposium 1987**

Singapore

Celebration took place in 1988.

- b. 5 f. 7-9 **1982-1988**
- er. 12 **Photographs 2013**
(182 computer files 622 megabytes)

Englewood, Colorado

Celebration took place in 1990.

Happenings and Celebration Performances (cont.)
Englewood, Colorado (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 10 1990-1992
 - er. 23 Photographs 2013
(13 computer files 84.5 megabytes)
Charlotte, North Carolina
Celebration took place in 1992.
- b. 5 f. 11-12 1991-1992
 - er. 35 Photographs 2013
(95 computer files 439 megabytes)
 - er. 18 Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 2013
(31 computer files 201 megabytes)
Celebration took place in 1992.
Santa Fe, New Mexico Community Day
Community Day performances took place in 1995 and 1997.
- b. 5 f. 13 1995-1997
 - er. 20 Photographs 2013
(112 computer files 430 megabytes)
El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico Cross Border Celebration
Celebration took place in 1997.
- b. 5 f. 14-15 1995-1997
 - b. 6 f. 1
 - er. 19 Photographs 2013
(96 computer files 385 megabytes)
- Workshops and Teaching Events 1970s-2014
 - b. 6 f. 3 Australia Workshops 1976
 - b. 6 f. 4 Calcutta, India Workshop 1982
 - b. 6 f. 5 Celebration Conference 1983
 - b. 6 f. 6 City as Theater Forum 1980s
 - b. 6 f. 7 Downtown Community School 1970s
 - b. 6 f. 8 Galveston Workshop 1977
 - b. 6 f. 9 Gateway Workshop 1975
 - b. 6 f. 10 Instrument Exhibition 1977
 - b. 6 f. 11-12 Ithaca, New York Workshops 1977
 - b. 6 f. 13 Jakarta, Java Movement Workshop 1980
 - b. 6 f. 14-16 Movement Workshops 1971-1972
New Rituals and Ceremonies Seminar
 - b. 6 f. 17-18 1977-1978
 - er. 16 Photographs 2014
(150 computer files 542 megabytes)
 - b. 6 f. 19 Queens Workshop 1974
 - b. 6 f. 20 Rutgers Workshop 1974
 - b. 7 f. 1 St. Mary's Workshops 1974-1975
 - b. 7 f. 2 Summer Workshops 1974-1975
 - b. 7 f. 3 Teen Arts Workshop 1977
 - er. 4 United Nations Conference on Women 1995
(5 computer files 26 megabytes)

Workshops and Teaching Events (cont.)

Various Workshops and Events

b. 7 f. 4-8 1970s

b. 11 f. 11

er. 6 Photographs 1970s
(68 computer files 369 megabytes)

b. 7 f. 9 Waterfront Conference 1985

b. 7 f. 10 Worcester Workshop 1976

b. 7 f. 11 Workshop Tool Instruction 1970s

Dance Companies and Personal Files 1950s-2016

b. 11 f. 12 American Institute of Architects Certificate 1978

b. 7 f. 12-13 Biography and Resume Drafts 1993-2013

b. 7 f. 14 Copenhagen Carnival Poster 1986

b. 7 f. 15 Correspondence 1974-2012

b. 8 f. 1-2 Endorsements and Testimonials 1969-1999

b. 8 f. 3 Eutopia Art and Culture Festival Poster 1995

Family

b. 8 f. 4 1970s-1980s

er. 26 Photographs 2013
(33 computer files 185 megabytes)

International Center for Celebration

b. 8 f. 5 1983-2013

er. 7 Photographs 2013
(25 computer files 117 megabytes)

Interviews

b. 8 f. 6 *Craft International* 1984

er. 2 Interview with Joan Rothfuss [audio] 2007 November 18
(in 2 computer files 38.1 megabytes)

b. 8 f. 7 Interview with Joan Rothfuss [transcription] 2007 November 18

b. 8 f. 8-10 Journals 1980-1983, 1995-1997

b. 9 f. 1-2 Marilyn Wood and the Celebration Group 1968-1993

b. 9 f. 3 Merce Cunningham and Dance Company 1958-1963

b. 9 f. 4-8 Notebooks 1970s, 1992-2010

b. 10 f. 1 Notes 1960s-2008

Portraits and Candids

b. 10 f. 2-4 1950s-2001

er. 1 Photographs 2007
(in 2 computer files 4.65 megabytes)

b. 10 f. 5 Project Notes 1990-1995

Radio Programs

b. 10 f. 6 Speeches 1980s

er. 28 Travel 2013
(29 computer files 106 megabytes)

b. 10 f. 7-8 Various Choreographer Scores 1969-2016

Dance Companies and Personal Files (cont.)

- b. 10 f. 9-10 Various Photographs 1960s-1980s
- b. 10 f. 11-13 Writings 1990s-2013