



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Beauford Delaney collection

1964-1979

Sc MG 59

Compiled by Victor N. Smythe, 1998. Finding aid edited and adapted to digital form by Kay Menick in 2016.

Summary

Creator: Delaney, Beauford, 1901-1979

Title: Beauford Delaney collection

Date: 1964-1979

Size: 2.1 linear feet (5 boxes)

Source: Donated by Daniel Richard in 1988.

Abstract: Beauford Delaney was a painter, specializing in portraits. The Beauford Delaney collection consists of correspondence with colleagues, friends, gallery owners, and family members, as well as printed material documenting Delaney's life in Paris.

Preferred citation: [Item], Beauford Delaney collection, Sc MG 59, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Processing note: Compiled by Victor N. Smythe, 1998. Finding aid edited and adapted to digital form by Kay Menick in 2016. Paintings and art catalogs transferred to Art and Artifact Division. Photographs transferred to Photographs and Prints Division.

Creator History

Beauford Delaney was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, the third child of the Reverend Samuel Delaney and Delia Johnson Delaney. He attended the Knoxville Colored School and later studied art with an elderly Knoxville artist, who encouraged him to get further training. In 1924 Delaney went to Boston where he studied at the Massachusetts Normal School and the South Boston School of Art, and attended evening classes at the Copley Society.

Delaney went to New York in 1929, settling at first in Harlem. He painted society women and professional dancers at Billy Pierce's dancing school on West 46th Street, which gained him a reputation as a portraitist. His first one-man show, which consisted of five pastels and ten charcoal drawings, was at the 135th Street Branch Library of the New York Public Library in 1930. During the same year three of his portraits were included in a group show at the Whitney Studio Galleries, the

predecessor of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Delaney also taught part-time at a progressive school in Greenwich Village.

By the late 1940s Beauford Delaney had become a significant figure on the art scene. He illustrated "Unsung Americans Sung" (1944), a book of black musical tributes edited by W.C. Handy; he had a series of one-man shows in New York and Washington, D.C.; and he exhibited in group shows in a number of other cities. In 1945 he showed his first series of portraits of writers Henry Miller and James Baldwin, who would become his lifelong friends. In 1949 he began an association with the Roko Gallery in New York, where he exhibited annually until 1953.

In 1953 Delaney left New York with the intention of settling in Rome, but a visit to Paris turned into a permanent stay. He had two studios in Paris, the first in the suburbs of Clamart and the other in the Rue Vincingetorix. In Paris Delaney exhibited in one-man and group shows at the Galerie Paul Fachetti (1960), the Centre Culturel Americain (1961 and 1972), the Galerie Lambert (1964), the Musee Galliera (1967) and the Galerie Darthea Speyer (1973), among other places. The latter was a major showing of a selection of his work from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s and the catalog contained tributes by James Jones, James Baldwin, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Delaney also exhibited in England, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United States. The Paris years saw the creation of several masterpieces including portraits of singer Marian Anderson and writer Jean Genet. During this period he also created a series of interiors and studies in watercolor.

After suffering two nervous breakdowns, Delaney was institutionalized, and died on March 26, 1979 at St. Ann's Hospital in Paris. Delaney's last one-man show in the United States was at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 1978, inaugurating that museum's Black Masters Series. Delaney's work is in several private collections and in the collections of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The Studio Museum in Harlem, the Newark Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Scope and Content Note

The Beauford Delaney collection consists of correspondence with colleagues, friends, gallery owners, and family members, as well a printed material documenting Delaney's life in Paris. Biographical information is provided in statements Delaney authored, articles prepared by others for catalogs, and his obituary. Among the many friends, colleagues and art collectors with whom he maintained an active correspondence is James Baldwin, who wrote an introduction to a catalog for an exhibition of Delaney's art at Paris' Galerie Lambert in 1964. Other correspondents include artists Charles Boggs, Al Hirschfeld, John Franklin Koenig, and Ellis Wilson, authors James Jones and Henry Miller (who was also a water colorist), art historian Richard A. Long, and his friend Lynn Stone. Additional artists, painters, writers, gallery owners and musicians who corresponded with Delaney include Lawrence Calcagno, Cab Calloway, Elaine DeKooning, Palmer C. Hayden, and Darthea Speyer.

The letters discuss the style of painting of the correspondents, travels, purchase and exhibition of works, and personal matters. Numerous gallery announcements for art exhibits of Delaney's and other artists' works in Paris, New York and other cities demonstrate the extent of Delaney's activities in the contemporary art world. The collection also contains a large number of picture postcards, some sent by friends, and gallery announcements. Family letters are from his brother and fellow artist, Joseph Delaney, and discuss his own work and impressions of Paris; his brother Emery (includes letters Delaney wrote to his brother, in addition to those received); and Delaney's niece, Imogene.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American artists
African American artists -- France -- Paris
African American painters
African American painters -- France -- Paris
Artists -- United States
Expatriate painters
Expatriate painters -- France -- Paris
Painters -- France -- Paris
Painting -- United States
Painting, American -- 20th century -- Exhibitions

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Announcements
Postcards

Names

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987
Boggs, Charles
Calcagno, Lawrence, 1913-1993
Calloway, Cab, 1907-1994
De Kooning, Elaine
Delaney, Joseph, 1904-1991
Haden, Palmer
Hirschfeld, Al
Jones, James, 1921-1977
Koenig, John Franklin, 1924-1987
Long, Richard A., 1927-2013
Miller, Henry, 1891-1980
Speyer, Dathea
Stone, Lynn M.

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Biography
- b. 1 f. 2 Mrs. Max Ascoci
- b. 1 f. 3 Baldwin, James
- b. 1 f. 4 Boggs, Charles
- b. 1 f. 5 Delaney, Emery
- b. 1 f. 6 Delaney, Imogene
- b. 1 f. 7 Delaney, Joseph
- b. 1 f. 8 Hartman, Iris
- b. 1 f. 9 Hayden, Palmer and Miriam
- b. 1 f. 10 Hirschfeld, Al
- b. 1 f. 11 Jones, James
- b. 1 f. 12 Koenig, J.F
- b. 1 f. 13 Long, Richard A
- b. 1 f. 14 Miller, Henry
- b. 1 f. 15 Stone, Lynn
- b. 1 f. 16 Wilson, Ellis
- Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 17 1953-1959
- b. 1 f. 18 1960-1962
- b. 1 f. 19 1963
- b. 1 f. 20 1964
- b. 1 f. 21 1965
- b. 1 f. 22 Bills and Credit Correspondence
- b. 2 f. 1 1966
- b. 2 f. 2 1967
- b. 2 f. 3 1968
- b. 2 f. 4 1969-1970
- b. 3 f. 1 Names and Addresses
- b. 3 f. 2 Correspondence -- Miscellaneous
- b. 3 f. 3 Invitations
- b. 3 f. 4 Larry Calcagno
- b. 3 f. 5 Charles Boggs, Winston Branch, Noel, Clarence Hagins, Walter F. Anderson,
James Long
- b. 3 f. 6 Exhibitions
- Correspondence
- b. 4 f. 1 1971-1973
- b. 4 f. 2 1974
- b. 4 f. 3 1975
- b. 4 f. 4 1977
- b. 4 f. 5-6 Miscellaneous Printing Material

- b. 4 f. 7 Notes
- b. 5 f. 1-3 Postcards and Cards
- b. 5 f. 4 Business Letter
- b. 5 f. 5 Jim Gaston