

THE PHILLIPS --- COLLECTION

Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips

1999-2000

Finding Aid

**The Phillips Collection
Library and Archives
1600 21st Street NW
Washington D.C. 20009
www.phillipscollection.org**

CURATORIAL RECORDS IN THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION ARCHIVES

INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Collection Title: *Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips*; exhibition records

Author/Creator: The Phillips Collection Curatorial Department. Eliza E. Rathbone, Chief Curator, and Elizabeth (Beth) Hutton Turner, Curator

Size: 1.25 linear feet; 3 document boxes

Bulk Dates: 1998-2000

Inclusive Dates: 1984-2002

Repository: The Phillips Collection Archives

INFORMATION FOR USERS OF THE COLLECTION

Restrictions: The collection contains restricted materials. Please contact Karen Schneider, Librarian, with any questions regarding access.

Handling Requirements: Care should be taken when handling the audio diskette housed in Box 1, Folder 14; for usage of this CD, see head librarian. The oversized preliminary floor plan/elevation drawing housed in Box 2, Folder 14, must be carefully unfolded for viewing.

Preferred Citation: The Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, D.C.

Publication and Reproduction Rights: See Karen Schneider, Librarian, for further information and to obtain required forms.

ABSTRACT

Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips (1999-2000) exhibition records contain materials created and collected by the Curatorial Department, The Phillips Collection, during the course of organizing the exhibition. Included are research, catalogue, and exhibition planning files that document the preparation and logistics for the show.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Laughlin Phillips (1924-2010), a founder of *Washingtonian* magazine, succeeded his mother Marjorie Phillips to become director of The Phillips Collection in 1972, a tenure that spanned two decades from 1972-1992. By the time that Laughlin sold his magazine in 1979, America's first museum of modern art was beginning to show the common problems that beset museums. The museum that founder Duncan Phillips created was in need of modernization. In the 1980s the museum underwent a period of intense growth and activity led by Laughlin Phillips, who oversaw the collection's remarkable transformation from a home filled with paintings to a professional museum.

As director, Laughlin Phillips established a research office headed by Martha Carey and her assistant Sarah Martin. A laborious inventory was conducted by staff from 1983 to 1985, with the resulting 1985 book *The Phillips Collection: A Summary Catalogue*, the first publication to list all artworks in the permanent collection. Their efforts were succeeded by research curator Erika Passantino, who worked with a research team to prepare a larger scholarly catalogue of the collection that would not only provide full documentation of its most important holdings but serve as an interpretive analysis of Duncan Phillips's importance as a writer, collector, and influence on the cultural history of modernism in America.

As the 21st century approached, these efforts inspired the exhibition that presented a new contextual understanding of Duncan Phillips and his role in the art world: *Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips* and the scholarly catalogue that was published entitled *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

Curatorial records in this record group document the research, planning, and activities of staff from 1998 to 2000 for the exhibition entitled *Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips*. Built upon the knowledge gained from two decades of research and study of the permanent collection, *Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips*, was the most comprehensive and ambitious exhibition in the history of The Phillips Collection. The exhibition filled the entire museum with 350 works drawn from the 2,500 American and European paintings, sculptures, and works on paper in the permanent collection, presented in refurbished galleries in the 1897 Georgian Revival house and the Goh Annex. Arranged chronologically by date of acquisition (and thematically), it explored milestones in Phillips's collecting and the evolution of his aesthetic taste over a period of fifty years, from his early purchases in 1916 until his death in 1966. Phillips's correspondence, journals, manuscripts, and ledgers, along with historical photographs were displayed in archival cases to amplify exhibition content.

Organized by The Phillips Collection, the show opened at the museum on September 25, 1999, and remained on view through January 23, 2000. The exhibition was organized by Eliza E. Rathbone, Chief Curator, and Beth Turner, Curator, under the directorship of Jay Gates. Led by Rathbone and Turner, the entire curatorial staff of The Phillips Collection contributed to the exhibition, its installation, presentation, archival materials, and audio guide. Corporate sponsorship for the exhibition came from Merrill Lynch. The show did not travel.

The exhibition was scheduled to coincide with the September 1999 completion date of the lavish catalogue entitled *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*, published by The Phillips Collection in association with Yale University Press. Edited by Erika D. Passantino, the book is both a selected survey of the major European and American works in The Phillips Collection and a study in the development of Duncan Phillips as critic, collector, and patron.

Records in this collection consist mostly of the research and exhibition planning files of chief curator Eliza Rathbone, and curator Beth Turner, as well as a few documents related to the

catalogue. The exhibition began to take shape in a series of planning meetings in 1998 to set the themes and select works to best illustrate those themes. As evidenced in the records, an early working title for the exhibition was: *Modern Art at the Millenium: The Eye of Duncan Phillips*. Meetings were also held with the facilities department to schedule the renovation needed to refurbish the building (both its interior and exterior spaces) and the galleries, since the entire museum was to be given over to the exhibition. The files also document funding efforts; educational and public programs including the Duncan Phillips Lectures, *Artful Evenings*, teacher programs, school tours, and gallery talks; special events, including the Duncan Phillips award presented to Leonard A. Lauder; press coverage; the show's audio guide; and a documentary film on Duncan Phillips produced by WETA for national broadcast on PBS.

CUSTODIAL HISTORY AND ACQUISITION INFORMATION

This collection is owned by The Phillips Collection, and was accessioned from the curators' offices in accordance with the museum's records schedule.

PROCESSING AND DESCRIPTION INFORMATION

Date Processed: July 2011

Processed By: Colleen Hennessey, Archives Assistant, supervised by Karen Schneider, Librarian

Processing Notes: After an initial survey of the collection, some duplicate materials were identified and a number of documents were determined to be of no future reference value for the collection. In discussions with the librarian, approval was given to photocopy documentation, weed duplicate documents (retaining those with hand-written notes), and discard selected drafts. Boxes and folders containing restricted materials were marked with a red dot (see note above re 'restrictions'). Folder headings were maintained when possible, but were re-written in some cases for greater clarity and accuracy. Metal fasteners were removed and replaced with plastic clips when needed. Post Its were photocopied if necessary, or otherwise removed. All documents were re-folded into acid free folders.

Finding Aid Written By: Colleen Hennessey, Archives Assistant, supervised by Karen Schneider, Librarian

RELATED MATERIAL

The Phillips Collection Archives includes Duncan Phillips's correspondence, manuscripts, and journals as well as the correspondence of Marjorie Phillips and other staff members associated with the early years of the museum. In addition, exhibition material assembled by the research office is now housed in The Phillips Collection Archives, including a folder for *Renoir to Rothko: The Eye of Duncan Phillips*. Contact Karen Schneider, Librarian, regarding access.

The Phillips Collection Archives
1600 21st Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20009
Phone: 202-387-2151
Email: <http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/archives/index.aspx>

In 1979, some of The Phillips Collection's original correspondence was given to the Archives of American Art, which microfilmed the correspondence. The Phillips Collection Archives and the Archives of American Art have the microfilmed versions that are available to scholars.

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. Research Center
Mailing Address:
P.O. Box 37012
Victor Building, Suite 2200, MRC 937
Washington, D. C. 20013-7012
Phone: 202-633-79440
Email: <http://www.aaa.si.edu/>

ARRANGEMENT OF THE COLLECTION

The collection is organized into three major series.

- Series 1: Research
- Series 2: Catalogue
- Series 3: Exhibition Planning

Box Inventory

Series I Research, 1914-1999 and undated

Series I file folders contain a small amount of printed material (photocopies), mostly regarding Duncan Phillips and other collectors (Albert Barnes; Henry Clay Frick; Alfred H. Barr). Included are newspaper clippings, catalogues (some with annotations by Duncan Phillips); and diagrams of art. Particularly informative also are notes and lists prepared by Librarian Karen Schneider that provide references to various archival materials. For further research material on Duncan Phillips, see also Series 3 (folders 18-19), regarding cases of archival documents and installation of the Reading Room.

Also in this series is a typescript review by Leo J. O'Donovan of MOMA's 1999 exhibition on Jackson Pollock, entitled "Comet / Jackson Pollock and Twentieth Century American Art."

Box I

Primary archival research materials (photocopies)	
Folder 1	Internal memorandum and notes, 1998-1999 (some with excerpts and copies of primary documents)
Folder 2	List – Duncan Phillips’s correspondence with artists, dealers, critics and intellectuals, undated (with copies of correspondence, 1918-1966)
Folder 3	List – archival items relating to Monet, Twachtman, Renoir, Bonnard, and early history of the collection, 1999 (with copies of Bonnard letters, 1931-1942)
Folder 4	List – Tack archival material, undated (with copies of documents, 1914-1949)
Folder 5	List – regarding Duncan Phillips’s role outside of The Phillips Collection: awards, committees/boards, and lectures delivered, 1998
Folder 6	List – selected important letters, A-K, 1920-1923 – Microfilm Roll 1929, undated
Folder 7	Microfilm citations, undated
Folder 8	Quotations from Duncan Phillips’s writings, undated
Folder 9	Various primary documents (copies), 1919-1985
Secondary research materials (photocopies)	
Folder 10	Clippings, 1995-1999
Folder 11	Printed material, with diagrams of art, 1927-1940, and undated
Folder 12	Review (typescript) of MOMA’s 1999 exhibition on Jackson Pollock, by Leo J. O’Donovan, undated

Series 2 Catalogue, 1998-2000

Series 2 includes a few documents related to the lavish 1999 catalogue entitled *The Eye of Duncan Phillips: A Collection in the Making*, whose publication inspired the exhibition. Editor Erika D. Passantino had from 1986 to 1995 directed the research, writing, and editing of the book, and brought the manuscript to its final stages. Under the directorship of Jay Gates, Yale University Press was the co-publisher, and Johanna Halford-MacLeod, Director of Programming and Publications, brought the work to publication, assisted by Leigh Bullard Weisblat, former assistant curator and member of the research office.

Series 2 is comprised of only a few scant items, thus, the bulk of the materials may be found elsewhere in other departmental records.

Box I cont’d.	Folder 13	Letter (outgoing) – book bid solicitation, 1998
	Folder 14	Visitor comment regarding p. 394; catalogue review, 2000

Series 3 Exhibition Planning, 1984-2002 (bulk 1998-2000)

Series 3 files document the planning and implementation of the exhibition. The exhibition brochure is helpful because it includes a complete floor plan of the show from the first floor of the original house to the third floor annex, and it lists the artists whose works were on display in those spaces. It highlights the development of the museum's physical environment and illustrates how for the first time in more than a decade, visitors entered the doors at 1600 21st Street which were reopened as the main entrance for the duration of the exhibition. Installation files provide further information on the appearance of the exhibition.

This marked the first time that an audio guide had been created for an exhibition of this scale at The Phillips Collection, and Series 3 includes documentation with Antenna Audio who produced the guide using the latest CD-ROM technology. There is also documentation in this series about the hour-long documentary film produced in relation to the exhibition, sponsored by the Eugene B. Casey Foundation. Filmed and created for high-definition television, narrated by actor Paul Newman, the documentary aired on PBS stations. In connection with this special exhibition, the first Duncan Phillips Medal was awarded to New York art collector Leonard A. Lauder. Press clippings in this series document the event.

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|--|
| Box 1 cont'd. | Folder 15 | Audio – correspondence with Antenna Audio; signed approval form for audio gallery guide script; CD disc, 1999 |
| | Folders 16-17 | Audio – audio scripts, 1999-2002 (?) |
| | Folder 18 | Brochure (provides floor plans and lists artists displayed in each gallery), 1999 |
| Box 2 | Folder 1 | Budgets, 1998-1999 [restricted]
See also: Funding, box 2, folder 8
See also: Installation & renovation, box 2, folder 13 |
| | Folder 2 | Checklists – working lists, 1999
See also: Press kit for final checklist, box 3, folder 5 |
| | Folder 3 | Correspondence (mostly incoming letters) – positive commentary [including letter from Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Elizabeth Turner], 1999-2000 |
| | Folder 4 | Documentary film, <i>The Eye of Duncan Phillips</i>
– producer/director agreement draft, 1999 [restricted]
– preliminary budget, 1999 [restricted]
– interviewee contact information, 1999 [restricted] |
| | Folder 5 | Documentary film, <i>The Eye of Duncan Phillips</i>
– correspondence, 1999
– lists of interview candidates considered, undated
– script drafts, 1999
See also: Special events (premiere), box 3, folder 13 |
| | Folder 6 | Education – docents, 1999
See also: Programs, box 3, folders 2-3 |

Box 2 cont'd.	Folder 7	Exhibition meetings and curatorial retreat, 1998-1999
	Folder 8	Funding – budget and marketing proposals; text draft for funding purposes, 1998 and undated [restricted]
	Folder 9	Funding – correspondence, 1999 [restricted]
	Folder 10	Funding – Merrill Lynch contract (unsigned copy), 1999 [restricted]
	Folder 11	Funding – NEH application, 1984-1999 [restricted]
	Folder 12	Installation & renovation – internal planning; building & grounds committee minutes, 1999
	Folder 13	Installation & renovation – proposal bids for architectural design, lighting, and landscape services – Gordon Anson, 1999 [restricted] – Bovis, Inc. (brochures), undated – Oehme, van Sweden & Associates, 1998 [restricted] – Scott Rosenfeld, 1999 [restricted] – Threshold Studio, 1998 [restricted]
	Folder 14	Installation & renovation – proposal bid (accepted), design schedule, budget costs, & invoices – Arch - et al, 1999 [restricted]
	Folder 15	Installation & renovation – room drawings, floor plans & elevations (Val Lewton for Arch - et al), 1999 and undated
	Folder 16	Installation & renovation – wall colors, 1999 and undated
	Folder 17	Installation & renovation – conservation issues, 1999
	Folder 18	Installation & renovation – objects, undated
Box 3	Folder 1	Installation & renovation – archival items, 1999
	Folder 2	Installation & renovation – reading room, 1999
	Folder 3	Loans, 1999 [restricted] – Archives of American Art – The Art Students League – Century Association Foundation
	Folder 4	Membership – newsletter draft, undated
	Folder 5	Opening events – invitation lists, undated [restricted]
	Folder 6	Programs – planning; statistical reports, 1998-2000 See also: Budgets, box 2, folder 1
	Folder 7	Programs – brochure; lecture series list, 1999

- Box 3 cont'd.** Folder 8 Programs – lecturer contract & correspondence
 – William C. Agee, 1999 [restricted]
 – Peter Conrad, 1999-2000 [restricted]
 – William H. Goetzmann, 1999 [restricted]
 – Erika D. Passantino, 1999 [restricted]
 – Charles Rosen, 1999-2000 [restricted]
 – Robert Rosenblum, 1999-2000 [restricted]
 – Witold Rybczynski, 1999-2000 [restricted]
 – Kenneth Silver, 1999 [restricted]
- Folder 9 Public relations – press kit, 1999
- Folders 10-13 Public relations – press clippings; articles; online coverage, 1999-2000 and undated
- Folder 14 Public relations – marketing outreach, 1999
- Folder 15 Public relations – media interviews, 1999
- Folder 16 Rack card (printed handout) and text drafts, 1999
- Folder 17 Special events – film premiere, invitation, 5 Nov. 1999
- Folder 18 Wall text and case labels, 1999
- Folder 19 Writings and notes – early planning, 1998
- Folder 20 Writings and notes – (drafts) overview; walkthrough narrative; labels, 1999 and undated
