

Collection Title: Ruth Armer Collection

Dates: c. 1912-1979

Collection Number: SFAI.045.Armer, Ruth

Creator: Ruth Armer

Extent: One document box (containing 11 folders), approximately 0.35 linear feet.

Repository: San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive

Abstract: This is a collection of materials related to the life and work of Ruth Armer (1896-1977), a San Francisco based artist who was a student at the California School of Fine Arts (later known as the San Francisco Art Institute) and later taught at the school and served on its Board of Trustees. This is an eclectic collection with ephemera from various stages of her life. It includes transcripts from her time as a student at the California School of Fine Arts, receipts and letters pertaining to the business side of her art, photographs, a draft of a children's story she wrote, sketches and artwork by herself and other artists, exhibition catalogs, clippings, and materials related to her death and subsequent bequest to the San Francisco Art Institute.

Language of Material: English

Access Use and Restrictions: The collection is open for research use.

Publication Rights: Contact the San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive for questions or requests regarding use of these materials.

Preferred Citation: [Identification of item] Ruth Armer Collection (SFAI.045.Armer, Ruth). Folder [x], Box 1, San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive.

Biography:

Ruth Armer (1896-1977) was born and raised in San Francisco. In 1914, at the age of seventeen she became a student at the San Francisco Institute of Art's California School of Design (later known as the San Francisco Art Institute). Later, she moved to New York to join the Art Students League and also took classes at Parsons School of Design. She began her artistic career painting landscapes. Her interest was not in literal reproductions of a scene, but in the relationships between objects and the sensations aroused: "Feelings that nature pressed upon me were my theme" (from her chapter in *Art and Artist*, 1956, University of California Press). She also painted portraits and abstract works, and was a lithographer. Her art was

influenced by her experience living in California, and her subject matter included the California desert and cityscapes of San Francisco. She was also inspired by music, finding that certain composers evoked certain images and feelings, which she painted. Her career as an exhibiting artist spanned from 1922 to 1977.

From 1933-1940 Ruth Armer joined the faculty of the California School of Fine Arts. She taught drawing, painting, design, and children's Saturday classes. She went on to serve on the Board of Trustees from 1945-1951, 1955-1956, 1960-1967, and 1969-1972. In June 1977 she was elected as an Honorary Trustee in recognition of her many years of service to the school. She was also active with the San Francisco Society of Women Artists during the 1940s and 1950s, serving as a director from 1950-1952 and frequently exhibiting in their annual show. Upon her death in August 1977, she left a substantial bequest to the San Francisco Art Institute; at the time, it was the largest bequest ever received by the school and was slated to be used to fund student scholarships.

System of Organization:

This collection is organized by type of material and chronologically within each folder when dates are available.

Scope and Content of Collection:

This is a collection of materials related to the life and work of Ruth Armer, a San Francisco based artist who was a student at the California School of Fine Arts (later known as the San Francisco Art Institute) and went on to teach at the school and serve on its Board of Trustees. This is an eclectic collection with ephemera from various stages of her life. It includes her transcripts from her time as a student at the California School of Fine Arts, receipts and letters pertaining to the business side of her art, photographs, a draft of a children's story she wrote, sketches and artwork by herself and other artists, exhibition catalogs, clippings, and materials related to her death and subsequent bequest to the San Francisco Art Institute. Much of the material is undated, but the earliest dated item comes from 1912 and the latest from 1979.

Access points/Indexing Terms:**Subjects**

- Art
- Painting
- Lithography

Personal and Corporate Names

- Armer, Ruth
- San Francisco Art Institute
- San Francisco Institute of Art
- California School of Design

Related Materials:

Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art Oral History with Ruth Armer:
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-ruth-armer-13090#overview>

Ruth Armer Papers at the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art:
<https://sova.si.edu/search/ark:/65665/mw92460344a39374a919d4bdde14560d916>

Ruth Armer Papers at the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life:
http://magnesalm.org/notebook_fext.asp?site=magnes&book=156723

Frankenstein, Alfred, et al., editors. *Art and Artist*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 1956.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8306224>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2024.

San Francisco Society of Women Artist Collection at the San Francisco Art Institute Legacy Foundation + Archive:
<https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8qn6fp6/?query=san+francisco+society+of+women+artists>

Acquisition: The bulk of this material was donated to the San Francisco Art Institute by Ruth Armer's husband, Joseph Bransten, upon her death. The rest were items belonging to the San Francisco Art Institute (i.e., transcripts) or collected by the institute (i.e., clippings, exhibition catalogs).

Level of Description: Folder level description

Processed by: Jenny Fosket

Container List:

Box 1, Folder 1: Academic Transcripts and Employment References, 1914-1937

- 1914 record of enrollment.
- 1915 record of enrollment.
- 1915 summer enrollment record.
- 1918-1919 record of enrollment.
- Series of letters from 1937 recommending Ruth Armer as an art instructor at the San Francisco College for Women.

Box 1, Folder 2: Exhibitions 1940-1975

- Clipping about a Ruth Armer exhibit at Beatrice Judd Ryan's Rotunda Gallery in San Francisco's City of Paris Department Store in 1940.
- Review of a group exhibition which included Ruth Armer at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1950.
- Copies of 1958 and 1959-60 catalogs of the Art Bank of the SFAA featuring Ruth Armer.

- Poster from a 1962 exhibit of Ruth Armer at Bolles Gallery with sculpture by James Malott.
- Announcement for a reception for an exhibit of Ruth Armer Acrylic Paintings at the Quay Gallery February 6, 1975.

Box 1, Folder 3: Death (1977, 1979)

This folder contains items relating to Ruth Armer's death on August 29, 1977 including:

- Two copies of a catalog of a Ruth Armer retrospective held at the Braunstein Gallery in 1979, which includes odes to Ruth's friendship, work, and mentorship by several artists.
- A press release about Ruth Armer's bequest to the San Francisco Art Institute.
- A press release about Ruth Armer's death.
- A statement made by the Board of Trustees of the San Francisco Art Institute on the election of Ruth Armer as an honorary trustee, re-released after her death.
- A clipping from the San Francisco *Examiner* about Ruth Armer's death.
- Letters from Ruth Armer's public relations person about how they want her death and bequest to be covered.

Box 1, Folder 4: Children's Story, n.d.

This folder contains two undated drafts of a children's story entitled, *Mrs. Racoon and her Triplets* by Ruth Armer.

- One draft is handwritten and the other is typed.

Box 1, Folder 5: Photographs

- Ten black and white photographs
 - One labeled, "Alice and Uncle Joe, Margaret on porch, San Rafael".
 - One labeled, "Distinguished California painter Ruth Armer, 1896-1977. Photo, circa 1972".
 - The rest are unlabeled and undated.

Box 1, Folder 6: Museum Rentals, 1967

- Paperwork (letters, receipts) related to rental agreements of Ruth Armer's artwork from 1967.

Box 1, Folder 7: Quay Gallery, 1964-1976

This folder contains material related to the operation of the Quay Gallery.

- Receipt notebook labeled Quay Gallery most undated, but those dated include 1964, 1972, and 1976.
- Two 1964 letters to Quay Gallery artists from Ruth (presumably Braunstein, the owner of the gallery) regarding expenses and commissions.

Box 1, Folder 8: Drawings, n.d.

- Four drawings without any attribution or titles, but which were said to be by Ruth Armer in the original collection list.

- One sketchbook (4X6) with four drawings, also without any attribution or titles, but which were said to be by Ruth Armer in the original collection list.

Box 1, Folder 9: Artwork by Others, 1912-1924

A collection of works by other artists gifted to Ruth Armer including:

- Levy, William A., "The Harp of the Winds," etching, 1912.
- Kihn, Wilford L., "Indian," painting, dated February, 1921.
- Gerstle, Miriam, "London, May 1921," etching.
- Gerstle, Miriam, etching of a woman.
- Scammon. L. N., "A Christmas Remembrance from Mr. & Mrs. Erwin H. Furman," etching of a sailboat on a bay.
- Scammon. L. N., "A Christmas Remembrance from Mr. & Mrs. Erwin H. Furman," etching of a building, 1924.
- Boas, Benjamin, Christmas card with etching of a sailboat.
- Sweet, Ralph, Christmas Card, etching of a donkey.
- Sweet, Ralph, "Sand Dunes," etching.
- Rudy, wash drawing.
- Smyth, Jane, Christmas card, drawing.
- Seven untitled/attribution drawings, etchings, and watercolors.
- A postcard from Robin.
- A Jim Crack Toys pamphlet signed to Ruth.

Box 1, Folder 10: Address Book and Correspondence, 1976

- Address book with phone numbers and some other notes slipped in.
- Correspondence about donations received by the San Francisco Art Institute from Ruth Armer's friends in honor of her 80th birthday in 1976.

Box 1, Folder 11: Supporting Materials

This folder contains various materials relating to the collection or to Ruth Armer including:

- The list of items belonging to Ruth Armer that were donated to the San Francisco Art Institute by her husband, Joseph Bransten.
- A copy of the chapter in the book, *Art and Artist* in which Ruth Armer describes her art and art practice, culled from an interview with Ernest Mundt. Frankenstein, Alfred, et al., editors. *Art and Artist*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 1956. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.8306224>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2024.
- Notes about Ruth Armer's life, career, and involvement with the CSFA/SFAI.