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Guide to the James Tiroff Notebooks and Art Works

YCAL MSS 358



by Susan Brady

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 358

CREATOR: Tiroff, James, 1939-1975

TITLE: James Tiroff notebooks and art works

DATES: 1962-1966

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1.5 linear feet (4 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The James Tiroff notebooks and art works document Tiroff's experiences touring Europe as an actor and designer with the avant-garde theatre company the Living Theatre between 1964 and 1966.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.tiroff>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.tiroff>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Maggs Brothers Ltd. on the Adele Gutman Nathan Theatrical Collection Fund, 2009.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The James Tiroff Notebooks and Art Works is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

James Tiroff Notebooks and Art Works. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

James Tiroff (1939-1975)

James Francis Tiroff was born in Alice, Texas, in 1939. A visual artist, musician, and theatre designer and performer, he was a member of the Living Theatre from the late 1950s, and toured Europe with the company in the 1960s. Before travelling to Europe, Tiroff became a Universal Life Church minister, and was referred to by company members as Reverend Jim. He died of a heroin overdose in 1975.

Scope and Contents

The James Tiroff Notebooks and Art Works document Tiroff's experiences in Europe as an actor and designer with the avant-garde theatre company the Living Theatre between 1964 and 1966. During these years the company was "in exile" from its home base in New York City, following a guilty verdict against directors Julian Beck and Judith Malina on charges of federal tax evasion. They lost their appeal and served sixty and thirty days, respectively, while the company remained in Europe. Tiroff's ten notebooks contain diary entries describing the Living Theatre company travels, rehearsals, and performances. Notes of company meetings and discussions on a variety of topics often include quotes from Beck and Malina. Productions documented in the notebooks include *The Brig*, *The Balcony*, *The Maids*, *Frankenstein*, and *Mysteries and Smaller Pieces*. Tiroff also details his personal experiences with fellow company members and acquaintances including preparation of meals, impromptu music sessions, sexual encounters, alcohol and drug use, and confrontations with police.

Accompanying the diary accounts (and frequently forming collages within the notebooks) are letters to Tiroff from friends and family members; photographs of Tiroff and others; pen and ink and watercolor abstract illustrations and drawings of people, production costumes and sets, and theatre floor plans; and ephemera including performance programs and handbills, train schedules, ticket stubs, hotel business cards, postcards, and newspaper clippings, maps, and organic material. Several letters from Malina and Beck in January of 1965, during their incarceration in the United States, sent to company members in Belgium, describe how set and costume designs should be constructed for *The Maids*. One folder of Living Theatre performance programs and Tiroff's Italian motorcycle registration papers follow the notebooks. Tiroff's art works within sketchbooks and as single sheets include pen-and-ink drawings of Living Theatre productions, nudes, and oil and watercolor portraits, including one self-portrait.

Arrangement

Organized into two series: I. Notebooks, 1962-1966. II. Art Works, 1965-1966.

Collection Contents

Series I: Notebooks, 1962-1966

0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

Arranged in chronological order.

b. 1, f. 1-6	Notebooks	1964 August- 1965 August
b. 2, f. 7-10	Notebooks	1965 August - 1966 August
b. 2, f. 11	Living Theatre performance programs	1965, undated
b. 2, f. 12	Italian motorcycle registration	1962-1965

Series II: Art Works, 1965-1966*0.67 linear feet (2 boxes)*

Arranged by type and date of work.

b. 3, f. 13-20	Pen-and-ink/watercolor/crayon drawings (loose and bound in sketchbooks)	1965-1966, undated
b. 4, f. 21	Oil/watercolor portraits	1965, undated
b. 4, f. 22	Watercolor portraits	1965
b. 4, f. 23	Oil/watercolor/pen-and-ink drawings	1965

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Costume design
Counterculture
Experimental theater -- United States -- 20th
Century
Nineteen sixties
Set designers -- United States
Theaters -- Stage-setting and scenery

Genres / Formats

Collages (visual works)
Drawings (visual works)
Portraits
Scrapbooks
Sketchbooks
Watercolors (paintings)

Names

Beck, Julian, 1925-1985
Malina, Judith, 1926-2015
Tiroff, James, 1939-1975

Corporate Body

Living Theatre (New York, N.Y.)