

Guide to the Selden Rodman Papers

MS 871



compiled by Annemarie Strassel

August 2003

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
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CALL NUMBER: MS 871

CREATOR: Rodman, Selden, 1909-2002

TITLE: Selden Rodman papers

DATES: 1935-2000

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 5.26 linear feet

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of published and unpublished writings, correspondence with a small number of acclaimed writers and artists, and handwritten journals kept between 1938 and 2000 that document the career and personal life of Selden Rodman.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0871>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.0871>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Selden Rodman, 1979-1997. Gift of the Estate of Selden Rodman, 2003. Gift of Richard Emmet Aaron, 2007.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Selden Rodman Papers (MS 871). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

Selden Rodman was born February 19, 1909, in New York City to architect Cary Selden and wealthy socialite Nannie Van Nostrand (Marvin) Rodman. In 1927, Rodman went to Yale, where he helped found and edit the sardonic *Harkness Hoot*, and graduated in 1931.

After graduation and a transformative tour of Europe that included a stop in the Soviet Union, Rodman and traveling companion Alfred Bingham founded *Common Sense* (1932-1946), a "magazine of social protest," which boasted contributing editors like John Dewey, Upton Sinclair, Roger Baldwin, Lewis Mumford, and Max Eastman. The magazine posed a radical challenge to the politics of the New Deal, "attempting to find a place independent of both old liberalism and the newly fashionable intellectual Marxism," according to Bingham. In *The Politics of Upheaval*, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. described the monthly political magazine as the "most lively and interesting forum of radical discussion in the country." While Bingham oversaw political and economic commentary, Rodman handled cultural matters, persuading writers like John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, and W. H. Auden to contribute to the magazine. Rodman continued his work with *Common Sense* until enlisting in 1943, serving first in an automatic weapons battalion and later as master sergeant in the foreign nationalities section of the Office of Strategic Services.

During the war, Rodman made a trip to Haiti as an intelligence officer in 1944, when his play *The Revolutionists* was produced by the Haitian government. The play was such a diplomatic success that shortly after the war the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs sponsored a second trip to Haiti, where he became co-director for the Haitian Centre d'Art (1949-1951). In this position, he directed and decorated the Episcopal Cathedral of St. Trinité and initiated the famous mural painting movement in Haiti. During his tenure, Haitian folk art and famous outsider artists, like Hector Hyppolite, achieved international renown.

While posted in Washington D.C. during the war, Rodman made his entree into the world of contemporary American art, meeting influential art critic Clement Greenberg, Peggy Guggenheim, and Sam Rosenberg. By the 1950s, Rodman had become president of the Haitian Art Center in New York City and was quickly incorporated into both American art and literary circles—now internationally acclaimed with the ascendancy of American abstract expressionism and Beat poetry. Rodman interviewed many of these emerging artists and poets, including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Allen Ginsberg, Franz Kline, and Mark Rothko for numerous publications including *Conversations with Artists* (1957) and *Tongues of Fallen Angels* (1972). Rodman also wrote a humanist's critique of these same abstract expressionists in his book *The Insiders* (1960), which denounced the artistic movement as void of content and championed instead figural artists like Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, Ben Shawn, and Mark Tobey as the truly great contemporary American artists.

By 1960, Rodman had turned his attention to Latin America, returning first to Haiti and then traveling throughout Central and South America for the next fifteen years to publish travel guides and books on both the modern and folk arts of Latin America. While maintaining his permanent residence in Oakland, New Jersey, Rodman traveled to Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, throughout the Caribbean, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador, where he befriended famous writers and artists, such as Diego Rivera, Octavio Paz, and Pablo Neruda. Following this tour, Rodman settled part-time in Haiti until 1992, writing plays and histories of Haitian art, expanding his private art collection, and coordinating exhibitions of Haitian art in Haiti and in the United States. In so doing, Rodman became a leading expert on Haitian art and culture.

During his lifetime, Rodman had many romantic interests, marrying Eunice Clark in 1933, Hilda Clausen in 1938, writer Maia Wojciechowska in 1950, and journalist, poet, and playwright Carole Cleaver in 1962. He had one daughter with Maia, Oriana ("Beebe"), and two children with Carole, daughter Carla Pamela and son Van Nostrand.

Rodman spent his remaining years with his fourth wife Carole in Oakland, New Jersey. Having already written over forty books, plays, and exhibition catalogs in his lifetime, Rodman published his final book, *Geniuses & Other Eccentrics*, in 1997—a fitting recollection of his many celebrated friends. Selden Rodman died November 2, 2002.

Scope and Contents

Selden Rodman was a prolific and versatile writer of poetry, plays and prose, political commentary, art criticism, Latin American and Caribbean history, biography, and travel writing - publishing a book almost every year of his adult life. The papers consist of a number of miscellaneous published and unpublished works, correspondence with acclaimed writers and artists, as well as handwritten journals kept between 1938 and 2000, which document his personal life and contain notes for many of his written publications.

Social, intellectual, and cultural historians alike will find much of benefit in Rodman's journals and correspondence. The journals document Rodman's ties to a variety of literary and artistic luminaries of the last century, including James Agee, Theodore Dreiser, W. H. Auden, Robert Frost, Jackson Pollock, Andrew Wyeth, Ernest Hemingway, Edward Hopper, Willem de Kooning, e.e. cummings, Diego Rivera, Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, Octavio Paz, and Pablo Neruda and will be of interest to historians of twentieth-century art and culture. Historians of the Old Left may be interested in his evolving political consciousness and personal contacts formed while working with *Common Sense*, his critical and incisive accounts of the military's pervasive anti-semitism and anti-communism during World War II, and his struggles to maintain his political and artistic ideals in a politically and culturally conservative postwar context. Rodman's fascination with and travels to Haiti, specifically, and Latin America more broadly, may be of interest to historians studying the work of American intellectuals in Latin America. On a more personal side, Rodman had many romantic interests during his lifetime, and historians of gender and sexuality may be interested in, amongst other things, Rodman's frank representation of his relationships with women, sexual encounters, and extra-marital affairs. Moreover, Rodman's sustained engagement with current affairs and the remarkable span of his journals, which literally cover everything from the bombing of Pearl Harbor to that in Oklahoma City, gives readers one individual's perspective on some of the most important moments in twentieth-century American history.

Arrangement

Arranged in three series and one addition: I. Correspondence, 1944-1984; II. Journals, 1938-2000; III. Writings, 1951-1986.

Collection Contents

Series I: Correspondence, 1944-1984

Arranged alphabetically, the series includes correspondence with and/or other materials about important literary and artistic figures, including Ernest Hemingway and Andrew Wyeth. These letters and notes range from standard business transactions to heated exchanges with artist and critic Leonard Baskin.

	Baskin, Leonard	
b. 1, f. 1	Correspondence	1952-1962, undated
b. 1, f. 2	Works by Leonard Baskin	1957-1967, undated
b. 1, f. 3	Printed material about Leonard Baskin	1960-1964, undated
b. 1, f. 4	Diamond, Lois	1981-1982
	Ginsberg, Allen	
b. 1, f. 5	Correspondence	1960-1973
b. 1, f. 6	Incomplete manuscript about Allen Ginsberg by Selden Rodman	1973?
	Ginsberg, Louis	
b. 1, f. 7	Correspondence	1961-1969
b. 1, f. 8	Works by Louis Ginsberg	1958-1968, undated
b. 1, f. 9	Correspondence about the Ginsbergs	1961, undated
b. 1, f. 10	Printed material about the Ginsbergs	1961-1969, undated
	Hemingway, Mary and Ernest	
b. 1, f. 11	Correspondence	1951-1973
b. 1, f. 12	Correspondence about Ernest Hemingway	1955-1962, undated
b. 1, f. 13	Love poems to Mary Welsh Hemingway by Ernest Hemingway	1944, undated
b. 1, f. 14	Printed material about Hemingway	1952-1972
	Neruda, Pablo	
b. 1, f. 15	Correspondence	1966-1973, undated
b. 1, f. 16	Letter about Pablo Neruda	undated

Neruda, Pablo (continued)

b. 1, f. 17	Printed material about Pablo Neruda	1966-1969, undated
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Paz, Octavio

b. 1A, f. 1	Correspondence A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1959-1982, undated
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b. 1A, f. 2	Correspondence about Octavio Paz A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.	1972, undated
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b. 1A, f. 3	Printed material about Octavio Paz	1972-1984, undated
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b. 1A, f. 4	Manuscript entitled "Octavio Paz" by Selden Rodman	1973
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Wyeth, Andrew

b. 1A, f. 5	Correspondence	1956, undated
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b. 1A, f. 6	Correspondence about Andrew Wyeth from David Rockefeller	1960
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b. 1A, f. 7	Incomplete manuscript about Andrew Wyeth	undated
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b. 1A, f. 8	Printed matter about Andrew Wyeth	1963-1973, undated
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Series II: Journals, 1938-2000

Selden Rodman kept detailed handwritten journals for most of his adult life and the series includes journals dating from 1938-1945 and 1956-2000. In these diaries, Rodman includes notes related to his numerous book projects and creative endeavors, commentary on current events and popular culture, frank accounts of his personal relationships, and records of his travels throughout Central and South America, Europe, and the United States. The journals are organized chronologically and many are listed using Rodman's own titles, which are included in quotations. The inventory also provides brief annotations of each journal.

While his journals often contain many or all of these elements, they can be roughly divided into four periods. Journals dating from 1938-1945 document Rodman's political stances developed during his tenure at *Common Sense*, the mounting tensions leading up to the war, and his experiences in service during World War II. By the 1950s, Rodman's interests had turned to contemporary art and architecture, and journals kept between 1956 and 1960 record both his evolving humanistic aesthetic philosophy and numerous conversations with important twentieth-century Mexican and American artists. Between 1960 and 1975, Rodman traveled extensively throughout Central and South America, documenting in his journals the cultural values, political climate, economic conditions, and artistic achievements of the places he visited - much of which he used in later published travel books and art criticism. Rodman had significant ties to Haiti throughout his life, and between 1976 and 1993 Rodman lived part-time in Haiti, writing several plays and advocating internationally for the country's popular artists. Journals from this period, however, deal more consistently with his troubled family life and personal affairs. The last set of journals from 1994 to 2000, kept while living back at his permanent residence in Oakland, New Jersey, are more difficult to define topically, but demonstrate a sustained engagement with contemporary politics and popular culture and poignantly reveal a growing sense of mortality.

b. 2, f. 1	1938 - 1943; HAITI, Frost, Spender, Faulkner [political philosophy as developed in <i>Common Sense</i> ; Conversations with modern American poets (James Agee, W. H. Auden, Theodore Dreiser, Christopher Isherwood, etc.); Notes for <i>The Airmen</i> (1941); documents anxieties in years leading up to WWII and early years in Army; first trip to South America; marriage to Hilda Clausen; ends with interviews from 1948-1951 with Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Faulkner, and Ernest Hemingway]
b. 2, f. 2	"1943-45: WAR" [Records experiences in the war, including commentary on culture of armed officers; notes for and critical reception of <i>The Revolutionists</i> (1942); life in Washington D.C. working with Office of Strategic Services; early contact with American art scene and critics (Peggy Guggenheim, Sam Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg)] English
b. 2, f. 3 - 4	"1956: ARTISTS; West Coast", "May-Oct 56; ARTISTS": [interviews with American artists and architects such as Jackson Pollock, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt and Edward Hopper for <i>Conversations with Artists</i> (1957); relationship w/ 3rd wife, Maia Wojciechowska] English A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy.
b. 2, f. 5 - 6	"MEX: 1956-1957," "1957: MEX Feb.-Apr.," and "MEX II: Yucatan, Jan '57" [travel diaries with notes used for <i>Mexican Journal: The Conquerors Conquered</i> (1958); includes interviews w/ Diego Rivera] English
b. 3, f. 7	"ARTISTS 1959 Jan-August": [notes for <i>The Insiders</i> (1960), a critique of abstract expressionism and treatise on humanism in art] English
b. 3, f. 8	"1959 Aug-Dec 31; HAITI; Artists, EE Cum": [notes on travels across country and Haiti with daughter, Oriana ("Beebe")] English

b. 3, f. 9	"1960 Jan-Dec": [budding relationship with eventual fourth wife, Carole Cleaver. Conversations with Norman Mailer, Arthur Schlesinger, and Bruce Neuman] English
b. 3, f. 10 - 11	1960 (Sep) - 1961 (May), "1961 June-Oct" [return to poetry; writes <i>The Heart of Beethoven</i> (1962); notes on pressures to conform in Cold War context; reflections on his relationship w/ women]
b. 3, f. 12	"Jan-Sept 1961-2 HAITI" [on romantic relationships, art, and travels through Haiti] English
b. 3, f. 13	"1962 Apr-July; MEXICO Interioristas": [travels in Mexico] English
b. 3, f. 14	"1962 July-Nov.": [life at home in Oakland, New Jersey] English
b. 3, f. 15	"MEX-GUAT 1963-1964 [embarks on tour of Central America, traveling to Mexico and Guatemala with wife Carole and infant daughter Carla. Includes more interviews with artists, commentary on tourist industry, and notes for <i>The Guatemala Traveler</i> (1967)] English
b. 4, f. 16	"DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 1963 Jan-Apr": [travel diary concerned especially with political instability in the aftermath of dictator Rafael Trujillo's assassination] English
b. 4, f. 17	"64 MEX Feb-Jun": [conversations with Mexican artists and scholars] English
b. 4, f. 18	"1964 July-Dec": [at home in Oakland, New Jersey; meets Allen Ginsberg and introduced to "The Metro," a Beat poetry collective] English
b. 4, f. 19	"Guatemala, Dec 64-Apr 65": [documents travels throughout Central America, including Guatemala, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, for <i>The Road to Panama</i> (1966)] English
b. 4, f. 20	"1965 June 2-Oct 22; Rev. in D.R.": [travel diary with continued interest in the political reconstruction of the Dominican Republic] English
b. 5, f. 21	"PERU: Dec 65-Apr 66": [records travels in Peru, with emphasis on the visual arts, the status of indigenous peoples and culture, and the political and economic climate for <i>The Peru Traveler</i> (1967). Includes clippings and ephemera] English
b. 5, f. 22	"1966 May-Nov; D.R., HAITI": [travels to Central American, returning to the Dominican Republic and Haiti] English
b. 5, f. 23	"The Caribbean"; "Appendix to Caribbean Journal": [travels to twenty-five islands in the Caribbean from 1966-1967, documenting culture, racial tensions, economic conditions, and political climate. Later publishes <i>The Caribbean</i> (1968)] English
b. 6, f. 24	"MEXICO": [documents trip to Mexico in 1968 for <i>The Mexico Traveler</i> (1969)] English

b. 6, f. 25	"CHILE . . .", Vol. I, II: [chronicles 1969 cultural tour throughout South America and conversations with many important South American literary figures, including Pablo Neruda, for <i>South America of the Poets</i> (1970)] English
b. 6, f. 26	1970 (Colombia) [records travels in and cultural/political life of Colombia for <i>The Colombian Traveler</i> (1971)]
b. 7, f. 27	"1970 Peru, Chile, Bolivia; Ginsberg, Kunitz, Pippin": [more thoughts on travels through South America as well as early notes for <i>Horace Pippin</i> (1972), co-authored by wife Carole Cleaver] English
b. 7, f. 28	"COLOMBIA . . ." [1971 travel diary from tour of South America; includes clippings and ephemera] English
b. 7, f. 29	"HAITI, BRAZIL; Mailer, Ginsberg, Walcott": [travel diary (Oct 1971- Mar 1972) with notes for <i>The Brazil Traveler</i> (1975); includes supplemental material and ephemera] English
b. 8, f. 30 - 31	1972-1974 (Haiti) [three journals and supplement, which record experiences living in Haiti and thoughts on country's cultural, economic, and political climate; his consulting work for new Haitian art museum; includes clippings, ephemera, and other materials Vol. I and II]
b. 8, f. 32	"1975": [in Haiti and Washington D.C.; includes travel notes, more art theory, critical reception of <i>Tongues of Fallen Angels</i> (1974), and reflections on his relationship with wife and children] English
b. 8, f. 33	1975 Nov-Dec: [travel diary with artist interviews for Genius in the <i>Backlands: Popular Artists of Brazil</i> (1977)]
b. 9, f. 34	1976 Nov-1977 Dec; 1977 Dec-1978 Jun: [self-reflective diaries written mostly while living in Haiti, with focus on troubled marriage and family life]
b. 9, f. 35	1978 Oct-1979 Jul: [first half includes notes from trip with Carole to Germany and Austria on German culture and history; latter half describes return to Haiti and travels in France and Spain]
b. 9, f. 36 - 37	1979 Oct-1980 Jan; 1980 Feb-Aug; 1980 Aug-1981 Jan: [more travels in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Haiti, with ostensible purpose of documenting second renaissance of Haitian art and expanding personal art collection; more focus in all three on troubles with son, Van Nostrand]
b. 10, f. 38	"Renaissance II" Journals 1981 Feb-Nov; 1981 Nov-Mar 1982: [collecting art on various trips to Haiti and mounting traveling exhibition in U.S. titled "Three Generations of Haitian Art;" continued emphasis on troubled family life] English
b. 10, f. 39	"Journal of Two Months of Crisis," 1982 Sep-Nov: [ongoing family tensions climax with wife Carole's attempted suicide] English
b. 10, f. 40 - 45	"Renaissance II" cont'd or "Jacmel, Haiti," 1982 Dec-1983 Nov; 1983 Dec-1984 Apr; 1984 Jun-Nov; 1984 Dec-1985 Mar; 1985 Apr-Oct; 1985 Nov-1986 Apr; 1986 May-Nov; 1986 Nov-1987 Aug; 1987 Aug-Nov; 1987 Nov-1988 Aug: [ten journals from the 1980s kept while living in Jacmel, Haiti; occasional entries on politics or art, but mostly deals with personal matters, including relationship with wife and daughters, extra-marital affairs, and son's ongoing struggle with substance abuse; '85-'86 journal includes notes for autobiography, and final journal discusses controversial 1988 elections in Haiti and American intervention] English

b. 10, f. 46	"Renaissance III," 1988 Aug-Dec: [from Haiti to Puerto Rico] English
b. 11, f. 47	1988 Dec-1989 Dec: [living in Puerto Rico with Carole]
b. 11, f. 48 - 49	1989 Dec-1990 Aug; 1990 Aug-1991 Dec: [returns to Haiti; on personal matters, art, and political instability in Central America]
b. 11, f. 50	1991 Dec-1993 Sep (Puerto Rico and Haiti): [on aging, relationships with extended family, American politics, and popular culture]
b. 11, f. 51	1993 Sep-Dec 1994: [returns from Haiti to Oakland, New Jersey; travels to Russia]
b. 11, f. 52	1994 Dec-1995 Dec: [living in Oakland, New Jersey, but still concerned with Haiti's economic and political status as well as current events nationally and internationally; last third dedicated primarily to dream description and interpretation]
b. 11, f. 53 - 54	1996 Jan-Oct; 1996 Oct-1997 Aug; 1997 Sep-2000 Dec: [journals kept while living in Oakland, New Jersey with wife Carole; final trip to Port-au-Prince to buy art; more dream interpretation, entries on current affairs, and thoughts on aging]

Series III: Writings, 1951-1986

Arranged alphabetically by type of writing, the series includes art exhibition catalogs, an article, a book, correspondence relating to the publication of *The Insiders*, and numerous unpublished plays written between 1972 and 1983.

b. 12, f. 1	Art catalogs	1979-1986
b. 12, f. 2	Article--"Forty Years After: The Nazi Heartland" [published in <i>National Review</i>]	1979
	Books	
b. 12, f. 3 - 4	<i>The Insiders</i> [correspondence and printed materials]	1951-1969
b. 12, f. 5	<i>Tongues of Fallen Angels</i>	1972
	Plays and Screenplays	
b. 12, f. 6	"The Black King," (unpublished screenplay) by Selden Rodman English	1977
b. 12, f. 7	"The Fool of Passion, or What Happened to Lord Byron's Marriage (1812-1816)," (unpublished play) by Selden Rodman English	1983
b. 12, f. 8	"Hustler of the Gods," (unpublished play) by Selden Rodman and Carole Cleaver English	1975
b. 12, f. 9	"The Liberator Liberated, or Bolivar's Dream," (unpublished play) by Selden Rodman English	1976
b. 13, f. 10	"The Phantom Express" (unpublished musical) by Maia Wojciechowska and Selden Rodman English	1982
b. 13, f. 11	"Saint of the Revolution" (unpublished play) by Selden Rodman English	1978
b. 13, f. 12	"Trazom!," (unpublished play) by Selden Rodman English	1985

Accession 2007-M-057: Additional Material, 1935-1948, undated

Correspondence between Hilda Clausen and Selden Rodman.

b. 1, f. 1

Correspondence

1935-1948,
undated

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

Art

Geographic Names

Haiti

Genres / Formats

Diaries

Names

Baskin, Leonard, 1922-2000
Ginsberg, Allen, 1926-1997
Hemingway, Ernest, 1899-1961
Neruda, Pablo, 1904-1973
Paz, Octavio, 1914-1998
Rodman, Selden, 1909-2002
Wyeth, Andrew, 1917-2009