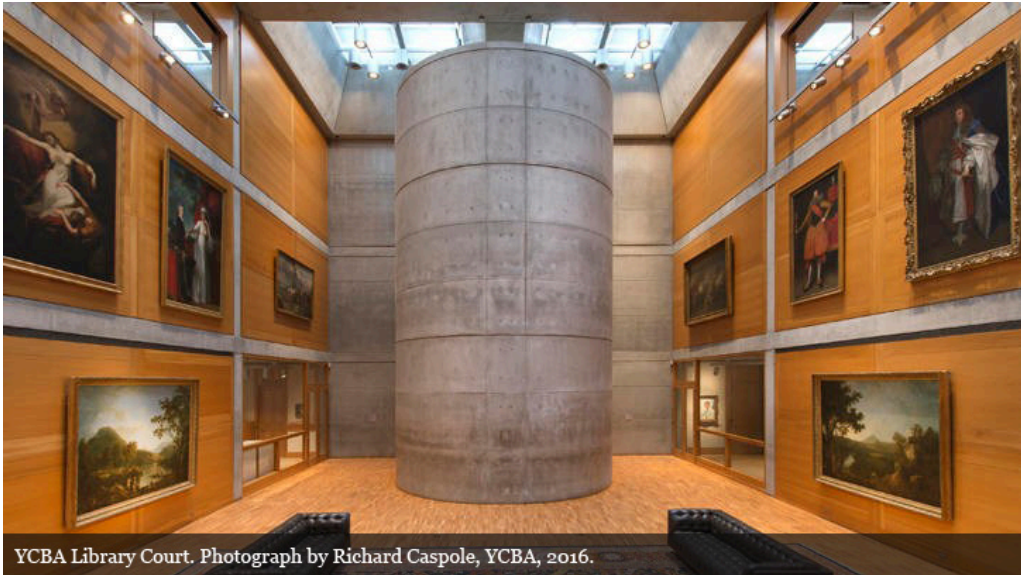


Paul Mellon collection of Basil Taylor papers

S006



YCBA Library Court. Photograph by Richard Caspole, YCBA, 2016.

Cate Peebles and Rebecca Straub

September 13, 2019

Institutional Archives
1080 Chapel Street
P. O. Box 208280
New Haven, CT 06520-8280
(203) 432-8395

ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu

<https://britishart.yale.edu/about-us/departments/institutional-archives>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Administrative Information	3
Conditions Governing Access	3
Preferred Citation	3
Biographical / Historical	4
Scope and Contents	4
Arrangement	4
Selected Search Terms	5

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Yale Center for British Art, Institutional Archives
Institutional Archives
1080 Chapel Street
P. O. Box 208280
New Haven, CT 06520-8280
(203) 432-8395
ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu
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CALL NUMBER: S006

CREATOR: Mellon, Paul

TITLE: Paul Mellon collection of Basil Taylor papers

DATES: 1959-1975

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.5 linear feet (5 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: This collection consists primarily of correspondence between Basil Taylor, Paul Mellon, and Mellon's advisors, including Mellon's first curator, the art dealer John Baskett, regarding the development of Mellon's British art collection. These papers cover the years 1959 through 1975, the year of Taylor's death, with the bulk spanning 1960-1969, the years of Mellon, Baskett, and Taylor's most active collaboration and collection building. The correspondence includes telegrams, letters, lists of artworks from auction houses, and internal memoranda recorded by Mellon's primary secretaries, such as Ethel Orendorff and Beverley Carter. Other significant correspondents represented in the collection are Willis Van Devanter, Mellon's librarian; Leslie Cheek, curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art; various associates at the National Gallery of Art, Agnew's, and Colnaghi; and Dudley Snelgrove, another advisor and curator of British prints and drawings. The correspondence provides insight into Mellon's collecting habits, and it documents the friendship and working relationship between Taylor and Mellon.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.ia.S006>

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is restricted.

Preferred Citation

Paul Mellon collection of Basil Taylor papers. Yale Center for British Art, Institutional Archives.

Biographical / Historical

Paul Mellon (1907-1999) was the son of Pittsburgh financier and former Secretary of the Treasury, Andrew W. Mellon. As a young man, Mellon developed a love for British art, literature and sport, interests that permeated his adult life and philanthropic pursuits. Mellon was a graduate of Yale College ('29) and Cambridge University, where he deepened his knowledge of British Literature and interest in equestrian sports. In partnership with his second wife, Rachel Lambert Mellon (1910 - 2013), Paul Mellon amassed a large collection of rare books and art, much of which was originally displayed at their homes in Virginia, Antigua, Washington D.C., and New York. Paul Mellon's focused collecting of British art began in the late 1950s, and in 1966 he bequeathed his extensive collection of art and rare books to Yale University, along with an endowment that established the Yale Center for British Art, which opened to the public in 1977.

Basil Taylor (1922-1975) was an art historian, writer, and broadcaster. He attended Wadham College, Oxford and the Slade School of Art. From 1945 through 1951 he worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on the series "Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians." He also regularly produced a series titled "The Visual Arts." From 1949 until 1950 he served as the Organizing Secretary of the National Art Collections Fund. In the early 1950s he taught art and architecture at the Royal College of Art (RCA). He became Librarian in 1953 and a Reader in General Studies in 1958. In 1959, collector and philanthropist Paul Mellon approached him to discuss the possibility of expanding his personal collection of British art. Mellon had come to know of Taylor through his work on the catalogue for Sport and the Horse, an exhibition that was held from April 1 - May 15, 1960 at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Mellon served as chair of the British and American committees, and Taylor had prepared the introduction for the text which accompanied the show. According to John Baskett, they quickly developed a system whereby Taylor would examine paintings in London and ask their dealers to send photographs of those works which he thought were suitable for Mellon's consideration. Taylor would then send Mellon a letter accompanying the photographs and occasionally would visit Mellon in America to discuss his progress. Late in 1961 Taylor resigned his position at the RCA and began acting as a full-time advisor to Mellon, though he refused to take a salary for the position. In 1962 he became the Director of the Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, which was based in London but under the financial control of Mellon's Bolligen Foundation and subsequently his Old Dominion Foundation in Washington D.C. In 1969 Taylor stepped down from his position as Director. He died in 1975 at the age of 53.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists primarily of correspondence between Basil Taylor, Paul Mellon, and Mellon's advisors, including Mellon's first curator, the art dealer John Baskett, regarding the development of Mellon's British art collection. These papers cover the years 1959 through 1975, the year of Taylor's death, with the bulk spanning 1960-1969, the years of Mellon, Baskett, and Taylor's most active collaboration and collection building. The correspondence includes telegrams, letters, lists of artworks from auction houses, and internal memoranda recorded by Mellon's primary secretaries, such as Ethel Orendorff and Beverley Carter. Other significant correspondents represented in the collection are Willis Van Devanter, Mellon's librarian; Leslie Cheek, curator at the Virginia Museum of Fine Art; various associates at the National Gallery of Art, Agnew's, and Colnaghi; and Dudley Snelgrove, another advisor and curator of British prints and drawings. The correspondence provides insight into Mellon's collecting habits, and it documents the friendship and working relationship between Taylor and Mellon.

Arrangement

The Paul Mellon collection of Basil Taylor papers is arranged chronologically (1959-1975), with the exception of oversized folders stored in box 1354.

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, British
Art -- Collectors and collecting

Names

Baskett, John
Taylor, Basil