John Graham: Artist and Avatar

Exhibition Records

1988

Finding Aid
CURATORIAL RECORDS IN THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION ARCHIVES

INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Collection Title: John Graham: Artist and Avatar, exhibition records
Author/Creator: The Phillips Collection Curatorial Department. Eleanor “Sue” Green, guest curator; Willem de Looper, exhibition coordinator.
Size: 3 linear feet, 8 boxes
Bulk Dates: 1985-87
Inclusive Dates: 1982-1988
Repository: The Phillips Collection Archives

INFORMATION FOR USERS OF THE COLLECTION

Restrictions: Some material is restricted. Please contact Karen Schneider, Librarian, with any questions regarding access.
Handling Requirements: No special requirements
Preferred Citation: The Phillips Collection Archives, Washington, DC
Publication and Reproduction Rights: See Karen Schneider, Librarian, for further information and to obtain required forms.

ABSTRACT

John Graham: Artist and Avatar exhibition records contain materials created and collected by the Curatorial Department, The Phillips Collection, during the course of organizing the exhibition. Included are correspondence, loan forms, and exhibition planning materials.

HISTORICAL NOTE

John Graham, a painter, collector, and writer who has often been overlooked as an artist, influenced abstract expressionism. Documentation on his early life remains scarce and contradictory. Published sources have widely cited his birthplace as Kiev, Ukraine, but baptismal records indicate that Graham was born Ivan Dombrowski into a noble family in Warsaw, Poland, in 1886 (1887 in the Gregorian calendar). He spent his youth in Kiev, graduating from the University of Kiev in 1907. In World War I he served as a Calvary officer for the Russian Army and was also an officer for the “Whites” or Anti-Bolsheviks during the Russian Civil War. After immigrating to New York City in late 1920 to escape persecution, Dombrowski immersed himself in the local art scene, and ultimately changed his name to John D. Graham. He was known for his extravagant claims, some of which included that he had shared a prison cell with Tsar Nicholas II and that he was the son of the Roman God Jupiter. Graham’s greatest influence in the world of art are perhaps his portraits of cross-eyed women, and his 1937 essay
*Systems and Dialetics of Art*, which had a major influence on Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and other abstract expressionist artists. Among his major patrons were Duncan Phillips, who in 1929 gave Graham his first solo museum exhibition, and Katherine Dreier. Graham died in London in 1961.

*John Graham: Artist and Avatar* was the first major retrospective on Graham’s work. The exhibition came about when an anonymous donor contributed money to conserve and exhibit Graham’s work, with additional support for the exhibition and accompanying catalogue made possible through the National Endowment for the Arts. The exhibit was held at The Phillips Collection from July 9 to September 4, 1988.

**SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION**

Records in this collection document the research and planning that went into the exhibition *John Graham: Artist and Avatar*, organized by the Phillips Collection. The show also had prior stops at the Neuberger Museum, State University of New York at Purchase (June 25 to September 13, 1987); Newport Harbor Art Museum at Newport Beach, California (October 23, 1987 to January 3, 1988); University Art Museum, University of California, Berkley (January 20 to March 20, 1988); and The David and Alfred Smart Gallery of The University of Chicago (April 14 to June 12, 1988).

Starting in 1984, Eleanor “Sue” Green, the guest curator of the exhibition, conducted primary research as well as making initial contacts. She contacted numerous people who had collected Graham’s works including private donors as well as works from various art galleries. Others who worked on the exhibition include Ellen Hicks, editor of the Graham catalogue; Linda Johnson, the exhibition coordinator at the Phillips; Laughlin Phillips the previous director of the Phillips Collection, and then curator Willem de Looper.

The type of materials in the collection include loan forms for Graham’s paintings, correspondence with individual donors, photocopies of articles related to Graham, and finally other exhibition materials such as glossaries and checklists about the exhibition.

**CUSTODIAL HISTORY AND ACQUISITION INFORMATION**

The 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:* December 2015  
*Processed By:* William Dawson, archival volunteer.  
*Processing Notes:* After an initial survey of the collection, some materials that were duplicates or of no future reference value were disposed of with approval by the librarian. For the sake of time, paper clips were removed when possible, but staples remained. Post-it notes were
photocopied or otherwise removed, and handwritten notes were maintained with the collection when possible. Photocopies of academic articles, as well as photocopies of Graham’s notes were also maintained in the collection as well.

**Finding Aid Written By:** William Dawson, archival volunteer, under the direction of Karen Schneider, Head Librarian. Partially revised by Colleen Hennessey, Archives Assistant.

**RELATED MATERIAL**

For Researchers who wish to learn more about Graham’s life and work, should contact the Archives of American Art and inquire about the John Graham Papers. The John Graham Papers contain Graham’s correspondence, biographical materials, and personal photographs.

Archives of American Art  
750 9th St NW #2200  
Washington, DC 20001  
Tel. (202) 633-7950  
http://www.aaa.si.edu/

**ARRANGEMENT OF THE COLLECTION**

The collection is organized into three series.

- Series 1: Exhibition Research and Planning Materials, 1982-88
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1984-88
- Series 3: Loan Forms, 1985-88

**Box Inventory**

**Series I Description: Exhibition Research and Planning Materials, 1982-88**

Materials in this series relate to the planning of the exhibition, *John Graham: Artist and Avatar*. Included are handwritten notes, research sources on Graham (mostly photocopies of resources dated from the 1920s-1980s), and other ephemeral items. Photocopies of articles and images include date of publication if found, otherwise date copied.

**Box 1**  
Folder 1  Application (signed) & letters—NEA, 1985-1987  
Folder 2  Agreement (signed) with “Sue” Green (copy), 1985 [restricted]  
Folder 3  Budget and funding proposals, 1985-1986  
Folder 4  Budget and funding—letters to private supporter, 1982-1986 [restricted]  
Folders 5-7  Budgets and expenses, 1985-1988  
Folder 8  Catalogue editing services, 1986  
Folder 9  Catalogue distribution, 1987  
Folder 10  Catalogue notes & planning, 1985-1987  
Folder 11  Catalogue outline and drafts, undated  
Folder 12  Checklists—working, 1986-1987
Box 2  
Folder 1  Fact sheet & PR info, 1987  
Folders 2-3  Notes & memos about exhibit, 1985-1986 & undated  
Folder 4  Permission to reproduce & quote applications, 1987  
Folder 5  Photo requests, 1985-1987  
Folder 6  Press release, 1988  
Folder 7  PR items, 1987-88  
Folder 8  Quotes for approval, 1985-87  
Folder 9  Research—bibliographic citations, 1985  
Folder 10  Research—inventory of Graham Papers at Archives of American Art, 1960; 1986  
Folder 11  Research—inventory of Brinton Collection; Russian art article, 1941; 1962  
Folder 12  Research—inventory of MOMA’s Graham archive, 1980s  
Folder 13  Research—bio data on Graham, 1920s-1982  
Folder 14  Research—glossary of Graham terms and symbols, undated  
Folder 15  Research—notes about Graham (biblical references; mysticism), 1986  

Box 3  
Folder 1  Research—Graham’s work in Phillips Collection, 1980s  
Folder 2  Research—Graham works (David Smith estate), 1960s-1980s  
Folder 3  Research—Graham’s artwork, undated  
Folder 4  Research—Graham’s drawings (sketchbook), 1958  
Folder 5  Research—Graham drawings (sketchbook), 1959  
Folder 6  Research—source images (mostly of women; theatrical), 1901 & undated  
Folder 7  Research—Graham’s thoughts on painting (sent to Phillips), 1928  
Folder 8  Research—Graham’s writing on Picasso (sent to Phillips), 1946  
Folder 9  Research—Graham’s notes about Don Giovanni, 1950s  
Folder 10  Research—Graham’s writings (excerpts) & notes, 1960 & undated  
Folder 11  Research—Graham’s book entitled Have It, 1923  
Folder 12  Research—Graham’s published articles, 1937-1961  
Folder 13  Research—letter to “John” from Graham, 1929  
Folder 14  Research—John Graham-Katherine Dreier correspondence, 1929-1949  
Folder 15  Research—letters to Duncan Phillips from Graham, 1930  
Folder 16  Research—letters from Graham to his former wife, Elinor, 1935-1961?  
Folder 17  Research—letters from Graham to his son David, 1950-1960  
Folder 18  Research—letters to Graham from Francoise Gilot, 1961  
Folder 19  Research—poem about Graham by Fernand Marc, undated  
Folder 20  Research—Waldemar George’s book on Graham, 1929  
Folder 21  Research—article about Graham for C Magazine, 1988  

Box 4  
Folders 1-2  Research—articles about Graham, 1926-1987 & undated  
Folder 3  Research—articles (various general topics), 1961-1985  
Folder 4  Research—publication excerpt—reference about Milton Avery, undated  
Folder 5  Research—publication excerpts about Willem de Kooning, 1979-1983  

5
Folder 6  Research—publication excerpts & notes about Arshile Gorky, 1976-1980s
Folder 7  Research—publication excerpts about Adolph Gottlieb (& The Ten), 1981
Folder 8  Research—publication excerpts about Lee Krasner, 1983
Folder 9  Research—publication excerpts, notes, & letter about Picasso, 1931-1985
Folder 10 Research—publication excerpts about Jackson Pollock, 1942-1983
Folder 11 Research—publication excerpt about The Ten (See also: Gorky file), 1978
Folder 12 Research—various exhibitions since 1925 of Graham’s works, 1929-1987
Folder 13 Research—Pennsylvania Academy annual exhibit catalogs, 1929-1946
Folder 14 Travel schedule—potential museum stops, 1984-1985
Folder 15 Travel schedules & bookings contract form, 1987-88
Folder 16 Travel tour (proposed co-organizer), American Federation of Arts, 1986
Folder 17 Travel tour, Neuberger Museum, SUNY (Purchase), 1985-1987
Folder 18 Travel tour, Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1985-1986
Folder 19 Travel tour, Smart Gallery (Chicago), 1985-87
Folder 20 Travel tour, University Art Museum, Univ. of California, Berkeley, 1985-1987
Folder 21 Writing (drafts)—Graham bio info & exhibition overview, undated

Series II Description: Correspondence, 1984-88

Series II contains general correspondence regarding the exhibition as well as files with individuals. Files with individuals are arranged alphabetically by correspondent name.

Box 5  Folder 1  Correspondence (general—internal), 1984-1988
Folder 2  Correspondence (general—external), 1985-1988
Folder 3  Correspondence—regarding Arts article, 1985
Folder 4  Correspondence—regarding catalogue, 1984-1986
Folder 5  Correspondence—regarding Stuart Davis, 1985
Folder 6  Letters (outgoing)—to private lender & supporter, 1984-1987 [restricted]

Individual correspondents:
Folder 7  S. Thomas Alexander III, 1985-88
Folder 8  Marcia Allentuck, 1985-86
Folder 9  Art Students League, 1985
Folder 10 Edwin A. Bergman, 1985-87
Folder 12 Donald Boxman, 1985-1987
Folder 13 Mr. & Mrs. Richard Brenner, 1986-1987
Folder 14 Dan Brewster, 1985-1987
Folder 15 Peter Broido, 1985
Folder 16 Phillip A. Bruno, 1987
Folder 17 Carnegie Museum of Art, 1987
Folder !8  Leo Castelli, 1985
Folder 19 Cheekwood Fine Arts Center, 1986-1987
Folder 20  John Cheim, 1986-1987  
Folder 21  Dr. & Mrs. Sidney Clyman, 1986-1987  
Folder 22  Maurice Cohen, 1985-87  
Folder 23  Conservation Studio (Washington), 1985  
Folder 24  Daniel Cowin, 1987  
Folder 25  Dorothy Dehner, 1985-1987  
Folder 26  Sid Deutsch Gallery, 1986-1987  

Box 6  Folder 1  Andre Emmerich Gallery, 1985-1986  
Folder 2  Elin Lake Ewald, 1987  
Francoise Gilot, See: Patricia G. Graham  
Folder 3  Herbert and Kitty Glantz, 1985-87  
Folder 4  John David Graham, 1985-1988  
Folder 5  Patricia G. Graham, 1985-1988  
Folder 6  Max Granick, 1985  
Folder 7  Grey Art Gallery, 1986-1987  
Folder 8  Guggenheim Museum, 1986  
Folder 9  Mr. & Mrs. Kirby Hamilton, 1987  
Folder 10  Helen Mary Harding, 1986-1987  
Folder 11  Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden, 1986-1987  
Folder 12  Indiana University Art Museum, 1986-1987  
Folder 13  William & Ellen Kahn, 1985-1987  
Folder 14  Jacob and Ruth Kainen, 1985-1987  
Folder 15  Ann Lanyon (Mrs. Julius) Kaplan, 1988  
Folder 16  R. B. Kitaj, 1985  
Folder 17  Mr. & Mrs. Carl D. Lobell, 1985-1987  
Folder 18  Maryland Institute, College of Art, 1986  
Folder 19  McMillen, Inc., 1985  
Folder 20  Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987  
Folder 21  Donald Morris Gallery, 1985-1986  
Folder 22  Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1985-1986  
Folder 23  Museum of Modern Art, 1985-1988  
Folder 25  Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 1985  
Folder 26  New Orleans Museum of Art, 1988  

Box 7  Folder 1  Martin Packard, 1985-1987  
Folder 2  Beverly Pepper, 1985-1987  
Folder 3  Harvey and Francoise Rambach, 1985-1987  
Folder 4  Karen and Thomas Rochon, 1986-87  
Folder 5  Rose Art Museum, 1985-1986  
Folder 6  Marieve Rugo, 1985-1987  
Folder 7  Linda Leyden Stander, 1985  
Folder 8  Hedda Sterne, 1985-1987
Folder 9  Allan Stone Gallery, 1984-87
Folder 10 Nina & Michael Sundell, 1987
Folder 11 N.G.W. Thorne, 1985
Folder 12 Suzanne Vanderwoude, 1985-1987
Folder 13 Washburn Gallery, 1987
Folder 14 Weatherspoon Art Gallery, 1985-1987
Folder 15 Thomas Weisel, 1986-1987
Folder 16 Linda & Martin Weissman, 1985-1986
Folder 17 Wells College, 1985 (includes copies of correspondence between Graham and William Sener Rusk, 1931-1937)
Folder 18 Whitney Museum of American Art, 1985-86
Folder 19 Yale University Art Gallery, 1986-1987
Folder 20 Richard Zeisler, 1985-1987

Series III: Loan Agreements, 1985-88

Series III contains loan agreements between lenders and the Phillips Collection. This series contains sensitive materials and should be referred to the librarian for access.

Box 8  Folder 1 Sample loan letters, 1986
Folders 2-3 Potential lenders for exhibition, 1985-87
Folder 4 Loans—lender lists & notes, 1985-1987
Folder 5 Loans—declined, 1985-1987
Folder 6 S. Thomas Alexander loan agreement, 1986
Folder 7 Archives of American Art loan agreement, 1987
Folder 8 Mrs. Edwin Bergman lender form, 1986
Folder 9 Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation loan agreement, 1987
Folder 10 Dr. & Mrs. Donald Boxman loan agreement, 1986
Folder 11 Mr. & Mrs. Richard Brenner, loan agreement, 1987
Folder 12 Dan Brewster loan agreement, 1986
Folder 13 Phillip Bruno loan agreement, 1987
Folder 14 Carnegie Museum of Art, loan agreement, 1987
Folder 15 Cheekwood loan agreement, 1987
Folder 16 John Cheim loan agreement, 1987
Folder 17 Maurice Cohen, loan agreement, 1987
Folder 18 Daniel Cowin loan agreement, 1987
Folder 19 Dorothy Dehner, loan agreement, 1986
Folder 20 Sid Deutsch Gallery loan agreement, 1987
Folder 21 Andre Emmerich loan agreement, 1986-87
Folder 22 Elin Lake Ewald, loan agreement, 1987
Folder 23 Herbert Glantz, loan agreement, 1986
Folder 24 Grey art gallery loan agreement, 1986
| Folder 25 | Helen Mary Harding loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 26 | Hirshhorn Museum loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 27 | Indiana University art museum, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 28 | William and Ellen Kahn loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 29 | Jacob and Ruth Kainen loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 30 | Mrs. Julius Kaplan, lending form, 1988 |
| Folder 31 | Mr. & Mrs. Carl Lobell, loan agreement, 1988 |
| Folder 32 | Metropolitan Museum of Art, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 33 | Donald Morris Gallery, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 34 | Museum of Modern Art, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 36 | New Orleans Museum of Art loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 37 | Martin Packard, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 38 | Beverley Pepper, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 39 | Harvey & Françoise Rambach, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 40 | Karen and Thomas Rochon, loan agreements, 1986 |
| Folder 41 | Rose Art Museum, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 42 | Marieve Rugo loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 43 | Hedda Sterne loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 44 | Allan Stone Gallery, loan agreements, 1987 |
| Folder 45 | Nina and Michael Sundell, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 46 | Suzanne Vanderwoude, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 47 | Washburn Gallery loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 48 | Weatherspoon Art Gallery, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 49 | Tom Weisel loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 50 | Dr. & Mrs. Martin Weissman, loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 51 | Whitney Museum loan agreement, 1986 |
| Folder 52 | Yale University Art Gallery, loan agreement, 1987 |
| Folder 53 | Richard Zeisler, loan agreement, 1986 |