

Charles Blum, Jr. papers

Ms. Coll. 936

Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.

Last updated on April 13, 2017.

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

2013.10.08

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Summary Information

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Repository | University of Pennsylvania: Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts |
| Creator | Blum, Charles William, Jr., 1925-1991 |
| Title | Charles Blum, Jr. papers |
| Call number | Ms. Coll. 936 |
| Date [inclusive] | 1925-1988 |
| Extent | 1.1 linear feet (4 boxes) |
| Language | English |
| Abstract | Charles William Blum, Jr. (1925-1991), an artist known for magical realism, lived and worked in New York; San Miguel, Mexico; and Spain. His papers, dating from 1925 to 1988, document his personal life through letters, journals, photographs and memorabilia. In particular, Blum's papers cover numerous topics including his work as an artist; his relationships with Robert Davison and Salvatore Saraceno; his opinions on love, romance and homosexuality; expatriate life in San Miguel de Allende in Mexico; and his opinions on the literary, theatrical, and modern dance scenes of the 1950s. |

Cite as:

Charles Blum, Jr. papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts,
University of Pennsylvania

Biography/History

Charles William Blum, Jr. (1925-1991), an artist known for magical realism, lived and worked in New York; San Miguel, Mexico; and Spain. The son of Charles and Elsa Blum, Charles William Blum, Jr. was born on February 6, 1925 in Jacksonville, Florida. In 1945, he was attending a two year college; and letters in the collection indicate that he also attended a military school in Sewanee. Blum appears to have had turbulent relationships with his parents and his sister Patricia (1927-?), whom he felt were disappointed in him in regards to his career and debts. In the 1950s, Blum moved to New York City where he pursued a career in art. Openly homosexual, Blum met Robert Davison (b. 1922), another artist, and they began a relationship which continued until 1956. Davison and Blum moved to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, which was a center for American artists in the post-World War II era. Blum and Davison divided their time between New York and Mexico where they painted and arranged for exhibitions of their work.

In 1956, Blum and Salvatore Saraceno (circa 1931-?), a printer, met and their relationship lasted into the 1970s, when they were living in Waccabuc, Westchester County, New York. Blum died in 1991 at the age of 66. It is unclear how successful Blum's artwork was during his lifetime.

Scope and Contents

The Charles Blum, Jr. papers, dating from 1925 to 1988, document Blum's personal life through letters, journals, photographs and memorabilia. The bulk of the collection consists of correspondence, mostly to and from Blum; but also includes a few letters to people within his circle, in particular Robert Davison and Salvatore Saraceno. Because Blum, Davison, and Saraceno maintained a strong friendship throughout their lives, there are many letters addressed to both Blum and Saraceno from Davison, as well as letters written to and from Saraceno and Davison. The letters, dating from 1954 to 1979, address numerous topics including Blum's work as an artist; his relationships with Davison and Saraceno, as well as others; opinions on love, romance and homosexuality; life in San Miguel de Allende in Mexico; and opinions on the literary, theatrical, and dance scenes of the 1950s. In the letters, most of which are very personal in nature, Blum discusses people he has met, including Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) in 1954 and Emilio Baz Viaud (1918-1991), as well as people with whom Davison is associated, including Leo Lerman, Valerian Rybar, Julian Green, Susan Sontag, and Paloma Picasso. These frank letters will be of value to researchers interested in American expatriate artists, homosexuality in the 1950s, and the lives of Charles Blum, Robert Davison, and Salvatore Saraceno.

The journal entries, dating from 1950 to 1956, are equally frank and discuss many of the same topics as the letters; however there are a much smaller number of journal entries than letters and they cover a shorter period of time. Together with the letters, however, the journals help to provide a fairly full view of Blum's life and personality.

The collection contains hundreds of photographs and snapshots, almost all of which are unidentified. It is

probable that many of the photographs of children include Blum or his sister Patricia, however, it is impossible to say so with any certainty. There are many photographs of the architecture and local scenery of San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, as well a few photographs of art work, presumably by Blum or Davison.

Finally, the collection includes some memorabilia including an advertisement for one of Blum's exhibits in New York, the birth announcement and baby book from Blum's infancy, newspaper clippings, and passports.

Taken as a whole, this collection provides researchers with an insight into the world of a gay artist in the 1950s, as well as into the art communities of New York and San Miguel de Allende in Mexico. Blum offers a frank and open commentary upon the world in which he lived and on his own faults and insecurities, relationships, and art.

Administrative Information

University of Pennsylvania, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts

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Finding aid prepared by Holly Mengel.

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Source of Acquisition

Sold by Robert Brown Rare Books, 2012.

Controlled Access Headings

FORM/GENRE(S)

- Correspondence
- Journals (accounts)

- Negatives (photographic)
- Photographs

GEOGRAPHIC NAME(S)

- San Miguel de Allende (Mexico)

PERSONAL NAME(S)

- Blum, Charles William, Jr., 1925-1991
- Davison, Robert, b. 1922
- Saraceno, Salvatore, b. circa 1931

SUBJECT(S)

- Art
- Artists
- Artists--United States
- Expatriate artists
- Gay men--Mexico
- Gay men--New York (N.Y.)
- Male homosexuality

Collection Inventory

I. CORRESPONDENCE.

| | Box | Folder |
|--|-----|--------|
| Adams, E. [Edie] to Charles Blum, Jr., 1978. | 1 | 1 |
| Bayley, John Barrington to Charles Blum, Jr. and Salvatore Saraceno, circa 1978. | 1 | 2 |
| Blum, Charles to Arthur, Bill and Ann, Charles and Elsa Blum (parents), "Chig," Cookie, Robert Davison, Dick, Fred and Sylvia, Gene Baroff, Herndon and Alice, Isa, Joe, Karl, Loyal, Lyle, Mike, Margaret, Minna, Paul, "Pen Pal," Pinky and Bud, Ray, Salvatore Saraceno, Tonio Selwart, Eugenio Seruin, and Willard (carbon copies pasted into letter book), 1954-1957. | 3 | 1 |
| Blum, Charles to Robert Davison (carbon copies pasted into letter book), 1954. | 4 | 1 |
| Blum, Charles to Robert Davison, 1975-1976. | 1 | 3 |
| Blum, Charles to Salvatore Saraceno, undated. | 1 | 4 |
| "Buster" to Charles Blum, Jr., 1978 January 21. | 1 | 5 |
| Carleton, William Graves to Charles Blum, Jr., 1976-1979. | 1 | 6 |
| Davison, Elexia to Charles Blum, Jr., undated. | 1 | 7 |
| Davison, Robert to Charles Blum, Jr. and Charles Blum, Jr. and Salvatore Saraceno, 1973-1978. | 1 | 8 |

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| Davison, Robert to Salvatore Saraceno, 1974-1978. | 1 | 9 |
| Delaney, Kevin to Charles Blum, Jr. and Charles Blum, Jr. and Salvatore Saraceno, 1975-1978. | 1 | 10 |
| Gilbert de Racey, Susan to Charles Blum, Jr., circa 1976. | 1 | 11 |
| McGuire, William to Charles Blum, Jr. and Charles Blum, Jr. and Salvatore Saraceno, 1972-1985. | 1 | 12 |
| Power, Joseph William to Charles Blum, Jr., Salvatore Saraceno, and Pat, 1973. | 1 | 13 |
| Saraceno, Salvatore to Charles Blum, Jr., 1975-circa 1977. | 1 | 14 |
| Selwart, Tonio to Charles Blum, Jr. and Salvatore Saraceno, 1977. | 1 | 15 |
| Seruin, Eugenio to Charles Blum, Jr., undated. | 1 | 16 |
| Waccabuc Community Services, Inc. to "Member", 1974 November 13. | 1 | 17 |
| Unidentified correspondence, undated. | 1 | 18 |

II. JOURNAL ENTRIES.

| | Box | Volume |
|---------------------|-----|--------|
| 1950-1956. | 4 | 1 |
| circa 1950. | 1 | 19 |
| 1955 July-November. | 1 | 20 |

III. PHOTOGRAPHS AND NEGATIVES.

| | Box | Folder |
|---|-----|--------|
| Blum, Charles, Jr., prints, circa 1940s-1970s. | 1 | 21 |
| Blum, Charles, Sr. and Elsa (probably), parents of Blum, prints, circa 1940s-1960s. | 1 | 22 |
| Buildings and rooms (probably in Spain or Mexico), prints, circa 1950s. | 1 | 23 |
| Buildings and rooms (probably in Spain or Mexico), negatives, 1950s. | 1 | 24 |
| Cars and boats, prints, circa 1920s-1950s. | 1 | 25 |
| Davison, Robert (probably), prints, circa 1950s. | 1 | 26 |
| Events, prints, circa 1920s-1950s. | 1 | 27 |
| Events, negatives, circa 1950s. | 1 | 28 |
| Knight, Paul, prints, circa 1950s. | 1 | 29 |
| Lake View Cottage, Waccabuc, New York (probably a family home), prints, undated. | 1 | 30 |
| Mexico, "Views of San Miguel," prints, 1951-1953. | 1 | 31 |
| Mexico, "Views of San Miguel," negatives, 1951-1953. | 1 | 32 |
| Spain or Mexico, prints, circa 1950s. | 1 | 33 |
| Spain, negatives, circa 1950s. | 1 | 34 |
| Unidentified children, prints, circa 1920s-1930s. | 1 | 35 |
| Unidentified groups, prints, circa 1920s-1950s. | 1 | 36 |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| Unidentified men, prints, circa 1930s-1970s. | 2 | 1 |
| Unidentified women, prints, circa 1920s-1950s. | 2 | 2 |
| Works of art (probably by Charles Blum), prints, undated. | 2 | 3 |
| Works of art (probably by Charles Blum), negatives, undated. | 2 | 4 |

IV. MEMORABILIA.

| | Box | Folder |
|---|-----|--------|
| Advertisement for "Paintings from Mexico by Charles Blum," at the Edwin Hewitt Gallery, 1953 November-December. | 2 | 5 |
| Baby book for Charles Blum, Jr., 1925. | 2 | 6 |
| Birth registration for Charles Blum, Jr., 1925. | 2 | 7 |
| Newspaper clippings (about art, Charles Blum & Co., Elsa Blum (mother), and San Miguel, Mexico), 1957-1975. | 2 | 8 |
| Passports, 1956-1958, 1976-1988. | 2 | 9 |