



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

**A Finding Aid to the Percy Leason Papers, circa
1929-2011, in the Archives of American Art**

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Creator:	Leason, Percy
Title:	Percy Leason papers
Dates:	circa 1929-2011
Quantity:	1.3 linear feet
Abstract:	The papers of painter, illustrator, and educator Percy Leason measure 1.3 linear feet and date from circa 1929 to 2011. The collection documents his career through biographical material, correspondence, diaries, writings and notes, printed material, photographic material, and a scrapbook.
Language:	The collection is in English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Donated in 1969-1979 and 2014 by Max A. Leason, Percy Leason's son.

Processing Information

The collection was processed to a minimal level and a finding aid prepared by Sarah Mundy in 2014. The collection has been minimally rearranged and retains the existing/original folder titles when possible. All materials have been rehoused in archival folders and boxes for long-term stability, but often staples and other fasteners have not been removed. Materials within folders have not been rearranged.

Preferred Citation

Percy Leason Papers, circa 1929-2011. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

Ownership & Literary Rights

The Percy Leason papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Percy Leason (1889-1959) was a painter, illustrator, writer, and educator from Kaniva, Victoria in Australia. Leason took an interest in art at an early age winning first prize in painting at the 1904 State Fair. He later attended art school in the town of Nhill, and in 1906, he went to Melbourne to be an apprentice at Sands and McDougall Lithographers. Soon after starting his apprenticeship, Leason moved to the art department where he began drawing illustrations for products and advertisements. In the evenings, he attended the Melbourne Gallery School where he studied art under Bernard Hall and Frederick McCubbin. While in Melbourne, Leason associated himself with the Victorian Artist Society and lived a bohemian lifestyle. He began creating

illustrations for books in 1914 and went on to do illustrations for the Sydney Bulletin, Melbourne Punch, Tabletalk Magazine, and the Melbourne Herald where he developed the Wiregrass cartoon series. In 1924, Leason and Max Meldrum, who Leason had met a few years before, discussed tonal realism, a systematic style of painting that uses light and shade to produce a misty quality. Leason's devotion to tonal realism along with his participation in Victorian Artist Society exhibitions helped advance his career. In 1934 Melbourne University commissioned him to do a series on Australian aborigines. He became interested in cave art and archeology during this time. In Cambridge, England in 1937 he presented his theory that cave artists sketched using dead animals as models.

Due to the impending World War, art scene rivalries, and the lack of commercial art employment prospects, Leason immigrated to New York in 1938 in search of more opportunities in the United States. Before emigrating to the U.S., he completed a portrait of Basil Burdett which now hangs in the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, Australia. His career in New York included work for New York Daily News, Blue Book Magazine, the Saturday Evening Post, Street and Smith, and book illustrations for *The Wizard of Oz* by Frank Baum (Whitman Publishing Company) in 1939. In New York, Leason continued his opposition to modernist and expressionist art by aligning himself with the Salmagundi Club, Allied Artists, and the American Artist Professional League, all of which supported tonal realism. In association with Portraits Incorporated in New York, he painted the portraits of TV personality Arlene Francis, Michael Engel of Grumbacker art supplies, and Missouri congressman Dewey Short whose portrait is housed in the House of Representative's collection in Washington D.C.

By the late 1950's, Leason had difficulties within the art world because the trends in art no longer held a place for his tonal realism. He died in 1959 on Staten Island in New York. As a tribute to Leason after his death, the Staten Island Institute and the Salmagundi Club held retrospective exhibitions of his work.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of painter, illustrator, and educator Percy Leason measure 1.3 linear feet and date from circa 1929 to 2011. The collection documents his career through biographical material, correspondence, diaries, writings and notes, printed material, photographic material, and a scrapbook.

Biographical materials include financial records, biographical statements about the artist, certificates, and a few sketches. Correspondence contains letters and writings of Max Leason, Percy Leason's son, correspondence to and from Percy Leason, letters from congressmen, and letters regarding Leason's work displayed at the State Library of Victoria in Australia. Four diaries document Leason's life over 20 years. A series of published and unpublished writings and notes includes two DVDs of Leason's writings . Printed material contains new clippings, gallery flyers, a framed statement about art, and the book *The Science of Appearances* by Max Meldrum with typed pages written by Leason inserted into the book. Photographic materials include slides and a DVD of Leason's artwork, personal photographs, and photographs of the State Library of Victoria. One scrapbook contains mostly news clippings and other printed material.

Scattered throughout the collection are annotations made by Max Leason which are usually signed "Max" with the date of annotation.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 7 series.

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1957, 2006 (5 folders; Box 1, 2)

Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1973 (4 folders, Box 1)

Series 3: Diaries, 1938-1959 (0.3 linear ft.; Box 1)

Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1939-2011 (6 folders, Box 1)

Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1946-1973 (4 folders; Box 1)

Series 6: Photographic Materials, circa 1969-1972 (0.2 linear ft.; Box 1, 2)

Series 7: Scrapbook, 1938-1972 (0.1 linear ft.; Box 2)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Archives of American Art under the following terms:

Subjects:

Illustrators--New York (State)--Staten Island

Painters--New York (State)--Staten Island

Types of Materials:

Diaries

Photographs

Scrapbooks

Sketches

Names:

Leason, Max

Meldrum, Max, 1875-1955

State Library of Victoria.

Series Descriptions/Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1957, 2006

5 folders; Box 1, 2

Biographical material includes an account book, account ledger, biographical statement written by Max Leason, Percy Leason's son, for AskArt.com, and certificates awarded by the Salmagundi Club, the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, and the Audubon Artists. Also included are six small sketches of figures in historical costume and one sketch of a boat.

Box	Folder	
1	1	Account Book, 1943-1944
1	2	Account Ledger, 1939-1942
1	3	Biographical Statements, undated, 2006
1	4	Sketches, undated

Box	Folder	
2	1	Certificates, 1947-1957

Series 2: Correspondence, 1946-1973

4 folders; Box 1

Correspondence includes the letters and writings of Max Leason regarding Percy Leason's artwork, membership status, and manuscripts sent to and from printers, museums, and art related organizations. Also within Max Leason's correspondence is a curriculum vitae for Percy Leason. The correspondence of Percy Leason documents his efforts to have his manuscripts published and contains letters expressing his opinions on art. Also found in correspondence are two letters from the U.S. House of Representatives, sent after Leason's death, requesting portraits of John McCormack, Overton Brooks, and James E. Van Zandt. Correspondence with the State Library of Victoria regarding an inventory of Leason's work that was deposited at the library is also included in this series.

Box	Folder	
1	5	Correspondence and Writings of Max Leason Regarding Percy Leason, 1968-1973
1	6	Correspondence Sent and Received by Percy Leason, 1946-1961
1	7	Letters from U.S. Congressmen, 1959, 1961
1	8	The State Library of Victoria, circa 1969

Series 3: Diaries, 1938-1959

0.3 linear feet; Box 1

This series includes four diaries that span over 20 years. The diaries document Leason's daily activities and thoughts. This series may include letters and news clippings that are either loose or pasted into the diaries.

Box	Folder	
1	9	Diary, 1938-1939
1	10	Diary, circa 1948-1951

1	11	Diary, 1950, 1956
1	12	Diary, 1959

Series 4: Writings and Notes, 1939-2011

6 folders; Box 1

Found within this series are Leason's notes on *A Brief History of Painting*, Paleolithic Art, and *The Science of Appearances*. Also included are published works by Leason in the *Proceedings of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences*, *The Artist*, and *Australia*. "Artist of Modern Times: the Biography of Percy Leason" by Max Leason and "Experience in Painting: An Analysis of the Visual Impression as Applied to Painting" by Percy Leason, edited by Max Leason are on two DVDs found in this series.

Box	Folder	
1	13	"Artist of Modern Times: The Biography of Percy Leason" (2011) by Max Leason, 2011 <i>1 electronic disc (DVD)</i>
1	14	"Experience in Painting: An Analysis of the Visual Impression as Applied to Painting" (2010) by Percy Leason, edited by Max Leason, 2010 <i>1 electronic disc (DVD)</i>
1	15	Notes on "A Brief History of Painting," undated
1	16	Notes on Paleolithic Art, undated
1	17	Notes on "The Science of Appearances," circa 1950's
1	18	Published Work, 1939-1962

Series 5: Printed Material, circa 1946-1973, 1973

4 folders; Box 1

Printed material consists of news clippings about Max Meldrum, flyers from the Adams, Davidson Galleries, a framed statement about art, and a reproduction of the Dewey Short portrait by Leason with a printed program from the portrait's unveiling. The book by Max Meldrum, *The Science of Appearances*, has typed writings by Leason inserted into the book where Leason thought appropriate.

Box	Folder	
1	19	Adams, Davidson Galleries, Inc., 1973
1	20	News Clippings About Max Meldrum, circa 1946
1	21	Framed Statement About Art, undated
1	22	Reproduction of Dewey Short Portrait, 1956
1	23	<i>The Science of Appearances</i> by Max Meldrum, 1950-1955

Series 6: Photographic Materials, circa 1929-1970s, 2010

0.2 linear feet; Box 1, 2

Photographic materials contains 1 DVD of Leason's paintings, photographs and slides of Leason's artwork, and some personal photographs showing candid photographs of Leason, a photo of Arlene Francis with her portrait, and Leason at work. Photographs on the DVD, slides, and prints may be duplicates.

Box	Folder	
1	24	Photographs of Paintings, 2010 <i>1 electronic disc (DVD)</i>
1	25	Photographs of Artwork, undated
1	26	Photographs of Artwork, undated
1	27	Photographs, Personal, circa 1929-1950s
1	28	Slides of Artwork, circa 1950s-1970s
1	29	Slides of Artwork, circa 1950s

Box	Folder	
2	2	The State Library of Victoria, circa 1969

Series 7: Scrapbook, 1938-1972

0.1 linear feet; Box 2

The scrapbook contains mainly news clippings and other printed material documenting Leason's career in Australia and New York. A few pieces of correspondence and notes are also included.

Box	
2	Scrapbook, 1938-1972