

STORM KING ART CENTER

ARCHIVES

David Smith
Collection of Gloria Gil

Collection 2017-005
Storm King Art Center
New Windsor, NY

Storm King Art Center Archives

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Collection 2017-005

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New Windsor, NY

David Smith Collection of Gloria Gil

Dates of record-keeping activity: 1954-1965

Extent: .5 linear feet in two archival boxes

Abstract: Collection of David Smith material gathered by Gloria Gil, including a Smith drawing from his 1954-1964 notebook, additional leaves of the notebook with accompanying ephemera, and Gil's personal commentary.

Administrative/Biographical History:

In 1948, Gloria and David Gil moved to Bennington, VT to start a collaborative design studio, which eventually became Bennington Potters. Gloria Gil attended Bennington College and the couple became involved with artists and artisans linked with the college and community, including David Smith, Kenneth Noland, Anthony Caro, Jules Olitski, Clement Greenburg, Helen Frankenthaler and others.

In 1964, Bennington Pottery invited certain American painters and sculptors to explore their ideas through ceramics in a project organized by Art in America magazine. Artists who participated included Cleve Gray, Alexander Liberman, Helen Frankenthaler, Seymour Lipton, and David Smith. The works created during this project eventually went on a national tour arranged by the American Federation of the Arts.

Gloria Gil was one of the last people to see Smith on the day of his fatal accident on May 23, 1965 and this collection includes her memories of that meeting.

Scope and Content:

Notebook drawing from David Smith, David Smith's Notebook from 1954-1964, personal letters from David Smith to Gloria and David Gil, items left in notebook, including notes and letters from friends, and handwritten memoriam by Anthony Caro for the *London Times*.

System of Arrangement:

Box 1:

1. Anthony Caro's double-sided handwritten memoriam to David Smith. (Itemized and described below but filed in this box.)
2. Smith, David, Notebook drawing - History of LeRoy Borton (recto); Tanktotem V (verso), marker and pencil, 10 ½ x 8 ¼ inches, n.d.
3. Notebook pages:
Folder, Description
 - a. 1981.28.a-c, Covers
 - b. 1981.28.d, p.24
 - c. 1981.28.e, pp. 47-48
 - d. 1981.28.f-g, pp. 49-50, 51-52
 - e. 1981.28.h-l, pp. 53-54
 - f. 1981.28.j, pp. 89-90
 - g. 1981.28.k, p. 106
 - h. 1981.28.l-m, pp. 123-124,
 - i. 1981.28.n, p. 138

- j. 1981.28.0, p. 140A
- k. 1981.28.p, p.149
- l. 1981.28.q-v, pp. (164)-165-166-167-168-169-170
- m. 1981.28.w, pp.171-172
- n. 1981.28.x, pp. 173-174
- o. 1981.28y, pp. 177-178
- p. 1981.28.z-bb, "Extra bonus" materials: color transparency - D.Smith and child, b/w 3.25" square photograph of D. Smith and friend, Balance sheet, handwritten – D. Smith and Lois Orswell, 1960, D. Smith September Exhibition FAA notes, 1959
- q. 1981.28, covers (copy)
- r. 1981.28, blank notebook sheets

Box 2:

Folder containing the following in Gloria Gil's words:

1. Anthony Caro's letter to The London Times dated May 26, 1965 enclosing his memoriam and appreciation of his friend.

"What happened was Tuesday, two days after the terrible accident on Sunday; Tony came into my office and asked if I could assist him to get a letter out to the London Times. He wrote it on a yellow pad and my staff transcribed it and got it into the mail."

2. The handwritten memoriam by Anthony Caro (double-sided) regarding David's importance to his generation of artists and sculptors. (Placed in Box 1.)

Gloria Gil's memory of the events of May 23, 1965, date of David Smith's death:

"I was working in the garden at home and David Gil was at the pottery. David Smith arrived in his truck. We looked at the garden, what was growing; he was always interested in gardens. I gave him a flat of some herbs for his garden and we put them in his truck. He was concerned that he hadn't sold any work recently. We talked about the Mark Rothko and what a bad year he had had as well. I asked David if he needed funds, (he had financially stood by us several times in the past) and assured me that he did not, that his gallery took care of him. David Gil and I were going to meet up with the Bennington crowd at Bennington College's art gallery later that evening; I invited David Smith to dinner with David Gil and I before we went off. David declined as he had already committed to having dinner with Ken Noland. They had gone fishing earlier and caught fish for dinner. After we talked, David Smith went down to the pottery to meet with David Gil to discuss how to ship some of the large agricultural implements around the pottery up to Bolton Landing (the pottery was the site of a former feed business and David Gil had offered David Smith whichever farm implements he wanted.) David seemed depressed to me.

After David Smith left, David Gil and I had dinner. Our babysitter arrived and we took off for the college. As we walked in to the gallery Tony Caro came up to us and took David aside and told him that David Smith had run into a telephone pole near the Shaftsbury Fire Dept. According to the State Police, it was a loose piece of steel David had had in his truck that whacked him in the skull and caused the bulk of the damage. The Putnam Hospital in Bennington was not equipped to deal with head injuries and usually sent them over to Albany. Tony Caro, David Gil, and others there drove over to Albany immediately upon receiving this information. Before they arrived the ones who had remained in Bennington were called and informed of David's passing."

3. This piece was taken from David's notebook (he liked to keep bits of correspondence on hand). It is a piece from The Washington Gallery of Modern Art regarding the postponement of a show.

4. Correspondence between the Museum of Modern Art and their shipping agency regarding the 29th Venice Biennale Exhibition.
5. The inventory for the 29th Venice Biennale Exhibition with notes added in ink by David. 14 items were to be shipped.
6. A happy New Year letter (undated, mostly likely from 1957) from Herman Cherry, an old friend of David's.
7. A postcard from Clem Greenberg to David dated July 1956. Cleam refers to a piece he was writing for David.
8. A letter from a friend who worked at Art News dated February 1956. Taken from David's notebook.
9. A letter sent by David Smith to David and Gloria Gil congratulating them on the birth of their fourth child, Michael. Dated December 12, 1960.
10. A letter of apology to David and Gloria Gil dated January 20th, 1965. David apologizes for an incident at a party in Ken Noland's studio. I had introduced everyone to the Supremes, via a record loaned to me by a student. Everyone was dancing and drinking. In attendance were Paul Feeley, Neil Noland (Ken's brother), Ken Noland, Gloria and David Gil, David Smith and Barbara Davenport (David's student, work term cataloguer and current lover). Other persons of importance were a graduate student from a college in the area. Barbara and the graduate student were flirting and it enraged David who was very drunk. He shook Barbara and pushed her away from the student. We were all shocked and the merriment (!) ended abruptly. Everyone tried to calm David down.
11. A letter from David Smith to Gloria Gil dated May 5th, 1965. I had told him that I was going to recommend him to Bill Fels, president of Bennington College, as a trustee. He had recently given the college a sculpture and was interested in its future. In the letter he requests that I wait, he was still "chagrined" about the Noland party.
12. Letter (undated) from Tom (last name unknown).
13. Note tucked into the notebook from Nic Carrone (sp?), a friend of David's, congratulating him on a recent art show. Written before 1965.
14. Postcard from Bob Motherwell to David dated March 20th, 1959 requesting a trade of work. My favorite of all the documents!

Additional Materials:

Box 1:

- David Smith Notebook, 1954, copy (original in Archives of American Art)
- Gil, Gloria - Donation correspondence, 1983-1987
- Gil Gloria - Donation correspondence, 1988-2003

Plaque, gift of David Smith to Gloria Gil [Goldfarb], May 4, 1952

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Languages and Scripts of the Material: English

Immediate Source of Acquisition: Gloria Gil, 1981