Paul Mellon collection of Basil Taylor papers

S006

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September 13, 2019

Institutional Archives
1080 Chapel Street
P. O. Box 208280
New Haven, CT 06520-8280
ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu
https://britishart.yale.edu/about-us/departments/institutional-archives

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Yale Center for British Art, Institutional Archives
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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: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.ia.S006

Requesting Instructions
To request items from this collection for use on site, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.ia.S006.

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access
This collection is restricted until processed.
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 who significantly influenced Paul Mellon’s interest in British artwork and was an active advisor in the formation of his collection. Taylor was educated at Tonbridge School, at Wadham College, Oxford, and at the Slade School of Art. Early in his career he worked with the British Broadcasting Company, serving in an editorial capacity from 1945-1951. He also served as Organizing Secretary of the National Art Collections Fund from 1949-1950. After this, he taught the History of Art and Architecture at the Royal College of Art, becoming Librarian in 1953 and Reader in General Studies in 1958. From 1962-1969, he was Director of the Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art.

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 all 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 -- Collectors and collecting
Art, British

**Names**
Baskett, John
Taylor, Basil