

# Guide to the Bismuth-Lemaître Papers

GEN MSS 754



by Beinecke staff

2010

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** GEN MSS 754

**CREATOR:** Lemaître, Maurice, 1926-

**TITLE:** Bismuth-Lemaître papers

**DATES:** 1920-2009

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 225.26 linear feet (270 boxes) + 4 broadside folders

**LANGUAGE:** French

**SUMMARY:** The Bismuth-Lemaître Papers is comprised of material created and compiled by Maurice Lemaître, documenting the Lettrism movement from its inception in 1945 to the present day and Lemaître's own cultural and political activities as a leader of the movement. According to Lemaître's wishes, the title of the collection incorporates his birth name in order to reflect his heritage.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.lemaitre>

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from Maurice Lemaître on the Edwin J. Beinecke Book Fund, 2010.

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### Conditions Governing Access

In-process collection. As of August 2018, this collection is closed to readers temporarily, and will reopen when processing is complete. For more information, please consult the Closed Collections Schedule on the Beinecke Web site, at [www.library.yale.edu/beinecke](http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke).

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### Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Access to original audiovisual recordings in boxes 183-205, 234, 242, and 259-273 is restricted. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Beinecke Access Services for further information.

Access to original computer disks in box 221, 243, and 274 is restricted. Reference copies may be requested. Consult Beinecke Access Services for further information.

## Conditions Governing Use

The Bismuth-Lemaître Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

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## Preferred Citation

Bismuth-Lemaître Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

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## Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

This collection received a basic level of processing at the time of acquisition in 2010, including rehousing into acid-free boxes and minimal organization. Material was organized into broad series according to activity or format; however, no attempt was made to arrange files within each series. Identification of material for the purposes of organization was based on information supplied with the collection and existing file titles, not on an analysis of the file contents. Descriptive information in the inventory below is drawn largely from the dealer list. This information has not been verified against the contents of the files in all cases.

The title of the collection deviates from standard naming conventions in order to accommodate the wish of the creator to reflect both his birth name and assumed name.

This finding aid may be updated periodically to account for new acquisitions to the collection and/or revisions in arrangement and description.

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## Associated Materials

Printed material, including Lemaître's library as well as works authored and published by him, has been transferred from the manuscript collection and will be accessioned and cataloged separately.

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## Maurice Lemaître (b.1926)

Maurice Lemaître, born Moïse Bismuth in Paris in 1926, was a leading voice of the mainstream Lettrism movement in the 1950s and 1960s, and continues to be one of its most active and outspoken proponents to this day. Lemaître joined the Lettrism movement in 1949/1950, four years after it was founded by Isidore Isou. He produced several important theoretical works of the early 1950s, including *Système de Notation pour les lètries* (1952), *Qu'est-ce que le Lettrisme?* (1954) and *Bilan Lettriste* (1955), as well as practical applications in experimental painting, music, book design, theater, and cinema. When Guy Debord led a schism away from the group around Isou in 1952, Lemaître became the leading spokesman of the movement's "moderate" wing, which he defended through polemical engagements against Debord and the Lettrist (later the Situationist) International.

In addition to being a major theoretician and practicing artist, Lemaître became increasingly important as the movement's publisher, not only editing but also financing the publication of the first Lettrist revues, including *Front de la Jeunesse*, *Poésie nouvelle*, and *Ur*, among others. He helped organize the first Lettrist exhibitions in the United States, and also provided support for the next generation of Lettrists, including

Roland Sabatier and Alain Satié, at crucial points in their careers. The second series of *Ur* (1963-1967) was an important venue for Lettrist experimentation for such artists and became the launchpad for the Centre de Créativité.

Over the course of his career, Lemaître worked to preserve an historical record of the cultural and political activity of the Lettrism movement. He acquired manuscripts and tracts from Isou and Gabriele Pomerand documenting the first years of the movement from 1945 to 1950, and himself kept notes, letters, tracts, essays, artwork, and the related production materials documenting the movement's output from 1950 onwards.

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## Lettrism

Lettrism was the first avant-garde movement to emerge from the postwar generation in Europe. Its origins are deeply rooted in the Second World War; from the beginning its leaders situated the movement explicitly vis-à-vis currents of European Modernism—particularly Dada and Surrealism—that were well-established in the years leading up to the war. Lettrism was central to the younger generation's confrontation with both the legacies of modernist experimentation (political and philosophical as well as aesthetic) and the wartime experience itself. The movement's development in the immediate postwar years is also integral to the proliferation of new avant-garde movements across Europe that came together to form a distinctly new cultural climate in the second half of the last century.

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## Scope and Contents

The Bismuth-Lemaître Papers is comprised of material created and compiled by Maurice Lemaître, documenting the Lettrism movement from its inception in 1945 to the present day and Lemaître's own cultural and political activities as a leader of the movement. According to Lemaître's wishes, the title of the collection incorporates his birth name in order to reflect his heritage.

The collection consists of writings by Lemaître and others, including Isidore Isou; editorial files for the numerous serials published by Lemaître; screenplays, production material, and publicity material for Lemaître's avant-garde films; correspondence with other Lettrists, including Isou, Gabriele Pomerand, Roland Sabatier, and Alain Satié, as well as editors, intellectuals, and museum and gallery directors; audio recordings of Lettrist readings and interviews, and video recordings of Lemaître's films; and posters, photographs, fliers, tracts, exhibition catalogs and other material relating to Lettrism. The collection provides comprehensive documentation of the development and evolution of Lettrism, and also sheds light on the post-war avant-garde and related cultural movements in Europe, particularly France, during the second half of the twentieth century.

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## Arrangement

Organized into eight series: I. Chronological Files, 1946-2009. II. Writing and Publishing Projects, 1950-2009. III. Writings of Others, 1951-2004. IV. Correspondence, 1960-1998. V. Film Projects, 1951-1998. VI. Subject Files and Lettrist Movement Material, circa 1920-2006. VII. Audiovisual Materials, circa 1953-2001. VIII. Printing Blocks, 1963-1967.

## 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

Artists -- France -- Archives  
Authors, French -- 20th Century -- Archives  
Experimental films -- France  
French literature -- 20th Century  
Lettrism  
Lettrism in motion pictures  
Motion picture producers and directors --  
France

### Genres / Formats

Audiovisual materials  
Born digital  
Lettrist literature -- France -- Paris -- 20th  
Century  
Motion pictures (visual works)  
Photographic prints  
Sound recordings  
Video recordings

### Names

Amarger, Michel  
Curtay, Jean-Paul  
Ferrua, Pietro, 1930-  
Fukui, Kana  
Guymer, Christiane, 1927-  
Isou, Isidore, 1925-2007  
Lemaître, Maurice, 1926-  
Pomerand, Gabriel, 1926-1972  
Richol, Hélène  
Richol-Müller, Marie-Thérèse, 1956-  
Sabatier, Roland, 1942-  
Satié, Alain, 1944-

### Corporate Bodies

Centre de créativité (Paris, France)  
Mouvement lettriste