

# Guide to the Louis I. Kahn Yale Center for British Art sketches

S019



YCBA Library Court. Photograph by Richard Caspole, YCBA, 2016.

Compiled by Meg Rinn

October 2023

Institutional Archives  
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P. O. Box 208280  
New Haven, CT 06520-8280  
(203) 432-8395

[ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu](mailto:ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu)

<https://britishart.yale.edu/about-us/departments/institutional-archives>

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## Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	3
Requesting Instructions .....	3
Administrative Information .....	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition .....	3
Conditions Governing Access .....	3
Conditions Governing Use .....	3
Preferred Citation .....	4
Biographical / Historical .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Collection Contents .....	5
Sketches .....	5
Selected Search Terms .....	6

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## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Yale Center for British Art, Institutional Archives  
Institutional Archives  
1080 Chapel Street  
P. O. Box 208280  
New Haven, CT 06520-8280  
(203) 432-8395  
ycba.institutionalarchives@yale.edu  
<https://britishart.yale.edu/about-us/departments/institutional-archives>

**CALL NUMBER:** S019

**CREATOR:** Kahn, Louis I., 1901-1974

**TITLE:** Louis I. Kahn Yale Center for British Art sketches

**DATES:** 1971-1972

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 1 linear foot

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** Collection features early sketches by Louis I. Kahn of the Yale Center for British Art building. This includes exterior elevations, interior and exterior renderings, and floor plans.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.s019>

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## 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 <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.s019>.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b.      box

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## Administrative Information

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### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Transfer from Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University, July 2022.

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### Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research.

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### Conditions Governing Use

In Copyright

Copyright is retained by the University of Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for works authored and provided by Louis I. Kahn during his lifetime. Please contact the Architectural Archives at the University of Pennsylvania for inquiries regarding copyright: [archarchives@design.penn.edu](mailto:archarchives@design.penn.edu).

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## Preferred Citation

Louis I. Kahn Yale Center for British Art sketches. Yale Center for British Art, Archives.

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## Biographical / Historical

Louis Isadore Kahn (March 5, 1901 – March 17, 1974) was born Itze-Leib Schmuilowsky to Jewish parents in Estonia, then a part of the Russian Empire. The family emigrated to the United States in 1906 so that Kahn's father would not be conscripted into the Russo-Japanese War, and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where other family members were already living. As a child, Kahn sketched with burnt twigs and matches due to the scarcity of art supplies. He attended Philadelphia's Central High School, where he took art classes, including a required course in architectural history his senior year. Kahn graduated from the University of Pennsylvania School of Fine Arts with a BA in architecture in 1924.

Following his graduation, Kahn worked for several architects in the Philadelphia area, including Paul Philippe Cret. Kahn founded his own atelier in 1935, where he would work until his death in 1974.

Kahn's work is noted for its sense of monumentality within the broader midcentury modern style. It emphasizes light and geometry, inspired by his time in Rome and observations of how ancient monuments interacted with sunlight. The lasting impact of his travels can be seen in his designs for the expansion of the Yale University Art Gallery (1951–53); the Salk Institute (1959–65) in La Jolla, CA; and the Kimbell Art Museum (1967–72) in Fort Worth, TX, among others.

These works and their use of natural light were a key factor in the selection of Kahn as the architect for the Yale Center for British Art over other architects such as Philip Johnson, I. M. Pei, and Robert Venturi. In working with founding director Jules David Prown, Paul Mellon, and others at Yale to create the Center, Kahn remarked, "On a gray day it will look like a moth. On a sunny day, like a butterfly." In creating the interior, Kahn relied on natural materials, including oak, linen, wool carpeting, and raw concrete, that underscore the presence of natural light and complement the art on the walls. He was also selected for his sensitivity to urban planning. His design for the YCBA incorporated shops on the ground level of the building, the first museum to do so. The YCBA was completed in 1977, three years after Kahn's death.

In addition to operating his atelier, Kahn taught architecture at several universities on the East Coast of the United States, starting with the Yale School of Architecture, where he served as a professor and design critic from 1947 to 1957. He went on to teach at the University of Pennsylvania, where he ultimately became Paul Philippe Cret Professor of Architecture, a post he held until his death. He also taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Princeton University.

During Kahn's lifetime, his colleagues recognized his work through professional honors. He was elected a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1953 and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1968. He was awarded the AIA Gold Medal, the highest award given by the American Institute of Architects, in 1971.

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## Scope and Contents

The collection features a number of early sketches by Louis Kahn, showing his designs for the YCBA building. It includes exterior elevations, interior and exterior renderings, and floor plans.

## Collection Contents

### Sketches

b. 4007, item 1	High Street elevation <i>22 5/8 x 10 1/8 inches unmatted; 30 x 15 inches matted</i>	1971
b. 4007, item 2	Chapel and High corner entrance to Mellon Center <i>16 15/16 x 12 1/8 inches unmatted; 22 x 16 inches matted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 3	Mellon Center Yale U[niversity] Lecture Room <i>19 x 12 1/6 inches unmatted; 22 x 16 inches matted</i>	1971 Oct 14
b. 4007, item 4	Untitled [Rendering of Yale Center for British Art portico at intersection of Chapel and High streets] <i>33 1/2 x 24 7/16 inches unmatted; 33 1/8 x 30 inches matted</i>	1972
b. 4007, item 5	[Second floor plan] <i>25 x 23 1/4 inches unmatted; 31 1/2 x 30 inches matted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 6	1 [First floor plan] <i>30 3/4 x 24 inches unmatted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 7	2M [Second floor mezzanine plan] <i>32 1/4 x 24 15/16 inches unmatted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 8	4 [Fourth floor plan] <i>31 5/15 x 24 inches unmatted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 9	3 [Third floor plan] <i>25 5/16 x 19 7/8 inches unmatted</i>	1971 February 17
b. 4007, item 10	3 [Third floor plan] <i>29 7/8 x 24 inches unmatted</i>	undated
b. 4007, item 11	2 [Second floor plan] <i>31 7/8 x 24 inches unmatted</i>	undated

## **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**

Architecture -- 20th Century -- United States  
Architecture -- Connecticut -- New Haven  
Art museums -- United States  
College art museums

### **Genres / Formats**

Architectural drawings  
Architectural drawings (visual works)

### **Corporate Body**

Yale Center for British Art