

Guide to the Birren Collection of Paint Catalogs and Samples

ART 30



Compiled by Arts Library Special Collections Staff

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Arts Library Special Collections

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library Special Collections
Arts Library Special Collections
180 York Street
New Haven, CT 06511
203-432-1712
haasalsc@yale.edu
<https://web.library.yale.edu/arts/alsc>

CALL NUMBER: ART 30

TITLE: Birren collection of paint catalogs and samples

DATES: 1880s-2010s

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 5 linear feet (12 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Chiefly in English with some materials in European and non-European languages.

SUMMARY: The collection contains a variety of pamphlets, brochures, and other ephemera issued by paint manufacturers as catalogs, color guides, and paint samples. Many of the items in this collection are also individually cataloged in the Yale University Library online catalog.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/arts.art.0030>

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/arts.art.0030>.

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

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Faber Birren and family, 1971-1998.

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright has not been transferred to Yale University. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

Birren Collection of Paint Catalogs and Samples, Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Individual bibliographic records were created in the Yale library catalog previously for the majority of the items in the collection. These material are not shelved individually but are boxed in alphabetical order by manufacturer's name. Readers who have identified an item in the library catalog that they wish to see should consult the box listing within the collection finding aid to determine which box should be requested through the Arts Library Special Collections department.

Biographical / Historical

Faber Birren, noted authority on color, was born September 21, 1900, in Chicago, Illinois. The son of successful landscape painter, Joseph P. Birren, and skilled pianist, Crescentia (Lang) Birren, Faber was the youngest of three children (Jeanette Birren Quinn (b. 1894) and William B. Birren (b. 1898)). After attending Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Elementary School, Birren studied art and ceramics at Nichols Senn High School. During his last two years there, Faber also attended classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. After high school, he entered the University of Chicago (1919). It was then that he began his study of color theory under Walter Sargent and others. Birren left the University of Chicago after only two years, and in 1921, he began working for a local bookseller and publisher, Charles T. Pownier. It was in this first job that Birren began to collect books on color and to write on the subject.

In 1924, Birren published his first articles (3) on color; the same year, his earliest attempt at a book on color was unsuccessfully submitted for publication. It was not until 1928 that *Color in Vision* was published. For the next several years and through the Great Depression, Birren published scores of articles and stories on the functional use of color, especially its use in hospitals and schools. Meanwhile, he continued to submit manuscripts on color and novels to publishers. Birren later explained that the meager pay for a published article coupled with the economic state of the country in 1933, "led to the endeavor to become a free-lance professional color authority." Birren reoriented his focus from writing to consulting.

Until late in life, Faber Birren was retained as a color consultant by companies such as Dupont, Walt Disney, General Electric, Westvaco Corp., and Sears & Roebuck, as well as by the United States Navy, Coast Guard and Army. During World War II, he specialized in the functional applications of color, focusing on its use in factories and war industries. He also developed color safety standards which were internationally adopted.

After the war, Birren continued his color consulting, and began lecturing at museums, universities and other institutions. He was a prolific author. By the end of his life, Birren had authored and published 254 articles and forty books on color; he had also published three novels under the pseudonyms Gregor and Martin Lang.

In 1971, Birren offered part of his personal collection of books on color to Yale University. Along with his donation to the university of over two hundred rare books, he also established an endowment and a research and publication fund for the development of a collection of books on color. The Birren Collection is the most comprehensive collection of books on color in the world.

In 1934, Birren married Wanda Martin (May 10, 1908 - Dec. 31, 1997), who was supportive of her husband's endeavors. They had two daughters, Zoe (b. Sept. 22, 1935) and Fay (b. May 1, 1939), and four grandchildren. Faber Birren died at age eighty-eight on December 30, 1988, after suffering a stroke.

Scope and Contents

The collection contains a variety of pamphlets, brochures, and other ephemera issued by paint manufacturers as catalogs, color guides, and paint samples. Many of the items in this collection are also individually cataloged in the Yale University Library online catalog.

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically by manufacturer, then chronologically by date.

Collection Contents

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| b. 1 | A-C |
| b. 2 | C-E |
| b. 3 | E-H |
| b. 4 | H-L |
| b. 5 | L-P |
| b. 6 | Pratt |
| b. 7 | P-S |
| b. 8 | S-Y |
| b. 9 | B-D oversize |
| b. 10 | D-J oversize |
| b. 11 | D-S oversize |

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

Color guides
Colors -- Charts, diagrams, etc.
Manufactures -- Catalogs
Paint -- Catalogs
Paint -- Specimens

Acquired From

Birren, Faber, 1900-1988