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Guide to the Rollo Peters Costume and Set Designs

DRA 3

Compiled by Susan Brady

January2007

Arts Library Special Collections
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library Special Collections
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180 York Street
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haasalsc@yale.edu
https://web.library.yale.edu/arts/alsc

CALL NUMBER: DRA 3

CREATOR: Peters, Rollo

TITLE: Rollo Peters Costume and Set Designs

DATES: 1912-1965

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 1 linear foot (4 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The materials in the collection document the varied theatrical and non-theatrical artistic activities of Rollo Peters from his youth until his later years.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/arts.dra.0003

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.dra.0003.

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

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Bequest of Rollo Peters.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright has not been transferred to Yale University.

Preferred Citation

Rollo Peters Costume and Set Designs. Robert B. Haas Family Arts Library, Yale University.

Biographical / Historical

Charles Rollo Peters, III was born in Paris, France, on September 25, 1892, the son of the American artist Charles Rollo Peters, Jr. and Mary Murphy Peters. He spent his early childhood in France, but moved to his father's native California when he was five years old. He attended schools in Monterey, California, and while a freshman at Pacific Grove High School he participated in theatrical productions at the Work Theater of Monterey. Following his first year in high school his family moved abroad and Peters studied to be a portraitist in London, Paris, and Munich. He returned to the United States in 1914, and began working in New York City as a portraitist, poster painter, and art teacher.

Within a few years of arriving in New York, Peters began working with experimental theatre companies including the Washington Square Players, for whom he designed the sets for *Life of Man* in January of 1917. Later that year he designed the sets and acted in *Night*, a production of the Provincetown Players. Peters also designed for Broadway productions including *Madame Sand* with Minnie Maddern Fiske, *Lady of the Camellias* with Ethel Barrymore, and *One Night in Rome* with Laurette Taylor. Peters was one of several theatrical scene designers (including Lee Simonson and Norman Bel Geddes) to be chosen to exhibit their work at the Bourgeois Galleries in New York in April 1919. That same spring, he was named company director of the Theatre Guild, a company formed by Lawrence Langner and other members of the Washington Square Players, which had disbanded the previous year. He designed and acted in the company's first two productions, *Bonds of Interest* and *John Ferguson*, but in the fall of 1919, he resigned his directorship reportedly over a disagreement with the board of managers over script changes for the production of *The Faithful*.

In the 1920s, Peters designed and acted in numerous Broadway shows, including one of the most renowned American productions of *Romeo and Juliet* (1923). His design of the set and costumes and his acting in the role of Romeo opposite Jane Cowl were highly praised. In 1921, Peters designed costumes for George Pierce Baker's *The Pilgrim Spirit*, a tercentennial pageant celebrating the arrival of the Pilgrims to Massachusetts. And in 1925 he designed the costumes for Adolph Bolm's ballet of La Falla's *Amor Brujo* in Chicago. In the summer of 1927, he directed his own stock company with Ann Harding in Detroit, Michigan.

In 1931, Lawrence Langner established the Westport Theatre in Westport, Connecticut, as a summer venue. Peters designed various productions during the first summer there, including *The Streets of New York*, which moved to the 48th Street Theatre in New York in October of 1931. Peters designed, directed, and acted in touring productions of Shakespeare in 1935 and 1936. He was asssistant director to George Cukor in Hollywood in 1935, and was advisor on the MGM production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1936). During World War II, he toured England in *Blithe Spirit* as part of the USO Camp Shows.

In addition to his stage work, Peters was involved in renovating and building homes in Rockland County, New York, in the late 1930s and 1940s. During World War II he was a volunteer member of the San Francisco Office of Civilian Defense and worked in the camouflage shop of the navy air force. Following the war he returned to New York State, but moved back to California in the 1950s. In 1965, a number of his designs were exhibited at the Tantamount Theatre in Carmel Valley, California. He died in Monterey, California, on January 21, 1967.

Scope and Contents

The materials in the collection document the varied theatrical and non-theatrical artistic activities of Rollo Peters from his youth until his later years. The collection includes original pencil, ink, and watercolor scene and costume designs created by Rollo Peters for theatre, dance, and opera productions. Included are designs for productions of the Provincetown Players, the Washington Square Players, The Theatre Guild, various Broadway productions, and others. Peters's non-theatrical artworks include portrait drawings of unidentified subjects from the early 1910s, an undated sketch of Ethel Barrymore, two sketchbooks, and a few drawings and watercolors relating to his real estate and wartime activities. Photographs include several of Peters's stage designs, Peters in acting roles, and a photograph of his sketch of Barrymore. A poster for the Theatre Guild's production of *The Faithful*, containing a drawing by Peters, and a poster advertising Peters's production of Ruth Draper at the Wharf Theatre in Monterey, are also included.

The costume and scene designs are interfiled and arranged alphabetically by title of production. Peters's portrait drawings are arranged by date. The photographs are arranged alphabetically by subject. Oversized materials are housed in Box 4. For preservation reasons, some of Peters's designs that were matted for exhibition purposes during his lifetime have been removed from the mats. Notations on the mat board by Peters and others were photocopied onto acid-free paper and foldered with the drawings. Information in brackets ([ ]) was supplied by the archivist who processed the papers.

Arrangement

Organized in three series: I. Costume and Set Designs, 1917-1958. II. Non-theatrical Drawings, 1912-1952. III. Photographs and Posters, 1919-1965.

Collection Contents
Series I: Costume and Set Designs, 1917-1960

b. 1, f. 1	*El Amor Brujo*	[1925?]
b. 1, f. 2	[*Antony and Cleopatra*?]	[1924?]
b. 1, f. 3	*The Avenue* On same sheet: *In the Zone*; *His Widow's Husband*; *Blind Alleys*	[1917]
b. 1, f. 4	*Blind Alleys* See also: *The Avenue*	[1917]
b. 1, f. 5	*Bonds of Interest*	[1919]
b. 1, f. 6	*Death of Tintagiles*	1917
b. 1, f. 7	*Faust*	undated
b. 1, f. 8	*Francesca da Rimini*	undated
b. 1, f. 9	*The Grasshopper*	[1917]
b. 1, f. 10	*Hamlet* ("projected production")	undated
	Hernani	
b. 1, f. 11	Costumes	undated
b. 1, f. 12	Sets	undated
	In the Zone See: *The Avenue*	
	His Widow's Husband See: *The Avenue*	
b. 1, f. 13	*Josephine*	[1918]
b. 1, f. 14	*Lady of the Camellias*	1917
b. 1, f. 15	*Lady Windermere's Fan*	undated
	Macbeth See: *The Avenue*	
	Madame Sand	
b. 1, f. 16	Costumes	1917
b. 1, f. 17	Sets	1917
b. 2, f. 18	*Moliere*	1919
	Mystery of Edwin Drood See: Oversize box 4	undated

b. 2, f. 19	*Night*	[1917]
b. 2, f. 20	The Pilgrim Spirit, (Tercentennial pageant)	1921
b. 2, f. 21	[The Prince and the Pauper]	[1920]
b. 2, f. 22	*Romanesques*	undated
	Romeo and Juliet See also: Oversize box 4	
b. 2, f. 23	Costumes File includes pages from production program.	[1923]
b. 2, f. 24-25	Sets	[1923]
b. 2, f. 26	*Sacred Ground*	undated
b. 2, f. 27	[*Salome*?]	[1918?]
b. 2, f. 28	*Sheba* ("projected musical play"--unproduced)	1958
	The Streets of New York See: Oversize box 4	
b. 2, f. 29	*The Taming of the Shrew* See also: Oversize box 4	[1925] 1960
b. 2, f. 30	*Tannhauser* [verso of one drawing contains drawing of Lady Macbeth]	undated
	Unidentified designs by Peters	
b. 2, f. 31	Costumes	undated
b. 2, f. 32-33	Sets	undated
b. 2, f. 34	Designs by Augna Enters and R. A. Jones	1929 1955

Series II: Non-theatrical drawings, 1912-1952

	Portrait drawings	
b. 3, f. 35-37	Pencil	1911-1915 undated
	Barrymore, Ethel See: Oversize box 4	
b. 3, f. 38	Red chalk	1912 1915 undated
b. 3, f. 39	Watercolor	1914 undated
b. 3, f. 40	Life drawings	undated
b. 3, f. 41	Miscellaneous drawings: architectural drawings; wartime camouflage watercolor; and bookplate sketches. See also: Oversize box 4	[194–] undated
b. 3, f. 42	Sketchbooks (2)	undated
	Art work by others	
b. 3, f. 43	John Barrymore; Roland Young	1952 undated
b. 3, f. 44	Unidentified	undated

Series III: Photographs and Posters, 1921-1965

	Production photographs	
	Peters as actor	
b. 3, f. 45	*The Varying Shore*	[1921 or 1922?]
b. 3, f. 45	Unidentified production	1918
	Costume designs	
b. 3, f. 46	*Hernani*	undated
	Set designs	
b. 3, f. 46	*Hernani*	undated
b. 3, f. 46	*Romeo and Juliet*	undated
b. 3, f. 46	*Tannhauser*	undated
b. 3, f. 46	Page from unidentified publication with reproductions of four photographs of sets from *Hernani* and *Tannhauser*	undated
b. 3, f. 47	Portrait drawing of Ethel Barrymore	
	Posters See Oversize box 4 for following:	
	Sign for exhibit of Peters's designs at the Tantamount Theatre in Carmel Valley, California	1965
	Theatre Guild production of *The Faithful*	[1919]
	Performance by Ruth Draper in Monterey, California, produced by Peters	[1952?]

Oversize

This contains oversize material from all series of the collection.

	From Series I.	
b. 4, f. 48	*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*	undated
b. 4, f. 48	*Romeo and Juliet*	[1923]
b. 4, f. 48	*The Streets of New York*	1931
b. 4, f. 48	*The Taming of the Shrew*	[1925]
b. 4, f. 49	Mats for *Streets of New York* drawings	undated
b. 4, f. 49	Signatures from mats from which designs were removed	1958 undated
	From Series II.	
b. 4, f. 50	Portrait drawing of Ethel Barrymore	undated
b. 4, f. 51	Watercolor drawings	undated
	From Series III.	
	Posters	
b. 4, f. 52	Sign for exhibit of Peters's designs at the Tantamount Theatre in Carmel Valley, California	1965
b. 4, f. 52	Theatre Guild production of *The Faithful*	[1919]
b. 4, f. 52	Performance by Ruth Draper in Monterey, California, produced by Peters	[1952?]

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

Costume design -- United States
Theater -- Stage setting and scenery -- United States

Genres / Formats

Drawings (visual works)
Watercolors (paintings)

Occupations

Costume designers -- United States
Set designers -- United States

Names

Peters, Rollo

Corporate Bodies

Provincetown Players
Theatre Guild
Washington Square Players (New York, N.Y.)
Westport Country Playhouse (Westport, Conn.)