

Paul and Rachel Mellon Dealer files

S008



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

Cate Peebles

April 25, 2020

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>

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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
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CALL NUMBER: S008

CREATOR: Mellon, Paul

TITLE: Paul and Rachel Mellon dealer files

DATES: 1933–1997

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 25 linear feet (48 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The Paul and Rachel Mellon Dealer Files contain records relating to the purchase of rare books and artwork, including prints, etchings, engravings, drawings, sculpture, and paintings, by the Paul Mellon family. The records comprise correspondence, records, images, and invoices between various dealers, Paul Mellon, and his assistants and art advisors. Many files include detailed provenance, biographical, and conservation information for the artworks, as well as photocopied exhibition catalogs. There are records pertaining to artwork found at the Yale Center for British Art, the National Gallery of Art, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, among other institutions. The John Baskett invoices are records related to artworks purchased through John Baskett, Ltd., a dealership run by Paul Mellon's close friend and advisor, John Baskett from 1964-1990, from whom the Mellon's purchased many works of British art currently on display at the Yale Center for British Art.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/ycba.ia.S008>

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is restricted. Contact the Yale Center for British Art Archives for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Paul Mellon (1907-1999) was an American philanthropist born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was the only son of financier and industrialist Andrew W. Mellon, and his wife, Nora McMullen Mellon. Paul Mellon attended Yale University (1925-1929) and upon graduation enrolled at Cambridge to study English.

While studying at Cambridge, Mellon began collecting books, particularly English color-plate books and rare books on racing and hunting. In 1936 Mellon purchased his first set of paintings, including English painter George Stubbs's *Pumpkin with a Stable-lad* (1774). In the late 1940s, Mellon and his second wife, Rachel Lambert Mellon, initially began collecting French Impressionist paintings, English sporting paintings, and rare English books, particularly those by William Blake. Throughout Mellon's collecting career, spanning over sixty years, he acquired a strong collection of British paintings, prints, sculptures, engravings, etchings, and French paintings. Specifically, Mellon was interested in genre paintings, sporting art, landscapes, marine paintings, urban views, conversation pieces, and informal portraits. Most of these were medium or small-scale pictures, but Mellon also collected some larger scale artworks. His sculpture purchases were mostly portrait busts, and most of his acquisitions were from the eighteenth century. Many, if not all, of these acquisitions now reside within the collections of the Yale Center for British Art, the National Gallery of Art and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Mellon maintained close relationships with his dealers. As he became known as a collector most of his purchase transactions were initiated by his advisors, John Baskett and Basil Taylor, who contacted him about artwork or books they thought would interest him.

Rachel Lambert Mellon (1910-2014) was an accomplished horticulturist and collector of rare books. In 1961, she redesigned the White House Rose Garden for the Kennedys. Known as "Bunny," she was most interested in collecting European art and rare books about gardening and botany. Her library is maintained at Oak Spring Garden Foundation in Virginia.

John Baskett (1930) was Paul Mellon's primary art advisor beginning in the early 1960s when he served as Mellon's first curator. Baskett began his work as an art dealer under his father's firm, Colnaghi, and founded his own firm, with the assistance of Mellon, in 1967. John Baskett, Ltd. was in operation until 1994. John Baskett co-wrote Paul Mellon's autobiography, *"Reflections in a Silver Spoon"* (1992).

Scope and Contents

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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
Booksellers and bookselling

Occupations

Art dealers

Genres / Formats

Correspondence

Names

Baskett, John
Mellon, Rachel Lambert
Taylor, Basil