Cecil Beaton Papers, 1938-1979: Finding Aid

Summary Information

Call number: C1194
Repository: Princeton University. Library. Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections
Manuscripts Division
One Washington Road Princeton, New Jersey 08544 USA
Size: 0.4 linear feet
1 archival box
Language(s) of Material: English
Abstract: Consists chiefly of correspondence of Cecil Beaton, English fashion and portrait photographer and Academy Award winning stage and costume designer for film and theater, with his author friend Hal Burton.
Location: This collection is stored onsite at Firestone Library.
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Biography/History

Sir Cecil Walter Hardy Beaton was an English fashion and portrait photographer and a stage and costume designer for films and the theater. When he was eleven his grandmother bought him a Kodak 3A camera, and he began to teach himself the basics of photography, often getting his sisters and mother to sit for him. He managed to get a portrait sitting with the Duchess of Amalfi, and the resulting images gave Beaton his first piece of published work in Vogue magazine; in 1927 he started working for Vogue on a regular basis. Beaton often photographed the Royal Family for official publication and he also took the wedding pictures of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. During the Second World War, Beaton was posted to the Ministry of Information and given the task of recording images from the home front. After the war, Beaton tackled the Broadway stage, designing sets, costumes, and lighting for a 1946 revival of Lady Windermere's Fan, in which he also acted. His most celebrated achievement for the stage was the sets and costumes for My Fair Lady (1956) which led to two film musicals, Gigi (1958) and My Fair Lady (1964), both of which earned Beaton the Academy Award for Costume Design. In 1972, Beaton received his knighthood, but suffered a major stroke two years later which permanently paralyzed one side of his body. Though primarily homosexual, he did have relationships with women, including the actress Greta Garbo.

Description

The collection consists selected papers of Beaton. Correspondence with author friend Hal Burton, including 81 letters, 18 cards (several of which are undated), and two telegrams, reveal Beaton’s regard for his friend. Other letters cover such topics as Burton’s criticism of works like Gainsborough and Quadrille and the collaboration of the two men. In addition, there are two letters by Beaton to Mark Boxer giving details of his recent work and of a trip to Japan. Also present are eight letters and two cards to Alastair Forbes, in which Beaton expresses his appreciation of Forbes. There are three unsigned, autograph letters written in pencil by Greta Garbo, trying to arrange a meeting with "Beatie." One letter to Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor, and one Christmas card designed by Beaton and addressed to Diana and Reed Vreeland are included.

Additional papers include editorial correspondence—referring generally to schedules, meetings, reviews, etc.—from Beaton to editors Ned Bradford and Ray Roberts, respectively regarding the publication of The Wandering Years: Diaries, 1922-1939 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962) and The Best of Beaton (New York: Macmillan, 1968); together with a file documenting Beaton’s disastrous dismissal from American Vogue in January 1938 due to the appearance of anti-Semitic propaganda in one of his drawings for the February issue (the magazine was immediately pulled, but only after 150,000 copies were mailed for distribution). Additionally, there is a handful of related material, including a note from Beaton to Ruth Ford, and a folder of printed matter.

Arrangement

Folders are arranged alphabetically by correspondent, followed by photographs, ephemera, and printed material.
Access and Use

Access
The collection is open for research.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information
Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. No further photoduplication of copies of material in the collection can be made when Princeton University Library does not own the original. Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Associate University Librarian for Rare Books and Special Collections. The library has no information on the status of literary rights in the collection and researchers are responsible for determining any questions of copyright.

Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition
Much of the correspondence (Hal Burton, Greta Garbo, etc.) was purchased in June 2007.
Other papers were purchased in March 2012. AM2008-06, 2012-78.

Processing and Other Information

Preferred Citation
Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Cecil Benton Papers, Box and Folder Number; Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Processing Information

Encoding
This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit 2012-06-20T14:36-0400

Descriptive Rules Used
Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

Subject Headings

- Boxer, Mark -- Correspondence.
· Burton, Hal, 1908-.
· Garbo, Greta, 1905-1990 --Correspondence.
· Windsor, Wallis Warfield, Duchess of, 1896-1986 --Correspondence.
· Authors, English -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
· Costume designers -- England -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
· Photographers -- England -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
· Set designers --England -- 20th century -- Correspondence.
· Correspondence -- 20th century.
· Photography
· Theater/Film
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