

Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena Papers

CMS.117

Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena Papers

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This finding aid was produced using the Archivists' Toolkit

October 03, 2017

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Center for Migration Studies
307 E. 60th Street
New York, New York 10022

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Summary Information

Repository	Center for Migration Studies
Title	Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena Papers
Date	1960-1985
Extent	1.0 Linear feet in two document boxes
Location note	CMS.117 is housed at the Center for Migration Studies, 307 East 60th Street, Third Floor, New York, New York, 10022. Some of Sirena's art is also housed there, and at the Provincial House of the Saint Charles Province of the Society of Saint Charles-Scalabrinians, 27 Carmine Street, New York, New York 10014.
Language	English
Language of Materials note	Most of the catalogs, in CMS.117 are in Italian. Newspaper clippings from the 1960s are mostly in Italian. Much of the rest of the collection is in English.
Abstract	CMS.117 covers, via catalogs, newspaper clippings, photographs, posters, and assorted personal files the professional papers of the Italian-American painter Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena, active in New York City, Long Island, and Italy from the 1960s to 1990.

Preferred Citation note

Center for Migration Studies of New York; Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena Papers (CMS.117); Box; Folder.

Biographical/Historical note

Information on Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena, who styled herself Sirena, comes mainly from her own biographical notes and from information in her catalogs and newspaper interviews. She is represented in New York City-area newspapers principally through advertisements for her art galleries; she has no locally published obituary.

Sirena started her own story with her birth in White Place, New York, in 1929. Her father died when she was two years old, leading her mother to take Sirena and her eight siblings back to the mother's native Italy. All eight siblings died before the end of World War II. Sirena herself was rescued from a burning train during the war by an opera singer who, noting her four-octave range, trained her to sing grand opera. A year later her teacher died in a bombing raid, but Sirena was able to make her singing debut in Naples at age fourteen. In the last stages of World War II, she was captured by the Nazis and entrained for a concentration camp but escaped into American hands and was able to resume her singing career. In 1947 she returned to New York State, where the Lew Walters Agency represented her professionally, booking singing engagement around the world. She married a real estate broker named Anthony Fanara, whom she met when he sold her a Manhattan apartment. The marriage ended in divorce, but not before it produced a daughter, Margherita.

Her divorce and a near-fatal illness led Sirena to abandon her singing career and seclude herself for five years, during which she taught herself painting, developing a style she called "Trans-expressionism" and a technique she called "marblization." By 1963 she was living in Merrick, New York, operating an art gallery. She went on to international recognition; she repeatedly told the story of how Picasso himself called her "an artist with a future." Her work appeared in numerous solo shows and many museums, and was purchased for both private and public collections. Suffering from overwork, she went into seclusion for a second, seven-year period, emerging in 1981. to resume her painting career, this time with a gallery in Manhattan. She was also generous with her paintings in this period. The Center for Migration Studies received several when these papers were deposited; they are not an official part of the collection. She also had photographs of herself donating paintings to Pope John Paul II and John Cardinal O'Connor. She died in 2006, and her remaining estate was auctioned off in early 2007.

Scope and Contents note

CMS.117 documents one phase of the life of Antonia Mastrocristina Sirena, the period from the mid 1960s to 1990 when she was active as a painter of large paintings that usually featured a bright palette and the suggestions of individuals and objects, a style she called "trans-expressionism." The collection also documents only one aspect of Sirena's painting career. There are no paintings and no business records. Rather, the collection focuses on her exhibitions and the critical response to them.

Sirena collected programs from many of her exhibits, mostly those in Italy, between the 1960s and the 1980s. These are arranged chronologically in one document box, and are accompanied by posters for two of the exhibits, wrapped separately. She also kept newspaper reviews of her Italian and American exhibits, some in the original newsprint and some in photocopies; these are filed separately according to the type of paper. She also had files on miscellaneous subjects related to her art, including files on her exhibits at the Center for Migration Studies' original Staten Island home in the 1980s.

While it is a small and narrowly focused collection, CMS.117 does touch on many subjects. Sirena was part of the Italian-American community of her day, and a woman artist in an age when women artists were beginning to garner some recognition. She took an intensively spiritual approach to her art, and her collections contains many interviews and reviews calling attention to the role of religion in her life and art. Finally, she was an artist, and part of the art world, reflecting the influences of the abstract painters that came before her, and foreshadowing the combination of artist and public figure that became more important in the 1980s.

Arrangement note

CMS.117 is arranged into three series as follows:

- I. Chronological File
- II. Alphabetical File
- III. Oversize File

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Center for Migration Studies

Conditions Governing Access note

Open to researchers by appointment.

Conditions Governing Use note

The Center for Migration Studies does not hold copyright to all published items in CMS.117. It is incumbent upon the researcher to clear copyrights before use.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

CMS.117 was acquired in 1985 directly from Antonia Mastrocristino Sirena.

Processing Information note

During September 2017 Mary T. Sanders sorted two document boxes of Sirena's papers into the present order. Two oversized items were wrapped separately. The rest of the collection was placed into folders, the folders were labelled and then the collection was returned to the document boxes and the boxes were labeled. Mary Sanders and Mary Brown prepared the finding aid.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

CMS.084A contains 3x4" color glossy prints of Sirena's artwork found at the Center for Migration Studies in the mid 1990s, when it was located at 209 Flagg Place, Staten Island, New York 10304.

Controlled Access Headings

Geographic Name(s)

- Italian American Women |New York (State) |New York

Personal Name(s)

- Sirena, Antonia Mastrocristino, 1929-2006

Subject(s)

- Italian American artists.

Chronological

Collection Inventory

Chronological	Box	Folder
Chronological 1965	1	1
Chronological 1966	1	2
Chronological 1967	1	3
Chronological 1968	1	4
Chronological 1969	1	5
Chronological 1970	1	6
Chronological 1971	1	7
Chronological 1971	1	8
Chronological 1973	1	9
Chronological 1980	1	10
Chronological 1981	1	11

Alphabetical

Chronological 1982	1	12
Chronological 1983	1	13
Chronological 1985	1	14
Alphabetical		
	Box	Folder
Biographical Notes undated	2	1
Center for Migration Studies Art Exhibit 1981	2	2
Center for Migration Studies Gala 1985	2	3
Gallery Publications undated	2	4
Invitations	2	5
Newspaper Clippings 1960-1969	2	6
Newspaper Clippings 1970-1979	2	7
Newspaper Clippings 1980-1985	2	8
Newspaper Clippings undated	2	9

Oversize

Photocopies 1980-1985	2	10
Photocoies undated	2	11
Photographs undated	2	12

Scope and Contents note

CMS.0118, Photographs file, consists of seven photographs. Five are 7x10" black-and-white glossy prints from the 1970s or 1980s showing Serena; in one image she is at an outdoors locale and in the remaining four she is posing before four of her paintings. There are also two 8x10" color glossy prints documenting Sirena's donation of paintings to Pope John Paul II.

Rose and the Thorns, The (inscribed by the author to Lydio F. Tomasi) 1990	2	13
Translations undated	2	14

Oversize**Oversize**

Advertisement for Bjorn Lindgren Gallery, New York, New York 23 March - 30 April 1982	1
Advertisement for Galleria D'Artes L'Albatross, Rome, Italy 3-14 May 1973	1