

**Finding Aid to the
Susan Katz “The Woman I Am”
Collection, ca. 1973-1975
Archives of Women Artists**

Finding Aid Prepared by and Collection Processed by:
Emily Sawyer, April 2018

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Overview

Repository Information:

National Museum of Women in the Arts,
Betty Boyd Dettre Library & Research Center
1250 New York Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20005
Email: lrc@nmwa.org
Phone: 202-783-5000

Title:

Susan Katz "The Woman I Am" Collection

Provenance:

Gift of Susan Katz, December 15, 2017

Collection Dates:

Inclusive Dates: ca. 1973-1975

Physical Description:

5 boxes, approx. 1.2 linear feet

Summary:

This collection consists of materials gifted by photographer Susan Katz related to her "The Woman I Am" project, originally intended as a photobook. The project documents women artists, performers, musicians, and writers in their studios in New York City during the mid-1970s. Each subject was photographed with black and white film and interviewed about their experience as a woman and as an artist. This collection includes a photocopy of Katz's photobook mockup, containing photographic portraits, along with a typed essay written from each subject's perspective, based on their interview. Additionally, the collection includes photographic negatives with original envelopes, slides, contact sheets and photographic prints, model release forms, and two pages of Katz's organizational notes.

Finding Aid URL:

<https://nmwa.org/learn/library-research/archives/finding-aids/katz-finding-aid>

Administrative Information**Access Information:**

Unrestricted

Preferred Citation:

[Item], [Date], [Series], Susan Katz "The Woman I Am" Collection, Archives of Women Artists, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Betty Boyd Dettre Library & Research Center.

Publication and Photocopies Note:

Permission from the National Museum of Women in the Arts required for publication and reproduction of original materials. Photocopies of original materials can be made for a fee and at the discretion of the library director.

Related Materials Note:

The Betty Boyd Dettre Library & Research Center holds additional materials related to Susan Katz's artwork in the artist files collection.

Other documentary photographs by Susan Katz are in the Museum of the City of New York's collection, some of which may be viewed at <http://collections.mcnyc.org/>.

Processed by:

Emily Sawyer, April 2018,
Slides processed by Jennifer Page, June 2018

Processing Note:

The first gifted portion of the collection consisted of strips of negatives which contained the frames selected for an unpublished photobook, *The Woman I Am*, in an attempt to recreate the planned book in digital form. The artist marked the edges of the negative

frames with red pen to identify the images used previously in the mockup (with a few discrepancies; see final processing note).

Katz made a second contribution shortly afterwards, which included the remaining negatives from the project. These were housed in glassine envelopes, with each envelope containing a complete or partial film roll (up to 44 frames), cut into strips (up to 6 frames). The first gifted portion of negatives were reincorporated into their original film rolls, found in this second portion. In rehousing, each strip was placed in an archival sleeve and arranged to reflect its order in its respective roll. In a few cases, loose or mismatched strips were returned to the correct roll. Each glassine envelope is currently contiguous with the roll it originally contained.

Where possible, multiple rolls of the same subject were ordered according to any visible set of consecutive numbers written by the artist on their respective original envelopes. All original envelopes and negative strips have been assigned new numbers, indicated along with subject names on their upper right corner.

The contents of original envelopes labelled “LaBelle” have been incorporated under the subject of “Nona Hendryx.”

On photographic prints, where not already specified, the subject, artist, and date were added to the back in pencil.

Page numbers were added, in pencil, to the bottom right corner of all photobook mockup pages.

The photos selected for the book were scanned from the available negatives and saved as TIFs, with file names conveying subject name, along with the photo's intended order in the photobook. The text pages from the mockup have also been scanned and saved as PDFs.

In a few instances, negatives for the images originally selected for the mockup were missing or misidentified by the artist: She marked the negative Wilson 3-2 frame #28, while the mockup contains the image from 3-1 frame #26 instead (mockup p. 4); Roan 5-6 #37 was marked, rather than 5-5 #35 (mockup p. 35); also, 3 of the 4 Abigail Heyman mockup images (mockup pp. 60-62) were not found among any gifted negatives—instead, alternative frames for use in the digital recreation were marked by the artist.

Katz made a third contribution in May 2018 of black and white photographic slides of 12 of the women. These were rehoused in archival slide sleeves and arranged in the order that Katz used in her photobook mockup book, each in a corresponding folder for each of the three portfolios in the photobook.

A collection of oral history tapes were added in March 2021 and Series 6 was created to accommodate them. Shortly after, in May 2021, a set of three index postcards by May Stevens were sent to the LRC by Katz. These were added to Series 5.

Biographical Note

Susan Lorkid Katz is an American photographer. Born in 1947 in Brooklyn, NY, Katz began her career as a teacher, then earned a MS in counseling. In the early 1970's, she joined a therapeutic community in New York City where she became acquainted with a number of artists and musicians. Through the creative activity within this group, she experimented in various art forms, becoming absorbed in the creative process. She also became politically and socially active with participation in the Women's Liberation Movement and assisting with the establishment of the N.Y.C. Chapter of The National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression. She reflects back to this time in her twenties and early thirties as an extraordinary period of psychological and artistic growth. It was during this time that she began studying photography at the New School and Parsons School of Design in NYC where she developed a particular interest in portraiture and the photo essay. She was a founding member of 22 Wooster, a SOHO Cooperative Gallery, exhibited widely, and taught photography at colleges in NYC.

Through her focus on the photo essay, from 1974-1976, Katz conceived of "The Woman I Am," a project combining photography and writing. She cold-called women artists and proposed to take portraits and document them while working. She wanted to explore their creative process and thoughts on the relationship between their gender and their art. Her main criteria for selecting her subjects were that they were women known and respected within their artistic field. By locating her project in New York City, Katz was able to visit these women in their homes and studios. She photographed and interviewed them, and later transcribed and transformed the conversations into first-person essays, assisted by writer, Leslie J. Freeman. The images and essays were made into a book mockup, which Katz attempted, unsuccessfully, to have published; however, she did exhibit many of the photographs as individual pieces.

While pursuing her MFA in photography, Katz focused her thesis project on the South Bronx, documenting Hispanic families and contrasting their interpersonal warmth with the cold, barren broken down neighborhood in which they lived. This photographic endeavor, which also contained interviews, is now in the archives of the Museum of the City of New York.

By the mid-1980's, Katz had moved on to more conceptual photography and photo collage in which deconstructing a visual subject and/or layering image and text represented more

of what she wanted to communicate. During this transition, she became disenchanted with the NYC art scene, and this set her on a new path. She subsequently earned an MSW and developed a successful career as a psychotherapist. She also pursued creative writing, graduating from two writing programs.

Katz currently resides in New York City. She is working on short story fiction and a memoir. She has reengaged in photography, making photographic images, exhibiting, and creating a series of photocollages to accompany her own writing.

Scope and Content Note

“The Woman I Am” project was originally conceived as a documentary photobook. All photographs are in black and white. This collection is made up of elements related to the photobook, organized by material similarity into 5 series.

Series 1 contains a Xerox copy of the photobook mockup, made up of portraits and essays. This book begins with a list of contents and 85 photographic portraits, followed by an introduction by Katz and three “portfolios” of personal essays from the 18 subjects, which were constructed by Katz and writer Leslie J. Freeman from their edited individual interviews. The subject portraits and essays appear in the following order, designated by Katz: (in Portfolio 1) May Wilson (5 photos), Mary Anthony (5), Nona Hendryx (5), Alice Walker (4), Susan Crile (5), Eva Rubinstein (5), Barbara Roan (5); (in Portfolio 2) Cynthia Carlson (5), Nikki Giovanni (4), Gillian Bradshaw-Smith (5), Barbara Kruger (4), Valentina Litvinoff (6); (in Portfolio 3) Abigail Heyman (4), Hannah Green (4), Joan Miller (5), Gwendolyn Watson (5), Myrna Lamb (5), and Nina Yankowitz (4). With the exception of 3 Abigail Heyman portraits, all mockup images can be found in the Series 2 negatives.

At least one page of the final essay from Nina Yankowitz appears to be missing; this was not included in the gifted mockup from Katz.

Series 2 of this collection includes 35mm and 120mm photographic negatives, depicting the 18 artists in their studios. Negatives of dancer Shirley Rushing are also included, although they were not incorporated into Katz’s mockup of the photobook. One additional roll of negatives, labelled as “Unknown Sitter” during processing, depicts an unidentified woman and child. Negatives of most subjects are in 35mm; however, Susan Crile, Gillian Bradshaw-Smith, and Valentina Litvinoff are represented in both 35mm and 120mm film.

In addition to the negatives, Series 2 includes the original glassine envelopes in which the negatives were delivered, bearing photographic and organizational information handwritten by the artist.

Series 3 consists of 120 photographic slides depicting 12 of the 18 photobook subjects: May Wilson (11), Mary Anthony (11), Nona Hendryx (6), Susan Crile (7), Barbara Roan (7), Cynthia Carlson (9), Nikki Giovanni (5), Gillian Bradshaw-Smith (17), Barbara Kruger (5), Valentina Litvinoff (13), Abigail Heyman (11), and Joan Miller (18).

Series 4 consists primarily of 32 photographic prints from this project, mounted on 30 11"x14" papers or boards. One additional 8"x10" print depicting Barbara Kruger is unmounted. These were printed for exhibition independent of the photobook. The prints depict 8 of the 18 photobook subjects: May Wilson (1 print), Susan Crile (2), Gillian Bradshaw-Smith (4), Barbara Kruger (6), Valentina Litvinoff (3 papers, one with 3 prints), Abigail Heyman (4 prints), Hannah Green (4), and Myrna Lamb (7).

Also in Series 4 are 10 8"x10" contact sheets depicting three subjects: Hannah Green (3 sheets), Barbara Roan (4), and Cynthia MacDonald (3). Cynthia MacDonald is not part of the photobook.

Series 5 is made up of additional paper materials related to "The Woman I Am" project. Model release forms were signed by 10 of the 18 subjects depicted in the mockup: May Wilson, Susan Crile, Barbara Roan, Cynthia Carlson, Barbara Kruger, Gwendolyn Watson, Valentina Litvinoff, Hannah Green, Myrna Lamb, and Nina Yankowitz. Cynthia MacDonald and Estelle Levitt, not part of the book nor present in the gifted negatives, also have releases. Three art postcards sent to Katz from May Wilson are also part of this series.

Two pages of typed organizational notes from the artist list 13 subjects with years, contact sheet #s, and negative #s. At the time of processing, the contact # and negative # information did not appear to consistently correspond with any numbering provided on the contact sheets, mounted prints, or original negative envelopes, and was not used to inform arrangement during processing.

Organization and Arrangement Information

Arrangement Note:

The collection contents are grouped into series by material type. Negatives, slides, contact sheets, prints, and model release forms have each been arranged by name (subject) in the order intended for the photobook, as demonstrated in the mockup (Series 1), with any additional subjects included at the end. Series 5, due to small size, is located in a folder on top of the Series 4 components in Box 5. Series 6 is arranged chronologically.

Series 1: Xerox of Photobook Mockup

Series 2: Negatives and Original Envelopes

- Series 3: Slides
- Series 4: Contact Sheets and Photographic Prints
- Series 5: Additional Paper Materials
- Series 6: Oral History Cassettes

Names and Subject Terms

Artists' studios
 Documentary photography
 Women photographers
 Anthony, Mary
 Bradshaw-Smith, Gillian
 Carlson, Cynthia, 1942-
 Crile, Susan, 1942-
 Giovanni, Nikki
 Green, Hannah
 Hendryx, Nona
 Heyman, Abigail
 Katz, Susan, 1947-
 Kruger, Barbara, 1945-
 Lamb, Myrna, 1930-2017
 Levitt, Estelle
 Litvinoff, Valentina
 MacDonald, Cynthia
 Miller, Joan, 1936-2014
 Roan, Barbara
 Rubinstein, Eva
 Rushing, Shirley
 Walker, Alice, 1944-
 Watson, Gwendolyn
 Wilson, May, 1905-1986
 Yankowitz, Nina

Container Inventory

Series 1: Xerox of Photobook Mockup

Box #	Title
1	Xerox of Photobook Mockup (145 pages)

Series 2: Negatives and Original Envelopes

Box #	Subject	# of Rolls	# of Strips
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2	May Wilson	4	24
2	Mary Anthony	10	56
2	Nona Hendryx	9	52
2	Alice Walker	4	24
2	Susan Crile	5	24
Box #	Subject	# of Rolls	# of Strips
2	Eva Rubinstein	9	47
2	Barbara Roan	9	46
2	Cynthia Carlson	4	23
2	Nikki Giovanni	4	24
2	Gillian Bradshaw-Smith	7	37
2	Barbara Kruger	5	30
3	Valentina Litvinoff	15	76
3	Abigail Heyman	11	55
3	Hannah Green	6	33
3	Joan Miller	7	37
3	Gwendolyn Watson	7	41
3	Myrna Lamb	12	67
3	Nina Yankowitz	6	34
3	Shirley Rushing	9	50
3	Unknown Sitter	1	4

Series 3: Slides

Box #	Folder	# of Slides
4	Folder 1: Portfolio I	
	May Wilson	11
	Mary Anthony	11
	Nona Hendryx	6
	Susan Crile	7
	Barbara Roan	7
4	Folder 2: Portfolio II	
	Cynthia Carlson	9
	Nikki Giovanni	5
	Gillian Bradshaw-Smith	17
	Barbara Kruger	5
	Valentina Litvinoff	13
4	Folder 3: Portfolio III	
	Abigail Heyman	11
	Joan Miller	18

Series 4: Contact Sheets and Photographic Prints

Box #	Title
5	Contact Sheets (10 sheets)
5	Photographic Prints (32 prints, 30 pages; one paper displays 3 prints)

Series 5: Additional Paper Materials

Box #	Title
5	Model Releases (12 forms)
5	Artist's Notes (2 papers)
5	May Wilson postcards (3)

Series 6: Oral History Cassettes

Box #	Title	Tape #
6	May Wilson, interviewed	1
6	Eva Rubenstein and Shirley Rushing	2
6	Hannah Green and Cynthia Carlson	3
6	Nina Yankowitz	4
6	Barbara Roan and Mary Anthony	5
6	Gwen Watson	6
6	Susan Crile and May Wilson	7
6	Susan Crile	8
6	Joan Miller	9
6	Abigail Heyman	10
6	Nona Hendryx	11
6	Hannah Green	12
6	Myrna Lamb	13
6	Barbara Kruger	14
6	Barbara Roan	15
6	Alice Walker	16
6	Nikki Giovanni	17
6	Barbara Kruger and Abigail Heyman	18
6	Myrna Lamb and Gillian Bradshaw-Smith	19
6	Cynthia Macdonald and Valentina Litvinoff	20