



# Guide to the Irene Rice Pereira Papers 1928-1971

Archives and Special Collections  
Library and Research Center  
National Museum of Women in the Arts

Re-processed by Patrick Brown  
August 2006  
6.5 linear feet; 12 containers

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## Biography

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Irene Rice Pereira (1902-1971) was an abstract painter, poet, and philosopher. Born in Massachusetts, Pereira early on supported her family as an accountant. At twenty-five, she began to pursue the arts by enrolling in night classes at the Art Student League in New York City. She studied there for four years, after which she continued at the Academie Moderne in Paris.

Returning to New York City in 1933, Pereira had her first solo show at the ACA (American Contemporary Artists) Galleries. It was during the 1930s and 1940s that she became a prominent figure in the New York art scene, known for her geometric and rectilinear works, and later for her glass paintings. Her success is reflected in the showcase of her art by the Whitney Museum of American Art. Along with Loren MacIver and Georgia O'Keeffe, she was among the first women to be given a retrospective at a major New York Museum. She continued to be represented in institutions such as Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art. At the peak of her career, she was included in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition *Fourteen Americans*, in 1946.

Pereira's interest in philosophy influenced both her paintings and her writings. As a writer she worked prolifically, but she never received the same acclaim as she got for her painting. In 1944, she published her first article, *An Abstract Painter on Abstract Art*. She continued to write throughout her life, addressing topics such as structure, time, optics, and space. In 1950 she wrote, "my philosophy is the reality of light and space; and ever flowing-never ceasing continuity, unfettered by man made machinery, weight and external likenesses. I use geometric symbols because they represent structural essences and contain infinite possibilities of change and dynamics."<sup>1</sup> She published her last work, *The Poetic of the Form of Space, Light and the Infinite* in 1969.

In 1971 Irene Rice Pereira died of emphysema at the age of sixty-seven, in Marbella, Spain.

## Chronology

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- 1902**            *August 5.* Born in Chelsea, Massachusetts to Emery Rice, a baker born in Poland, and Hilda Vanderbilt Rice.
- 1927-1928**      *October 1927 – May 1928.* Studied at Art Students League with Richard Lahey.
- 1929**            *January 8.* Married Humberto Pereira.
- 1929-1930**      *October – May.* Studied with Jan Matulka, Art Students League.
- 1930-1931**      *September – April.* Studied with Jan Matulka, Art Students League.

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<sup>1</sup> I. Rice Pereira, *I. Rice Pereira: April 17<sup>th</sup> through May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1976* (New York, 1976) introductory statement.

- 1931** Studied at Academie Moderne, Paris under Ozenfant; visited Switzerland, Palermo, Tunis.
- 1932** Leaves from Cherbourg to return to US
- 1933** Studies with Hans Hofmann one month at ASL. First one-woman show at ACA Gallery.
- 1935-1939** Teaches, Design Laboratory, WPA FAP
- 1938** Divorces H. Pereira. Visiting artist lecture, Columbia University, "New Materials and the Artist."
- 1940** Lecture, UAA forum on abstract art. Begins work with Guggenheim Foundation under Hilla Rebay as "Museum Assistant."
- 1941** Sister Dorothy diagnosed with cancer in January and dies in September. MOMA acquires two paintings for permanent collection.
- 1942** Hilla Rebay asks for IRP's resignation, notes IRP "too concerned with materials" but permits IRP to stay until fall.
- September 26.* Marries George Wellington Brown.
- 1944** Publishes article "An Abstract Painter on Abstract Art," published by ACA Gallery.
- 1947** *May 13.* Listed in Congressional Record as having Communist affiliations (support of New Masses).
- June 10.* Participates in panel discussion, "Why the Conflict Over Modern Art?" broadcast by WQXR.
- 1948** Participates in panel discussion, "New Roads in Science and Education: The Artists Meets the Critics"
- 1949** Separates from George Brown
- March.* Presents lecture at the Town Hall, Inc.
- Listed as sponsor for Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace, Waldorf-Astoria.
- Sponsors Mexican Art Workshop associated with University of Guadalajara.
- Meets George Reavey at end of August. In September leaves for Paris.
- 1950** IRP begins letter writing to George Reavey. Returns to Florida and completes divorce from George Brown.
- September 9.* Marries George Reavey in St. Marylebone, London. Witnesses included Dylan Thomas, Helen McAlpine, W.R. Rogers.
- c. 1950** Demonstrates plastics and new materials at Art Education Conference. Teaches at Artists' Equity in New York City.

- 1951 Teaches at Ball State Teacher's College in Muncie, Indiana then returns to New York City in August.
- October.* First mentions new philosophy of light.
- Publishes *Light and the New Reality*.
- 1952 *April 15.* Lectures at Dayton Art Institute on "Light and the New Reality."
- 1953 Whitney Retrospective.
- Lecture/Demo at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.
- 1954 Writes introduction to catalogue of show of Robert E. Borgatta, Wellons Gallery.
- April 25.* Participates in panel, "The Retreat and Advance of Color in Modern Painting," at Marcia Clapp Gallery in New York City.
- Presents lecture on creative process at symposium "Woman in the World of Man" at University of Michigan.
- September.* IRP's sister Juanita is in the hospital with eye injury.
- 1955 *December 13.* IRP leaves George Reavey.
- 1956 *March 2.* Separation agreement with George Reavey.
- Publishes *Nature of Space*.
- 1957 Publishes *The Lapis*.
- 1959 *July 16.* Divorces George Reavey.
- Publishes *Crystal of the Rose*.
- 1963 *July.* Joins Galerie Internationale, New York City.
- 1964 *June.* Travels to San Diego to be co-juror with Vincent Price for "Santa Barbara to the Border" at San Diego County Fair.
- 1965 Juror, Audubon Artists, 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Exhibition.
- March 1.* Lectures at Norton Gallery in Palm Beach on "Art and Space."
- June 30.* Public reading of *The Poetics of the Form of Space, Light and the Infinite* at Gotham Book Mart.
- 1967 Spends five weeks in St. Vincent's Hospital.
- May 27.* Participates in Artists' Voices for India, readings to benefit *The Literary Half-Yearly*.
- 1968 *March 7.* Lecture on "The Logos Principle," Gotham Book Mart Gallery, with Dr. Olivier Leslie Reiser and Dr. Ira Progoff.

1970            *August*. In Clinique Sylvana in Epalinges, Switzerland.

*December 12*. Leaves NYC for Spain after being evicted from apartment.

1971            *January 11*. Dies in Spain.

## Scope and Content

The collection is divided into seven series. The first series contains periodicals. The periodicals have writings by Pereira, reviews of her, and generally match her philosophical interests. The second series is Pereira's personal address book. Series three contains record keeping notes by Pereira regarding her paintings. Inventories of her paintings are in notebooks and a group of notecards record the condition of the paintings. On the notecards are photographic film roll counts to refer the card to a particular painting. The fourth series is a manuscript of Pereira's memoir, which is described as a *Künstlerroman*<sup>2</sup> by Bearor. The manuscript includes photographs of Pereira's work. The photographs are in their original positions, in mylar sleeves. The largest series is series six, which contains photocopies of notebooks by Pereira copied from the originals in the Schlesinger Library. The last series is a copy of Pereira's 1957 book, *The Lapis*.

The Irene Rice Pereira Papers consist of a series of photocopied notebooks entitled *The Concept of Substance*, written between 1954 and 1970. Within the notebooks are journal entries, descriptions of dreams, philosophical notes, reference notes, periodical clippings, sketches and correspondence. The Papers also contain an original, undated manuscript of *An Eastward Journey*, probably written between 1932 and 1959.

There is an original work by Pereira. A number of personal books: Pereira's address book, a tan notebook listing her works between 1935 and 1952, a black notebook listing her works between 1953 and 1959, and a green note book listing works between 1964 and 1967, are also included in this collection. Lastly, the library holds a series of white index cards describing the condition of her works.

*An Eastward Journey* is an unfinished, unpublished autobiographical manuscript. The manuscript was probably written in expectation of requests for her life's story after the Whitney retrospective.

The notebooks entitled *The Concept of Substance* represent a working through of ideas, broaching topics as diverse as the history of Christian philosophy to the nature of space. The books actually published by Pereira during this time (1954 to 1970) can be seen as the culmination of the ideas explored in her notebooks. In this way the notebooks can be approached as a more personal and insightful way into the thought processes of the author herself.

The photocopies are arranged according to previous archival pagination. The pagination for "Concept of Substance" is found in the top right corner of the pages and is composed of three components. The first component is a letter, which seems to refer to the color of the original paper. The second component denotes the book number and the last component gives the page number. The notebooks have been arranged in chronological order. The notes within each book were arranged chronologically by Pereira, although there are many extracts from previous note books and frequent discrepancies in the order of dates.

The collection is divided into seven series:

Series I:    Periodical, 1928-1971 (by subject)

Series II:   Address Book, n.d.

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<sup>2</sup> *Künstlerroman* is a romantic novel of an artist's moral and intellectual development. (Karen Bearor, "Irene Rice Pereira's Early Work: Embarking on an Eastward Journey." P. 9)

- Series III: Art Inventories, 1935-1967 (by object)
- Series IV: Manuscript, c. 1932 – c. 1959 (original order)
- Series V: Original Work, n.d.
- Series VI: Photocopies, 1955-1970 (original order)
- Series VII: Book, 1957

## Provenance

The periodicals in the collection were part of the Library of Irene Rice Pereira, which was donated by the nephew of Pereira, Djelloul Marbrook, to the Washington Women's Art Center in 1973. In 1986 the Irene Rice Pereira Library was donated to the Library and Research Center of the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

The originals of the photocopies in this collection are part of the Irene Rice Pereira Papers (accession number 79-M307) at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Those papers were donated to the Schlesinger Library in 1979 by the I. Rice Pereira Foundation, whose Manager-Trustee at the time was Djelloul Marbrook.

## Series Descriptions

### Series I: Periodical, 1928-1971

This series consists of periodicals which have writings by Pereira, reviews of her, and generally match her philosophical interests.

### Series II: Address Book

This series is Pereira's personal address book.

### Series III: Art Inventories, 1935-1967

This series contains record keeping notes by Pereira regarding her paintings. Inventories of her paintings are in notebooks and a group of notecards record the condition of the paintings. On the notecards are photographic film roll counts to refer the card to a particular painting.

### Series IV: Manuscript, c. 1932-c.1959

This series is a manuscript of Pereira's memoir – or *Künstlerroman*, a romantic novel of an artist's moral and intellectual development, according to Bearor – entitled "An Eastward Journey. The manuscript includes photographs of Pereira's work. The photographs are in their original positions, in mylar sleeves.

### Series V: Original Work

This series contains one original black and white ink drawing.

### Series VI: Photocopies, 1955-1970

This series is the largest and contains photocopies of notebooks by Pereira copied from the originals in the Schlesinger Library.

### Series VII: Book, 1957

The last series is a copy of Pereira's 1957 book, *the Lapis*.

## Processing

The collection is contained in twelve boxes, which are located in the Library and Research Center. An inventory of the first portion of the collection was prepared by 1988. The papers were processed and a finding aid was created in 2003. In 2006 the collection was reprocessed, an unprocessed portion of the collection was integrated, and the finding aid was edited and rewritten to conform to DACS standard. The collection was separated into seven series and re-housed in appropriately sized acid-free folders. Patrick Brown made a wrapper for the copy of *Lapis*.

## **Related Materials**

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The Archives on Women Artists in the Library and Research Center at the National Museum of Women in the Arts maintains a vertical file on Irene Rice Pereira, which includes articles and other secondary research material.

The Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, houses the papers of Irene Rice Pereira. The Archives of American Art of the Smithsonian Institution has a microfilm copy of the Schlesinger Library's papers, other original material, and unique microfilmed material.

## **Box Inventory**

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### **SERIES I: PERIODICAL**

#### **Box 1**

- Almanac for 1943
- American Scholar, 1970-1971
- Art in America, 1963
- Art in America, 1965
- the arts, 1946
- The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art, 1936
- Cahiers d'Art, 1928-1930
- The Charioteer, 1960
- Daedalus, 1960

#### **Box 2**

- La Government de la Catalogue Expose a Paris Cinq Siecles d'art Catalon, 1937
- Harpers Magazine, 1968
- The Hound and Horn: a Harvard Miscelleany, 1929
- Interior Deisgn and Decoration, 1937
- Latit Kala Contemporary, 1968
- The Literary Half-Yearly, 1966
- Odyssey Review, 1961-1962
- Palette, 1952-1960
- Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 1958-1964

#### **Box 3**

- Portal, n.d.
- The Review of Metaphysics, 1959
- Spectrum: the Richmond Tri-Annual Review, 1970
- Think, 1960
- Tomorrow, 1957
- Vincent Van Gogh, n.d.
- Voyages, 1971
- Writers Workshop, 1960-1961

XXth Century, 1938

## **SERIES II: ADDRESS BOOK**

### **Box 3**

Address book, n.d.

## **SERIES III: ART INVENTORIES**

### **Box 4**

Notebook, 1935-1952  
Notebook, 1953-1967  
Notebook, 1956, 1966-1967  
Condition Report Index cards, n.d.

## **SERIES IV: MANUSCRIPT**

### **Box 4**

Eastward Journey, c. 1932- c. 1959 (3 folders)

## **SERIES V: ORIGINAL WORK**

### **Box 4**

Black and white ink drawing, n.d.

## **SERIES VI: PHOTOCOPIES**

### **Box 5**

Notebook, #1, 1955-1956 (3 folders)  
Notebook, #2, 1957-1958 (4 folders)

### **Box 6**

Notebook, #3, 1958-1961 (5 folders)  
Notebook, #4, 1958-1959 (5 folders)

### **Box 7**

Notebook, #4, 1958-1959 (5 folders)  
Notebook, #5, 1961 (3 folders)

### **Box 8**

"Concept of Substance" Book 6, 1962-1963 (4 folders)  
"Concept of Substance" Book 7, 1963-1964 (3 folders)

### **Box 9**

"Concept of Substance" Book 8, 1964-1965 (3 folders)  
"Concept of Substance" Book 9, 1965-1966 (4 folders)

### **Box 10**

"Concept of Substance" Book 10, 1965-1966 (4 folders)  
"Concept of Substance" Book 11, 1967-1969 (4 folders)

**Box 11**

"Concept of Substance" Book 11, 1967-1969 (4 folders)  
"Concept of Substance" Book 12, 1961-1970 (3 folders)

**SERIES VII: BOOK**

**Box 12**

*Lapis*, 1957