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McNay Art Museum

Archives

Robert L. B. Tobin Papers
Robert Indiana Collection
(circa 1968 – 1989)

2015-003

The McNay Art Museum
6000 North New Braunfels
San Antonio, Texas 78209-4618

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Robert L. B. Tobin Papers

Robert Indiana Collection

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Tobin, Robert L. B.

Title: Robert L. B. Tobin Papers: Robert Indiana Collection

Dates: circa 1968 – 1989

Abstract: The Robert L. B. Tobin Papers Robert Indiana Collection reflects the professional and personal relationships between Robert L. B. Tobin, a respected patron of the arts, and Robert Indiana, prominent pop artist. Contents include correspondence between Tobin and Indiana, gallery layouts and essay drafts for a traveling exhibition, photocopies of design sketches, exhibition catalogs, newspaper clippings, magazine articles, photographs, and ephemera.

Accession: 2015-003

Extent: 2 boxes (2 linear feet)

Language: English

Repository: The McNay Art Museum Archives

Biographical Note

Robert Lynn Batts Tobin (1934-2000) was born on March 12, 1934, in San Antonio, Texas, to Edgar and Margaret Tobin. From an early age, Tobin showed an affinity for books, art, and music. He attended his first opera as a young boy of six or seven and he was captivated. He began staging his own operas on his family's estate.

He attended Alamo Heights High School, in San Antonio, Texas, and during these years he developed his knowledge of art and rare books. Tobin collected his first work of art at the age of thirteen, and his first rare book around the age of eighteen. It is reported that he requested original theatre designs and artists' drawings as gifts instead of the usual requests of young men his age. He continued his education in theatre at the University of Texas at Austin, but it was cut short at the age of nineteen, when Tobin's father died in a plane crash. Robert Tobin then took over direction of the family business, Tobin Aerial Surveys, Inc., building the company into an industry leader in cartography. In addition to his professional success, Tobin was a generous philanthropist and voracious theatre arts collector.

Robert and Margaret Tobin were involved with the McNay soon after the museum opened its doors in 1954. By 1956, Tobin, in his early twenties, was a consistent lender of works of art, and he also donated funds for acquisitions. The first theatre designs exhibition was organized chiefly by Tobin in 1959 and showcased the works of Norman Bel Geddes, Eugene Berman, and Marc Chagall. That same year, Tobin lent the majority of works for the *Great Books and Great Editions* exhibition. He also served on the discussion panel for the 1961 *Printer's Ink* exhibition of important examples of modern graphic art borrowed from the National Gallery of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum, among others. 1969 marked the landmark exhibition *Explosion: Color: Paris: 1909* at the McNay, organized from Tobin's private collection of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes designs. Tobin would continue his involvement with the McNay in the coming years by focusing his efforts on his favorite areas; theatre arts, prints and drawings, American art, and the art of the book. His generous donations included Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's 1893 lithograph of the dancer Loie Fuller and George Grosz's early 1920s painting of *Der Turner (the Gymnast)*. On March 12, 1984, The Tobin Wing at the McNay Art Museum, funded by Margaret Tobin, opened in honor of her son's fiftieth birthday. The wing was designed with Tobin's grandfather's library in mind and houses Tobin's remarkable theatre arts collection and provides space for the museum's growing art reference library.

Tobin and his mother underwrote *Don Carlos* for the opening celebration of HemisFair, the official World's Fair, in 1968 where he served as Cultural Vice-President. The event hosted many honored guests including First Lady Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson. It was the first time that Verdi's complete opera had been performed in the United States. Robert Indiana was commissioned to create the official poster for HemisFair, and in June of 1968, during HemisFair, the largest collection of Indiana's work to date was installed at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio. With Tobin's involvement with HemisFair, and his close ties to the McNay, it is perhaps during this time that Tobin's friendship with Robert Indiana began to flourish. In the coming years, Tobin would become one of Robert Indiana's largest collectors, even curating and writing the catalog essay for a traveling exhibition of Indiana's work in 1977. Among Tobin's gifts to the McNay are Indiana's designs for Virgil Thomson's opera, *The Mother of Us All*, performed at the Santa Fe Opera in 1976, and Indiana's painting *The Metamorphosis of Norma Jean Mortenson*.

Tobin served on the board of numerous cultural institutions including the McNay Art Museum, the San Antonio Symphony Society, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Metropolitan

Opera, the Santa Fe Opera, the Opera Company of Boston, and the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy. The mother and son team of Robert and Margaret Tobin supported many designers such as Eugene Berman, Jocelyn Herbert, Robert Indiana, and Timothy O'Brien; and their works comprise some of the most important pieces in the Tobin Theatre Arts Collection, a collection that has been exhibited in New York, Santa Fe, and Spoleto, Italy.

Tobin died on August 26, 2000, in San Antonio, Texas, from complications of cancer.

Tobin was consistently described as someone who not only cared about the art, but also championed the artist. Ming Cho Lee, chair of the Design Department at Yale University and Tony Award winner for set design, wrote this about Tobin, "There are people who are only interested in the objects. They are not interested in the people who created those objects. Robert was the absolute opposite. He was a friend of all the people who create."

Source: Blake, Jody. *An Eye for the Stage: The Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts at the McNay Art Museum*. San Antonio: The McNay Art Museum, 2004.

Source: Newman, Maria. "Robert Tobin, 66, Who collected Art and Championed Artists." *The New York Times*. 30 April 2000. Web. 27 March 2015.

Scope and Content Note

The Items in the collection date from circa 1968 to 1989 and result from the professional and personal relationships between Robert L. B. Tobin and Robert Indiana (1928-), a prominent pop artist. Indiana wrote often to Tobin, indicating a friendship that lasted many years. Tobin was one of Indiana's largest collectors and he supported Indiana on multiple projects including HemisFair 1968 and the costume designs for the opera *The Mother of Us All*, performed at the Santa Fe Opera in 1976. In 1977 Tobin served as Guest Curator for Indiana's second one-man museum retrospective exhibition, sponsored by The University of Texas at Austin, which traveled in the United States through July of 1978.

Types of correspondence from Indiana to Tobin include letters, postcards, and greeting cards recounting day-to-day activities and information about upcoming exhibitions and designs. Indiana often included with his correspondence small-format exhibition catalogs, magazines articles, and newspaper clippings about his current projects and events, as well as photographs. Additional materials in the collection include correspondence from other individuals, photocopies of Indiana's early design sketches, and gallery layouts, photocopies of interview transcripts, and essay notes and drafts, all relating to a 1977 traveling exhibition of Indiana's works.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into four separate series:

Series 1: Correspondence – Robert Indiana, circa 1968-1989

Series 2: Subject Files – Robert Indiana, 1975

Series 3: Exhibition Files – Robert Indiana, circa 1975-1978

Series 4: Photographs – from Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1968-1985

Series 1: Correspondence – Robert Indiana, circa 1968-1989

The items in series 1 consist of correspondence in the form of handwritten and typed letters, postcards, and greeting cards written by Robert Indiana and sent to Robert L. B. Tobin, spanning approximately twenty years. The correspondence begins when Indiana was living in New York and continues from the Star of Hope lodge when he relocated to Vinalhaven, Maine. Also included in this series are newspaper clippings and magazines containing articles about Indiana. There are small-format catalogs of Indiana's exhibitions as well as invitations to gallery and museum exhibitions and artist receptions. Additionally, there are letters received by Tobin from other acquaintances. Ephemera includes marketing banners for Indiana's show at Galerie Denise René in New York and sugar packets featuring Susan B. Anthony, the subject of the opera *The Mother of Us All*, of which Indiana was the costume designer. One oversized item has been removed and stored in box P01.05.02.

Series 2: Subject Files – Robert Indiana, 1975

This series contains photocopies of early drawings and design sketches by Robert Indiana sent to Tobin from William Katz. Contents include photocopies of two "yellow page" drawings created by Indiana, born Robert Clark, during his school days in Chicago, and photocopies of early design sketches for the painting *The Metamorphosis of Norma Jean Mortenson*, which was donated by Tobin to the McNay Art Museum.

Series 3: Exhibition Files – Robert Indiana, circa 1975-1977

Series 3 pertains to the traveling exhibition of Indiana's works organized by the University of Texas at Austin in September of 1977. Tobin was the guest curator of the exhibition, which began at the Michener Galleries at the University and continued on to four additional cities through July of 1978. Correspondence, photocopies of interview transcripts between Donald B. Goodall and Indiana, gallery layouts, exhibition designs, and essay notes and drafts are included in series 3. The essay notes and drafts written by Tobin provided the basis for his essay contained in the published exhibition catalog.

Series 4: Photographs – from Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1968-1985

Series 4 contains photographs and is boxed and stored separately for preservation. There are 17 photographs including three small photographs of Indiana, two Christmas postcards, a series of six 4 x 6 photographs framed in notecards titled "An Island Essay" that document Indiana's home town of Vinalhaven, Maine, and six 11 x 14 photographs of Tobin and guests at the celebration of Indiana's fiftieth birthday on September 13, 1978.

Restrictions

Access Restrictions

Open for research

Index Terms

Names

Tobin, Robert L. B.
Indiana, Robert, 1928-
Clark, Robert, 1928-
Goodall, Donald B.
Tobin, Margaret
Katz, William
Lieberman, Shelley

Subjects

Indiana, Robert, 1928---Exhibitions.
University of Texas at Austin. University Art Museum
Galerie Denise René
Star of Hope (Vinalhaven, Me.)

Locations

San Antonio, Texas
Vinalhaven, Maine
Austin, Texas

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Robert L. B. Tobin Papers: Robert Indiana Collection, 2015-003, McNay Art Museum Archives.

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated to the McNay Art Museum Archives in 2015.

Processing Information

Processed by Tracey S. Stephens, 2015

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series 1: Correspondence – Robert Indiana, circa 1968-1989

Box	Folder	
as03.05.11	1	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, Undated
	2	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1968
	3	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1970
	4	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1972
	5	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1973
	6	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1974
	7	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1975

Box	Folder		
as03.05.11	8	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1976	
	9	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1977	
	10	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1978	
	11	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1978	
	12	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1979	
	13	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1980	
	14	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1981	
	15	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1982	
	16	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1983	
	17	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1984	
	18	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1985	
	19	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1986	
	20	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1986	
	21	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1987	
	22	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1989	
	23	From Robert Tobin to Robert Indiana (includes undated content), 1976	
	24	From Others to Robert Tobin (includes undated content and one letter addressed to Margaret Tobin), 1976-1982	
	Box	Folder	
	P01.05.02	1	From Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin (OVERSIZE), 1989

Series 2: Subject Files – Robert Indiana, 1975

Box	Folder	
as03.05.11	25	Copies of Indiana design sketches from William Katz, 1975

Series 3: Exhibition Files – Robert Indiana, circa 1975-1978

Box	Folder	
as03.05.11	26	Correspondence, 1976-1978
	27	Essay notes and drafts (includes undated content), 1975
	28	University Art Museum layouts (includes undated content), 1976

Series 4: Photographs – from Robert Indiana to Robert Tobin, 1968-1985

Box	Folder	
P01.05.02	2	50th Birthday of Robert Indiana, September 13, 1978 (Photography by Gerard Murrell) OVERSIZE, 1978
	3	Mixed, 1968-1985
	4	An Island Essay (mailing envelope), 1985
	5	An Island Essay, 1985