

∞ The Ward M. Canaday Center ∞
for Special Collections
The University of Toledo

Finding Aid

➤ **Suzanne Miller Papers, 1936-1995** ◀

MSS-105

Size: 1.5 cu. Ft.

Provenance: Suzanne Miller papers were donated by her brothers Alfred Kenngott and Robert Miller in December 1994. They also gave the Center authorization to photocopy the Cornell letters for the purposes of research. On October 26, 1995, Dorothy Benzian (friend of Miller's) donated original letters, collages, etc. that she received from Joseph Cornell and other materials which relate to Cornell.

Access: Open

Collection Summary: Most of the material documents her creative life and personal thoughts. Also reflected in the collection is her personal and professional association with a number of artists, actors, and directors, particularly Steve Allen, Stella Adler, Gladys Vaughan, Joseph Papp, Salome Jens, Anthony Zerbe, and Joseph Cornell. This documentation is primarily in the form of correspondence, clippings, programs, and photographs. Miller also created a considerable body of writing, including short stories, biographical sketches, poems, screen plays and an unfinished novel. The collection also contains correspondence with such contemporaries as Joseph Cornell, Stella Adler, Gladys Vaughan, and Anthony Zerbe.

Subjects: [Music, Art, Drama, and Theatre](#)

Related Collections:

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Completed by: Judith M. Friebert & Barbara A. Shirk March, 1995, Revised November, 1995, Converted by Patrick Cook Nov. 2011; last updated: June 2014

**Suzanne Miller
Papers, 1936-1995**

Introduction

Suzanne Miller's papers, dating from ca. 1936-1995, reflect her career as an actress on television, stage, and screen, and also her gifts as theater director and writer. Her theatrical career and association with a number of eminent artists, actors and directors began in her native Toledo where she worked as an apprentice, and developed further after her move to New York at the age of nineteen. Her activities and associations are documented primarily in the form of correspondence, clippings, programs, photographs, and her own writings. Although far-ranging in scope, the materials primarily provide a glimpse into the personal and professional life of a talented and observant woman who experienced New York's cultural environment of the 1950's and 60's. Much of Miller's own writing is autobiographical and introspective.

Miller's friendship with surrealist artist Joseph Cornell is a significant component of the collection. Included are over seventy letters, in photocopied form, written by him to Miller. In addition, there are original letters, collages, etc. from Joseph Cornell to Dorothy Benzian (friend of Suzanne Miller) and other Cornell-related correspondence received by Ms. Benzian. This material would be of great interest to scholars of twentieth century American art.

Miller started to write in New York, mostly in the form of journaling, poetry, and short fiction. After her move to southern California, Miller's creative energies were almost exclusively devoted to writing, some of it intended for the screen.

There are no restrictions in access to the Miller collection. Any use of the materials for publication requires permission of her family.

Biography

Suzanne Miller was born in Toledo in 1935. She attended Libbey High School, graduating in 1953, and began her interest in the theater when she apprenticed for the Mad Anthony Players, a summer stock group that performed at the Toledo Zoo. Among the actors in the troupe was the young George C. Scott.

Soon after, she left Toledo for New York where she achieved stardom as a regularly featured performer on the "Tonight Show" with Steve Allen. As a result, she was featured in Life magazine. She also appeared on other television shows, specifically "The Honeymooners" with Jackie Gleason. She then studied acting with a leading drama instructor, Stella Adler, who also taught Marion Brando, Warren Beatty, Robert DeNiro, Ellen Burstyn, Harvey Keitel and Candice Bergen. In addition to her professional connection to Adler, they were also life-long friends. Along with her studies, she worked as an assistant director for the fledgling Shakespeare in the Park, run by Joseph Papp and Miller's close friend, Gladys Vaughan. She appeared on off- Broadway, and directed several plays, including a production at Mexico City College featuring Anthony Zerbe, a well known character actor on stage, screen, and television.

Miller was also a friend of Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), the internationally-known surrealist artist. She appeared in two of his underground films, considered to be a significant component of the artist's oeuvre, and her photo was included in several of his world-acclaimed boxes and collages. Because of this connection, she is mentioned in a number of monographs and other books on the artist.

After living in New York for many years, Miller moved to southern California. She studied primal therapy, worked as a therapist for a time, and focused more on writing for publication. Although ultimately little of her work was published, her writing activity during this time resulted in the creation of screen plays, poems, short fiction, and an unfinished novel. Miller returned to Toledo in 1992 to pursue a degree in art history at the University of Toledo. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree shortly before her death from cancer in 1994.

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Scope and Content Note

Miller's papers trace her early life in Toledo, her New York experience, life in southern California, and her last two years in Toledo before her death. Most of the material documents her creative life and personal thoughts. Also reflected in the collection is her personal and professional association with a number of artists, actors, and directors, particularly Steve Allen, Stella Adler, Gladys Vaughan, Joseph Papp, Salome Jens, Anthony Zerbe, and Joseph Cornell. This documentation is primarily in the form of correspondence, clippings, programs, and photographs.

As stated above, Miller also created a considerable body of writing, including short stories, biographical sketches, poems, screen plays and an unfinished novel. Three slightly varying copies of *Gifted Observors*, one of the two screenplays, are included. All of Miller's writings are unpublished. Her autobiographical novel is in fragments-- some of it typed, other parts handwritten (including handwritten versions of the typed pages), and a number of preparatory sketches and notes.

A significant portion of Miller's collection is the group of over 70 letters from surrealist artist Joseph Cornell, written to her from the late 1950's until his death in 1972. These letters are in the form of photocopies. Along with these documents is additional information, both published and unpublished, on Cornell and his work that Miller collected. Miller's own writings on the artist, albeit scant, provide rare insights into Cornell's life, character, and their relationship; some of this is written as fiction.

There are also numerous original letters, collages, etc. from Cornell and his sister, Betty Benton, which were sent to Dorothy Benzian (Miller's friend); the collection contains other Cornell-related correspondence received by Ms. Benzian.

The collection includes original letters from drama teacher and actress Stella Adler and director Gladys Vaughan, and one letter from actor Anthony Zerbe. Another important piece of correspondence is a letter from television personality and writer Steve Allen, written to the Canaday Center about his remembrances of Miller after her death. A considerable amount of correspondence from lesser known individuals is also contained within the collection.

**Suzanne Miller
Papers, 1936-1995**

Folder List

Box	Folder	Description
1		
	1	Correspondence (outgoing), 1969-1986 Correspondence (incoming)
	2	Joseph Cornell, 1962 (1 of 2)
	3	Joseph Cornell, 1962 (2 of 2)
	4	Joseph Cornell, 1964-1966
	5	Joseph Cornell, 1967-1969
	6	Joseph Cornell, 1970
	7	Joseph Cornell, 1971-1972
	8	Joseph Cornell, (n.d.)
	9	General, 1953-1994
	10	Clifford Terry Warner, 1956-1959
	11	Clifford Terry Warner, 1959-1964 Re: Suzanne Miller (post-mortem, incl. letter from Steve Allen), 1994-1995
	12	Correspondence to Dorothy Benzian from:
	13*	Betty Benton (Sister of Joseph Cornell), 1972-1977
	14**	Joseph Cornell, 1972 (1 of 3)
	15**	Joseph Cornell, 1972 (2 of 3)
	16**	Joseph Cornell, 1972 (3 of 3)
	17	Edward Flower (attorney for Helen Batcheller) and Helen Batcheller (niece of Joseph Cornell), 1973-1975
	18	Denis R. Hurley (attorney for Betty Benton), 1974-1979
		Clippings
	19	Suzanne Miller, 1955-1994
	20	Joseph Cornell, 1967-1992
	21	Others, 1961-1990
		Photographs
	22	Suzanne Miller, (ca. 1936-199?)
	23	Others
	24	Boxes by Suzanne Miller
	25	Collages by Joseph Cornell
		Programs and Fliers
	26	Suzanne Miller, 1953-1978
	27	Joseph Cornell, 1975-1978
		Writings
	28	Gifted Observers, screenplay (1st version of 3)
	29	Gifted Observers, screenplay (2nd version of 3)
	30	Gifted Observers, screenplay (3rd version of 3)
	31	Miscellaneous writings (Cornell references) (1 of 8)

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32	Miscellaneous writings (2 of 8)
33	Miscellaneous writings (3 of 8)
34	Miscellaneous writings (4 of 8)
35	Miscellaneous writings (5 of 8)
36	Miscellaneous writings (6 of 8)
37	Miscellaneous writings (includes screenplay <u>Perils of Zenobia</u>) (7 of 8)
38	Miscellaneous writings (school papers) (8 of 8) 1992-1994
2 R-4	
1	Novel (1 of 6)
2	Novel (2 of 6)
3	Novel (3 of 6)
4	Novel (4 of 6)
5	Novel (5 of 6)
6	Novel (6 of 6)
	Video Tape and Film
7	Joseph Cornell's film, "A Legend for Fountains (fragments)" featuring Suzanne Miller (1965)
8	Miscellaneous (1 of 2)
9	Miscellaneous (2 of 2)

NOTE:

R-4 =Range 4

* = Oversize cabinet, drawer 5

** = Locked cabinet

^ = Oversize area