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Downing, Joseph Dudley "Joe," 1925-2007 - Relating to (MSS 686)

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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
Department of Library Special Collections
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

Descriptive Inventory

MSS 686 DOWNING, Joseph Dudley “Joe,” 1925-2007 – Relating to

1 box. 5 folders. 166 items, 1960-2008. Originals and photocopies

SC2020.2.1

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Joseph Dudley Downing was born on 15 November 1925 in Tompkinsville, Kentucky, to Aldridge Clifton and Katie Burton Goodman Downing. He spent his childhood in Horse Cave, Kentucky, where he received his education and graduated valedictorian in 1943. After high school, Downing became an artillery observer in the U.S. Army receiving a Bronze Star for his service in France during World War II. In 1945 Downing enrolled at Western Kentucky University, where art professor Ivan Wilson encouraged his artistic endeavors. However, respecting his parents' wishes, Downing pursued a degree in optometry by attending Northern Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago. He continued his art training by enrolling in classes at the Chicago Art Institute. Upon graduating in 1950, Downing decided to take a three-month trip to Paris, France, a place he had briefly seen during his military service. He fell in love with the city during his visit and became increasingly interested in pursuing art as a career. Downing decided to stay in Paris, and he continued to live in France for the remainder of his life.

Downing gave credit to the unique coloring and shapes of his abstract works to his childhood spent playing in the caves of his hometown and the ubiquitous barns found on the southcentral Kentucky landscape. The Kentucky countryside inspired Downing's works that were displayed museums and galleries around the world from the Louvre in Paris to the Kentucky Museum in Bowling Green. He was known for his unique use of color and the unusual material on which he painted which included old barn doors, stretched leather, chicken bones, and rescued provincial court documents. Throughout his career, Downing maintained his ties to Kentucky, keeping in close contact with his family and bringing his works back for galleries in his hometown and in local museums.

Downing passed away on 29 December 2007 in Menerbes, France, where he lived for 40 years. Memorial services and art showings were given in his honor in Kentucky and Meberbes. As was requested by Downing, his ashes were distributed in the two places he loved, Menerbes, France, and Horse Cave, Kentucky.

COLLECTION NOTE

This material documents the life and work of Kentucky native and artist Joseph Dudley “Joe” Downing. Folders 2 and 3 include correspondence chiefly related to exhibitions of Downing’s work at the Kentucky Museum at Western Kentucky University in 1988, 1992, and 2000. Most of this material was generated by the Kentucky Museum’s staff, but there are a few photocopies and originals of letters written by Downing. Also heavily represented is Dero Downing, Joe’s brother and former president of Western Kentucky University. Folder 3 also includes information related to Riley Handy’s (Department Head for Library Special Collections t WKU) nomination of Joe Downing for one of the Governor’s Awards in the Arts in 1999. Folder 4 holds photocopies and typescripts of newspaper clippings about Downing. Folder 5 includes material related to exhibitions of Downing’s work; it also contains some biographical information gleaned from magazines and other print sources.

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	Joseph Dudley “Joe” Downing	1960-2008	166 items
Folder 1	Inventory		1 item
Folder 2	Correspondence	1988-1993	57 items
Folder 3	Correspondence	1999-2008	41 items
Folder 4	Newspaper articles	1960-1998	44 items
Folder 5	Biographical and exhibit related items	1978-1993	23 items

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS 686 DOWNING, Joseph Dudley “Joe,” 1960-2008
1925-2007 – Relating to

Correspondence, news clippings, and excerpts from magazines and other print sources related to Kentucky native and artist Joseph Dudley Downing and exhibitions of his art at the Kentucky Museum, Western Kentucky University and other venues worldwide.

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SUBJECT ANALYTICS

Art – Exhibitions

Artists

Bale, Kenneth “Kenny,” b. 1940 F2-3

Biddle, Flora Miller F2

Binder, Michael Bernard, b. 1943 F2-3

Bingham, Mary Clifford (Caperton), 1904-1995 – Correspondence F2

Chelf, Phyllis Earlene, b. 1939 F2-3

Cherry, Wendell, 1935-1991 – Letters to F2

Dear, Walter – Letters to B3

Downing, Dero Goodman, 1921-2011 F2-3

Governor’s Awards in the Arts F3

Gray, Lois (Howard), 1920-2012 – Letter to F3

Handy, Riley Dean, 1941-2010 F2-3

Hunter, Eleanor (Pearce) Smith – Letter to F3

Kendall, Donald McIntosh “Don,” b. 1921 – Correspondence F3

Kentucky Museum – Western Kentucky University

Meredith, Thomas Carter, b. 1941 – Letters to F2

Parker, Donna Ruth (Collier), b. 1954

Ransdell, Gary Allen, b. 1951 F3

Scott, Larry Z.

Staebell, Sandra L. “Sandy,” b. 1958

Smith/Jeffrey 01/23/2020