

The Filson Historical Society

**Currier, Mary Ann, 1927-2017
Papers, 1971-2017**

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Size of Collection:

1 cubic foot

Locator number:

Mss. A C976a

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Biographical Note

Mary Ann Currier was a nationally recognized visual artist who had a profound impact on the Louisville art scene and inspired generations of artists through teaching and mentorship. Her work hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and in private and corporate collections around the world.

Early Life

Currier was born Mary Ann Ebert on July 23, 1927, the daughter of German immigrants Adolf Ebert, a metal pattern maker for machinery, and Gertrude Brewer. As a senior at Sacred Heart Academy, Currier won a war bond poster contest, which in 1944 earned her a scholarship to the Chicago Academy of Fine Art.

After art school, she returned home to Louisville under her parents' instruction to "make money." In 1945, she was hired at Stewart's Department Store as a commercial artist in their advertising department, drawing home furnishings for ads. During her three years at Stewart's, she met Lionel F. Currier, a bridge engineer, on a blind date. They were married on July 2, 1949.

Teaching

After marrying Lionel, Currier left her advertising job but continued creating art while raising three children, Frances, Anne, and Nancy. During this period, she painted murals for the children and continued honing her skills as a still life and portrait painter. In 1957, when her youngest was three and her oldest nine, she began taking night courses at what was then called the Art Center School, located on First Street, but was later renamed the Louisville School of Art and moved to a new campus in Anchorage.

While she was still a student, the director of the school offered her a job as a portrait teacher. She started teaching one day per week but then moved on to full-time to also teach design and color classes. She taught at the Louisville School of Art from 1962 to 1982, eventually becoming chair of the foundation program. The school is now closed, but during her tenure, it was a center of Louisville's artistic community. Currier's students included many artists who went on to successful careers, including Dave Caudill, Ed Hamilton, Martin Rollins, Jacque Parsley, and many others.

Solo Career

During the 1960s and 1970s, Currier continued developing her art, experimenting with different styles, forms, and materials. She tried photography and sculpture, then moved on to large-scale

black-and-white floral paintings, which earned her her first solo show in 1977 at the Byck Gallery, when she was 50 years old.

After the success of her black-and-white pieces, she described herself as “color starved” and continued her artistic exploration, working instead with brightly colored images both representative and abstract. Setting aside oil paints for pastels, she created a series of onion images, which would come to represent the style of still lifes she was best known for: hyper-realistic arrangements of commonplace items, such as dried flowers and vegetables. She never worked from photographs and was known to choose her subjects based on practicality over prettiness—the onions and dead flowers were ideal because they wouldn’t deteriorate while she painted or drew.

In 1974, Currier cut back her teaching to part time so she could spend more time on her own projects. In 1982, she stopped teaching at the Louisville School of Art altogether and moved to Jacksonville, Florida, where Lionel was transferred for work. There she found the time and solitude to be extremely productive and created many vibrant new works before eventually returning to Louisville.

Soon her work was being shown in New York galleries, where she had two sold-out shows. One of her most notable shows was at the Gerald Peters Gallery in 2005, which showed off her series of roses and earned her a review in the *New York Times*.

In 1984, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York acquired her oil pastel “Onions and Tomato.” Her work has been exhibited in 21 solo and 84 group shows across the United States and is featured in 19 permanent collections, including the Speed Art Museum and Crystal Bridges in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as in the collections of ExxonMobil, Goldman Sachs, and American Express.

Mary Ann Currier died November 5, 2017. She is buried with her husband at Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville.

Sources:

<https://www.ket.org/program/kentucky-muse/master-of-still-life-mary-ann-currier-169661/>

<https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2017/11/07/louisville-painter-mary-ann-currier-dies/839224001/>

<https://stateoftheart.crystalbridges.org/blog/project/mary-ann-currier>

<https://www.ket.org/muse/mary-ann-currier/>

<http://tfaoi.com/aa/6aa/6aa152.htm> (Article in Fall 2005 Speed Art Museum Newsletter)

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Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of material related to the career and personal life of Louisville artist and educator Mary Ann Currier (1927-2017). The bulk of the collection is correspondence to and from Currier's friend and fellow artist Madison Cawein IV, who moved from Louisville to Santa Fe, New Mexico, ca. 2004.

Their 17 years of correspondence takes the form of both handwritten letters and printed emails. Many of the letters are written on postcards or cards with Mary's or Madison's art printed on them. Many emails contain photos of in-progress or complete works by either artist.

The correspondence concerns a wide variety of topics: outings to galleries and lectures, visits to each other's homes and art shows, books they've been reading, professional advice, news about mutual friends, thoughts and philosophies about their craft, etc.

The collection also includes art prints, pamphlets, and other publications concerning Currier's art, Cawein's art, the Louisville School of Art where Currier taught, and various other Louisville artists and institutions.

Related Collections:

Photograph Collection [[accession #](#)]

Museum Collection: Paintings and sketches [2021.22]

Museum Collection: Original illustrations for Stewart's Department Store [2021.23]

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Folder List

Box 1

- Folder 1: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2001-2004
- Folder 2: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2005
- Folder 3: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2006
- Folder 4: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2007
- Folder 5: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2008
- Folder 6: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2009

Box 2

- Folder 7: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2010-2011
- Folder 8: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2012
- Folder 9: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2013-2014
- Folder 10: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, 2015-2017
- Folder 11: Correspondence with Madison Cawein, n.d.
- Folder 12: Correspondence with others, 2009-2011
- Folder 13: Notes and letter/email drafts, ca. 2014-2017
- Folder 14: Mary Ann Currier pamphlets and art books, 1985-2005

Box 3

- Folder 15: Mary Ann Currier art prints, cards, and postcards, 1984-2011
- Folder 16: Madison Cawein publications, prints, cards, and postcards, 1986-2014
- Folder 17: Louisville School of Art publications, 1971-1973
- Folder 18: Miscellaneous Louisville art scene publications, 1964-1969
- Folder 19: Anne Currier material, 2006
- Folder 20: Miscellaneous material, 2014-2015 and n.d.
- Volume 21: *Drawing Space, Form, and Expression* textbook signed and featuring works by Mary Ann Currier, 1996

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Subject Headings

21c Museum (Louisville, Ky.)
Art – Kentucky – Louisville.
Art – New Mexico – Santa Fe.
Art – Study and teaching.
Art Center School (Louisville, Ky.)
Art criticism.
Art galleries – New York (N.Y.)
Art museums – Kentucky – Louisville.
Art schools.
B. Deemer Gallery (Louisville, Ky.)
Bernarducci, Frank, 1959-
Cawein, Madison, 1950-
Cawein, Marjana.
Currier family.
Currier, Anne, 1950-
Currier, Lionel, 1925-2020.
Currier, Nancy.
Deemer, Brenda.
Erwin, Gaela, 1951-
Fischl, Eric, 1948-
Global Financial Crisis, 2008-2009 – Anecdotes.
Grubola, James.
Grubola, Kay Polson.
Hulsey, Russel.
J.B. Speed Art Museum.
Kentucky Educational Television.
Kloner, Jay.
Louisville School of Art (Anchorage, Ky.)
Morrin, Peter.
Portrait painting.
Raffael, Joseph, 1933-2021.
Rivera, Elias, 1937-2019.
Robson, Julien.
Rollins, Martin.
St. Francis High School (Louisville, Ky.)
Still-life painting.
University of Louisville. Cressman Center for Visual Arts.