BACKGROUND ON SIDNEY WALTER FINKELSTEIN

Sidney Finkelstein, born in Brooklyn, New York on July 4, 1909, received his Bachelor’s degree from City College in New York in 1929 and his A.M. from Columbia University in 1932 before he became a renowned critic of music, literature, and the arts. In 1955, he earned a second master’s degree from New York University. During the 1930s he served as a book reviewer for the Brooklyn Daily Eagle and worked for the United Postal Service. In the 1940s he joined the music staff of the Herald Tribune and also served as a music reviewer for several other publications including New Masses, Masses and Mainstream. Finkelstein became active in the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA) where he served as the party’s leading musical and cultural theoretician.

Finkelstein applied his interpretation of Socialist Realism in several books on arts and culture, the most famous being Jazz, a People’s Music (1948). Between 1951 and 1973 he served on the staff of Vanguard Records, a New York based record label that specialized in jazz and classical recordings. In 1957 he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee for his Communist party affiliation. Finkelstein died in Brooklyn, New York on January 14, 1974.

CONTENTS OF COLLECTION

The Sidney Finkelstein Papers (1914-1974) are organized into 3 series: Biographical (1914-1969), Correspondence (1934-1974), and Writings (1949-1973, n.d.). Biographical materials include legal documents, educational, military, and personal records, financial papers and contracts, photographs, and lecture and course notes. Correspondence includes letters both to and
from Mr. Finkelstein and consists primarily of informal discussions of his works and the writings of others on related topics. Finkelstein’s writings constitute the bulk of the collection and include original manuscripts of reviews, articles, essays and books he wrote during his career. Finkelstein’s writings cover a broad array of topics and include discussions of jazz, classical music, music criticism, aesthetics, literary criticism, profiles of the work of individual artists, and Socialist Realism and its relevance and application to cultural studies.

Partial List of Correspondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Name</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>Axelrod, Eric</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Cameron, Angus--of Knopf</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Capouya, Emile</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>Cazden, Norman</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Cohen, Robert Sonné--physicist</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955, 1956</td>
<td>Downes, Olin--critic</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Gelbin, Gertrude--editor, Seven Seas</td>
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<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Hille, Waldemar</td>
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<td>1956, 1965</td>
<td>Kent, Rockwell and Sally</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>Lask, Tom--New York Times Book Review</td>
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<td>1965, 1966</td>
<td>Lawson, John Howard</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>Lowenfels, Walter</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>Lumer, Hyman--editor, Political Affairs</td>
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<td>1969</td>
<td>Markin, Ann</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>Richmond, Al</td>
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<td>1972</td>
<td>Russell, Ross</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>Selsam, Millicent and Howard</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>Schneerson, Grigon</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>Siegmeister, Eilee--composer</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>Smith, Harrison--Saturday Review</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Tamura, Toshio</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>Thomson, Virgil--composer</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Velaus, Abraham--Syracuse Univ.</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>______, John</td>
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</table>

Organization of the Collection

This collection is organized into three series:

- **Series 1. Biographical, 1914-1969**
- **Series 2. Correspondence, 1934-1974**
- **Series 3. Writings, 1949-1973**

Collection inventory

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<tr>
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<th>1914-1969</th>
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<tr>
<td>Legal documents and other personal records</td>
<td>1914-1957</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education, records of</td>
<td>1925-1955</td>
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<tr>
<td>Military records</td>
<td>1942-1947</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publishing contracts and related materials</td>
<td>1947-1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Course outline: Philosophy of Art**

Lecture notes and course outline

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**Series 2: Correspondence**

**Note:**

**See attached partial list of correspondents**

| Letters from SF | 1949-1966 | Box 1: 8 |
| Letters to SF | 1934-1954 | Box 1: 9 |
| Letters to SF | 1955-1964 | Box 1: 10 |
| Letters to SF | 1965-1974 | Box 1: 11 |

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**Series 3: Writings**

**1949-1973**

- Student paper by SF: The Imagery of Picasso's Blue Period
- Student paper by SF: The Philosophy of Art of Frank Lloyd Wright
- Masters thesis: Picasso (fragment)
- Notebooks
- Melville/Pierre notes
- Book reviews by SF (Combined with folder 16)
- Is Jazz a National Expression or an International Folk Music?
- On Jazz (fragment)
- On American music
- On opera
- Music and Music Criticism: A New Look
- Myths and Realities of the Arts c. 1949
- Psychoanalysis and the Arts 1951
- On realism, especially Charles White (fragment)
- On Charles White's paintings
- Realism in Art, review of c. 1954
- Realism in Art, article about & SF response
- On Arnold Hauser's "The Social History of Art" (fragment)
- Dialectical Materialism and the Arts
- On John Dewey's "Art as Experience"
- On Tagore's play "The King of the Dark Chamber" (fragment)
- On two articles regarding young intellectuals
- The Art and Science of C.P. Snow c. 1961
- Composer and Nation, letters re: review of 1961
- Dialectics of Art/Form and Freedom Box 3-5: 46-71
- Notes on Greece/Spain: High Renaissance architecture, Spanish Colonial architecture, Romanesque sculpture Box 6: 72-73
- On Henry James' "The Sacred Fount" 1960 Box 6: 74
- James: Introduction to Princess Cassanassima Box 6: 75
- Dialectical materialism & Art/ What Is Art? Box 7: 76-84
- The Literary Influence of Existentialism/ The Literature of Alienation 1965 Box 8-10: 85-93
- Media & the Arts: The Sense and Nonsense of McLuhan 1968 Box 8-10: 94-95
- McLuhan Book - published versions Box 8-10: 96
- On Beauty and Truth Box 8-10: 97
Administrative information

Provenance

Books Written by Finkelstein
1968. The Sense and Nonsense of McLuhan.

Processing Information

Acknowledgments
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Cite as: Sidney Finkelstein Papers (MS 128). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
SUBJECTS

- Art criticism--United States--History--20th century--Sources.
- Communism--United States--History--Sources.
- Communist aesthetics--History--Sources.
- Criticism--United States--History--20th century--Sources.
- Critics--United States--Archives.
- Culture--Study and teaching--United States--History--20th century--Sources.
- Musical criticism--United States--History--Sources.
- Music--History and criticism--Sources.
- Socialist realism--History--Sources.

NAMES

- Cohen, R. S. (Robert Sonné)
- Cohen, R. S. (Robert Sonné)--Correspondence.
- Communist Party of the United States of America--History--20th century--Sources.
- Finkelstein, Sidney Walter, 1909-1974--Correspondence.
- Gorton, Sally Kent, 1915-2000--Correspondence.
- Hille, Waldemar, 1908--Correspondence.
- Kent, Rockwell, 1882-1971--Correspondence.
- Lawson, John Howard, 1894--Correspondence.
- Richmond, Al, 1913-1987--Correspondence.
- Selsam, Millicent Ellis, 1912-1972.
- Selsam, Millicent Ellis, 1912--Correspondence.
- Siegmeister, Elie, 1909-
- Siegmeister, Elie, 1909--Correspondence.
- Thomson, Virgil, 1896-
- Thomson, Virgil, 1896--Correspondence.
- Veinus, Abraham.
- Veinus, Abraham--Correspondence.

GENRE TERMS

- Manuscripts.
- Photographs.