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Finding aid for the  
Gordon L. Bennett papers, circa 1951-2012  
AG 253

**Gordon L. Bennett papers, circa 1951-2012**

**AG 253**

**Creator**

Bennett, Gordon L.

**Abstract**

Collection contains papers, photographic materials, artwork and ephemera circa 1951-2012 of Gordon Bennett (1933-2012) collector, dealer, photographer and publisher. A pioneer collector of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century photography and advocate for vernacular photography, he discovered a complete set of Carleton E. Watkins' New Series mammoth prints, the only known set to survive the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Bulk of collection records his collecting activities: purchases, donations, sales and loans to galleries and institutions. The remainder consists of Bennett's personal photographs negatives, art work and exhibition records. A small group of papers document his fine art poster publishing venture, Homestead Productions. A few personal papers record his education, Air Force service, and awards.

**Quantity/ Extent**

19 linear feet

**Language of Materials**

English

**Biographical/ Historical Note**

Gordon Lynn Bennett was born April 1, 1933 in Decatur, Tennessee. From childhood Bennett had an interest in photography and art. Following his high school graduation in 1951, he attended East Tennessee State University until 1953. Bennett joined the United States Air Force and served from 1953-1957. While in the Air Force he worked in the darkroom for the first time. Following his discharge he took a position with the Curry Company, managing a transportation and touring office in Yosemite Valley. While there he saw and was inspired by the work of Ansel Adams.

During 1957-1958 Bennett studied painting and drawing at the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles, earning a B.A. His first formal study of photography began as a graduate student at San Francisco State College in 1960. While there, Bennett was a student of John Gutmann and Jack Welpott and in 1964 earned an

M.A. in Art with an emphasis in photography. He had his first one man show at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1964.

During the 1960's Bennett worked at a variety of jobs, teaching art in the San Francisco Public Schools, supervising photography facilities at San Francisco State and photographing gallery installations and artists' works. In 1971 he taught briefly at SF Art Institute but decided to leave photography and began working in collage and assemblage.

Bennett was a lifelong artist, photographer, photography collector and dealer. While in college he began collecting vernacular photographs and over the years amassed a collection of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs that influenced curators, museum collections and enriched the history of photography. Bennett persuaded museum curators that vernacular photography was a legitimate subject for study. Over the years he loaned prints from his collections to museums, institutions and publications.

His most important discovery occurred in 1967 when he found two complete disbound albums of 19<sup>th</sup> century photographer Carleton E. Watkins' New Series mammoth-plate prints of Yosemite and California Missions. The albums were unique, having survived the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and destruction of Watkin's studio. In 1973 Bennett exhibited the 76 prints at Focus Gallery, San Francisco, thought to be the first exhibition of Watkin's work since his death in 1916. Over the years he resisted offers to sell individual prints because he was committed to keeping the sets together. Bennett stated that he wished that them to be kept together and eventually placed in an institution particularly receptive to Watkins work. The California Mission set was ultimately placed in Special Collections at the University of California, Los Angeles. Bennett retained the Yosemite New Series for over thirty years after its discovery, occasionally lending prints out for exhibition. On April 28, 2004 Bennett sold the New Series, 40 mammoth plate photographs of Yosemite, at auction at Sotheby's, New York. He donated his remaining collection of over 1,000 images to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Bennett worked on personal photography projects throughout his adult life. Working in 35mm and 4" x 5" formats he exhibited and sold his work. He stated that his photographs "must have an element of mystery" and hoped that "the image evokes meanings on several levels, not only the literal but also on that of the symbolic and the enigmatic". He later incorporated "found" vernacular photographs into collages. During the 1990s he gave up collecting to concentrate on his personal art and photography. He received a Marin Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship for non-traditional media in 1991 and an Individual Artist

Fellowship for sculpture in 1996. His works are in the collection of major museums in the United States.

In 1971 Bennett pioneered a publishing company, Homestead Productions that produced posters from the fine art photography of Imogen Cunningham, Wynn Bullock, and other California photographers.

Gordon Bennett died of a heart attack on November 25, 2012 at age 79 in Oakwood, Georgia.

### **Chronology**

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1933      | Gordon Lynn Bennett born April 1 in Decatur, Tennessee  |
| 1949      | Becomes actively interested in photography  |
| 1951      | Graduated Meigs County High School, Tennessee   |
| 1951-1953 | Attends East Tennessee State, Johnson City, Tennessee   |
| 1953-1957 | Military service in U.S. Air Force  |
| 1954      | First works in a photographic darkroom while in U.S. Air Force  |
| 1955-1956 | Photographed ruins of three Roman cities in Libya in color to illustrate his paper "Roman Art in Tripolitania"  |
| 1957-1960 | Manager, Transportation Office. Yosemite Park and Curry Company, Yosemite National Park. First sees work of Ansel Adams.  |
| 1957-1958 | Undergraduate studies in painting and drawing at the Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, California; earns B.A.   |
| 1960-1965 | Graduate studies at San Francisco State College, California; earns M.A., in Art with emphasis in Photography. Studies with Jack Welpott and John Gutmann                            |
| 1962-1963 | Student teacher in Art, Francisco Junior High School, San Francisco, California   |
| 1962-1963 | Photographed early settlements and cemeteries in Northern California, using a 4" x 5" view camera. Images later part of his 1964 one-man show at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art |
| 1963-1964 | Substitute Teacher, San Francisco Unified School District, San Francisco  |
| 1964      | Began photographic series on parades  |

- 1964 First one-man show, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California
- 1964-late 60s Photography Technician and Supervisor of photography facilities in art department of San Francisco State College, San Francisco, California  
Additional employment photographing gallery installations and artists' works.
- 1965 Driving trip across U.S. Among photographs taken were those of rural people of East Tennessee where he grew up, including his uncle, Abner Bennett, and Abner's wife, Flossie.  
  
Began a photo-study of Southern California in Los Angeles, concentrating on elderly living in public places and behind-the-scenes at Hollywood film studios
- 1966 Photographs people and people-objects from San Francisco north into British Columbia. Began series of environmental portraits of West Coast artists
- 1967 Discovers disbound set of 76 mammoth-plate photographs of Yosemite and California missions from Carleton E. Watkins' New Series in a San Francisco bookstore.
- 1967 Experimented with use of sandwiched negatives, his own and "found" negatives  
  
Photographed series on county fairs in rural California
- 1968 Continued photo-essay on Southern California. Concentrated on San Diego and Hollywood. Began to photograph cut-out figures and fake facades
- 1969 Continued work on Southern California, concentrating on Long Beach and Palm Springs areas  
  
Photographed student and faculty strike and aftermath at San Francisco State College. Series used to promote Art-in-the-Community program for the city of San Francisco
- 1970 Works on series of photographed television screen images
- 1971 Briefly teaches at San Francisco State College
- 1971 Cuts back on his photography to work in other media, principally collage and assemblage

- 1971 Establishes publishing venture, Homestead Productions. Uses images by California photographers Wynn Bullock, Imogen Cunningham, Don Worth, and others. First printed posters to utilize fine-art photography
- 1973 Exhibits his collection of 76 Watkins' mammoth-plate prints at Focus Gallery, San Francisco. First exhibition of Watkin's work since his death in 1916
- 1975 Creates stage environments in U.S. and abroad
- 1976-1978 Resumes work with collage and assemblage
- 1978 Resumes photography and works solely in color, principally photographing natural scenes mostly at Point Reyes National Seashore
- 1979-1980 Continues to photograph. Works on book combining his photographs with his writing, but never submits for publication. Produces poems and essays
- 1981-1982 Photographs urban scene and man-built structures in the landscape
- 1987 Becomes private dealer in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century vintage prints
- 1991 Marin Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship in Non-traditional Media
- 1996 Marin Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship in Sculpture  
Begins offering Watkins' Yosemite photographs from New Series for sale
- 2004 Auction of Bennett's collection of Carlton Watkins New Series, 40 mammoth-plate photographs of Yosemite, April 28 at Sotheby's, New York
- 2004 Donates his collection of over 1,000 images to San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
- 2012 Dies of heart attack on November 25 at age 79 in Oakwood, Georgia
- 2015 Collection donated to CCP

### **Scope and Content Note**

The Gordon Bennett papers document Bennett's careers as a dealer, collector and artist. The bulk of the collection contains records of sales, auctions and purchases of photographs, some photocopies of his collection, loan records, appraisals and donations. There is extensive documentation of his 1999 donation of the bulk of his collection to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the appraisal and sale of the Carleton Watkins Yosemite New Series, including the Sotheby's catalog. By the 1990s

Bennett had decided to focus on his own art career and the collection documents his exhibitions, grants and works purchased by museums and contains his negatives, photographs, photographs of his exhibitions and collages. A small group of materials document his fine art photography poster publishing venture, Homestead Productions, established in 1971. There are a few personal papers documenting his education and military service, but no personal correspondence.

Series one, Biographical, 1951-2012, contains education records, Master's thesis, military records, portraits, resumes, interviews, awards and Bennett's obituary.

Series two, Activities, contains two subseries: Dealer and Collector Activities and Personal Art Career. Subseries Dealer and Collector Activities (1960-2010) contains correspondence, inventories, auction records, donation records, appraisals, tax records, research and receipts. Folder titles assigned by Bennett and grouped alphabetically by artists, subject, institutions to whom he loaned, donated or sold photographs, and the auction houses at which he purchased or sold works. Of note are his research materials on Carleton Watkins and catalog of Sotheby's sale, appraisals of his collections and itemized donation to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Subseries Personal Art Career (1962-2007) documents his art and photography. Materials including clipping books, exhibition records and reviews, grants, contracts, prints, transparencies, negatives and publications containing his work. The appendix has a listing of Bennett's art exhibitions. The final subseries on Homestead Productions (1971- ) contains a small group of materials documenting Bennett's publishing venture with business partner Edward Kitson. Included are advertising materials, posters and artist contracts signed by Bullock, Cunningham, and other California photographers.

Series three consists of publications containing reproductions of Bennett's photographs and a few books from his personal library, one annotated.

Series four, Photographic Materials includes Bennett's negatives and transparencies, photographic prints by and of Bennett, photographic collages by Bennett, photocopies of his work and others and a small group of vernacular photographs collected by Bennett.

## **Arrangement**

Series 1: Biographical Materials

Series 2: Activity Files

    Subseries 1: Dealer and Collector Activities

    Subseries 2: Personal Art Career

    Subseries 3: Homestead Productions

Series 3: Publications

Series 4: Photographic Materials

## **Names and Subject Terms**

Bennett, Gordon L.

Watkins, Carleton E., 1829-1916

## **Restrictions**

### **Conditions Governing Access**

Access to this collection requires an appointment with the Volkerding Study Center.

### **Conditions Governing Use**

It is the responsibility of the user to obtain permission from the copyright owner (which could be the institution, the creator of the record, the author or his/her transferees, heirs, legates or literary executors) prior to any copyright-protected uses of the collection.

The user agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Arizona Board of Regents, the University of Arizona, Center of Creative Photography, including its officers, employees, and agents, from and against all claims made relating to copyright or other intellectual property infringement.

## **Provenance**

The collection was donated to the Center in 2015 by Joyce Branch, cousin and executor of Gordon L. Bennett. Bennett's close friend Denise Bethel, photography expert and auctioneer at Sotheby's, New York assisted Ms. Branch in the selection of donation material and added explanatory notes to some items in the collection.

## **Preferred Citation**

Gordon L. Bennett papers, circa 1951-2012. AG 253. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

## **Processing Information**

Collection processed by Ann Richwine, 2015. Finding aid created by Ann Richwine in 2016, and updated by Susan Mergenthal and Alexis Peregoy, 2016.



**Container List****Series 1: Biographical Materials, circa 1950s to 2012**

Box	Folder	
1	1	High School Documents, 1951
	2	East Tennessee State, 1951-53
	3	Chouinard Art Institute, 1962
	4	San Francisco State College, Thesis, 1965
	5	Master of Arts, San Francisco State College, 1965
	6	Teaching Credentials, California, 1963-65
	7	Military Records and Discharge, 1961, 2004 (request for information)
	8	Resumes
	9	Award [U.S. Department of State Art in the Embassies Program], undated -1967?
	10	Obituary, 2012

**Series 2: Activity Files**

Subseries 1: Dealer and Collector Activities, arranged alphabetically

Box	Folder	
2	1	Andrews, Mari, n.d., 1996-99, 2003-04
	2	Batle, Angelio, n.d., 1994-97, 2000, 2003
	3	Butterfield's, n.d., 1986, 1997, 1999, 2001-03
	4	Catalogs, receipts, ammonites collecting, n.d., 1982-1990
	5	Crocker Art Gallery, 1997
	6	Dealer Papers [business cards, tax forms, dealer registration] n.d., 1984, 1997-98
	7	Dealer ephemera and notes, n.d., 1983, 1987, 1992
	8	DeYoung Museum, n.d., 1986, 1990-94, 2000
	9	Exhibitions from Bennett collection, n.d., 1989, 1998
	10	Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, contributions, 2004-06
	11	Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, gift appraisal, March 15, 2005
	12	Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, list of gifted photographs, 2004
	13	Fraenkel Gallery, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1993, 1994
	14	Getty Museum, n.d., 1993, 1996, 1998
	15	Gutmann, John, n.d., 1982-83, 1989-1991, 1995, 1997
	16	Gutmann, John, Estate gift, 1998-99
	17	Herms, George, n.d., 1966, 1969
	18	The Huntington, 1993-95
	19	Jullien, J., Exhibition, 1981
	20	Market Research for Photographs, n.d., 1998-99, 2002, 2008-10, 2012
3	1	Monterey Museum of Art, 1992
	2	Montreal Museum of Fine Arts [includes negatives: Trasker and unknown], n.d., 1989, 1990-1996

- 3 Museum of Modern Art, NY, 1965-68, 1970-71, 1981, 1987-88
- 4 National Gallery of Canada, 1994-1999
- 5 Norton Simon Museum, 2005-2007
- 6 Oakland Museum, 1984, 1994
- 7 Receipts for Purchases of art, personal art collection, 1962, 1968-69, 1991, 1995-2000
- 8-9 Receipts, Photographs purchased [includes negatives: Lucy Fleming, c1864], n.d., 1982, 1984-87, 1989, 1991-92, 1996
- 10 Tax Receipts from Donations, 1994, 1996, 1999-2001, 2003
- 11 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, gift appraisal, March 5, 2005
- 12 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift, 2004
- 13 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gift Receipts, 2001-2005
- 4 1 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Gifts, 2005-2008
- 2-3 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Donation records, Deed of gift, Appraisal, 1989-1999, 2002, 2004-2009
- 4 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Loans, 1988-89, 1991-92, 1994, 1996-98
- 5 Sotheby's, Carleton Watkins "New Series" exhibition and sale, 1996, 1999, 2000-2004
- 6 Sotheby's, Carleton Watkins "New Series" exhibition, sale and appraisal, 1993, 2000-01, 2003-05
- 7 Swann Galleries, 1985, 2000-01
- 8 Transparencies, "Photos by other people sold at auction", [includes slide of Ansel Adams, 1929 "Untitled" (Half Dome from Glacier Point Hotel, Yosemite)], n.d.
- 5 1 Watkins Research, Carleton Watkins Research files and documentation of exhibition, n.d., 1974, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2000, 2004, 2010

Subseries 2: Personal Art Career

- 6 1-2 Scrapbooks, 1960s and 1970s
- 7 1 Bennett Exhibitions, n.d., 1963-68, 1970, 1975
- 2 Clippings, n.d., 1964, 1965, 1967, 1971, 1974
- 3 Photography for Art in the Embassies, 1967
- 4 Exhibitions of others, 2004
- 5 Lists of works, Exhibitions and sales, 1960s – 1990s
- 6 Marin Arts Council, n.d., 1991, 1992, 1996
- 7 Palm Press, 1993-95, 2000, 2004, 2006
- 8 Photocopies of Bennett's collages, n.d., 1966-69, 1972
- 9 Pomegranate Publications, 1991, 2002-2007
- 10 Writings/editorials, n.d., 1982

Subseries 3: Homestead Productions

- 7 11 Homestead Productions (Bennett's publishing company), n.d., 1971-74

### Series 3: Printed Materials

#### Subseries 1: Books

##### Box

- 8 Plantureaux, Serge. Niepce, Daguerre or Talbot? c2004.  
Weyl, Hermann. Symmetry, c1952.  
Henry Wessel, c2000 [autographed copy].

#### Subseries 2: Publications containing reproductions of Bennett's photographs

- 9 Photography U.S.A., De Cordova Museum, 1968.  
Vision and Expression, Nathan Lyons editor, 1969.  
California Photographers 1970, organized by Fred R. Parker.  
Large Spaces in Small Places; a survey of Western Landscape Photography:  
1850-1980, Crocker Art Museum, 1980.  
Album No. 11, Royal Photographic Society, 1970.  
San Francisco Camera: a selection of photographs from the Pasadena Art  
Museum Permanent Collection, vol. 1, no. 5.

### Series 4: Photographic Materials

##### Box

- 10 Transparencies by Bennett, 1960s-1990s
- 11 Transparencies by Bennett, 1978-early 1900s
- 12 Negatives and Photographic prints by Bennett, 1960s and early 1970s  
4x5 color negatives, 35 mm negatives, 3-8x10 color autos/rock  
photographs, 6-11x14 color rocks & sand photographs unsigned/undated
- 13 Prints by Bennett  
Jesus Flea Market photos, b&w 8x10 photos (mostly signed, dated, titled)  
b&w assemblage photos, 4x5 contact prints, photos from rock  
formations exhibition
- 14 1<sup>st</sup> One Man Show  
26 gelatin silver prints, matted. All except 2 are signed Gordon Bennett,  
1962-1964. Stamped imprints on reverse sides are either S.F.M.A. or  
California State Fair and Exposition
- 15 Series of 17 matted gelatin silver prints, signed by Gordon Bennett, 1965-1969
- 16 23 Photographic Collages  
Large format, matted. Labeled on reverse "found photographs", 1990-  
1992
- 17 Photocopies of Bennett and other's photographs
- 18 Vernacular prints and negatives collected by Bennett
- 19 Matted, signed prints by Gordon Bennett
- 20 Portraits of Gordon Bennett  
1 photograph taken by Irene Poon, 1966, 2 photographs taken

- by Joan Murray, 1971, and 1 self-portrait, 1970
- 21 Label on board for exhibit at SFMoMA, A History of Photography from California Collections, 9 February-30 April 1989
- 22 6 posters, signed by the photographers (Homestead Productions), circa 1971  
My Father at Ninety by Imogene Cunningham  
Child in Forest by Wynn Bullock  
Untitled, signed by Neal White  
Trees and Fog by Don Worth  
Oak Leaves by Don Worth  
Male Nude on Beach by Don Worth
- 23 1 poster untitled and unsigned by Helen Nester (Homestead Productions), circa 1971
- 24 1 poster, Trees in Fog by Don Worth (unsigned) in original packaging with Homestead Productions ordering information

## Appendix

Exhibition List of Personal Art  
Transcribed from Bennett's original

### *SOLO EXHIBITIONS*

Assemblage  
1974.  
Union Gallery, California State University, San Jose, California

Photography  
1970  
Silver Image Gallery, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1967  
International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester  
M. H. DeYoung Memorial Museum, San Francisco, California

1966  
Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, California

1965  
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, California  
California State University, San Francisco

1964

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California

*GROUP EXHIBITIONS*

Collage

1997

"The Body Through The Lens", Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

1993-94

"Flora Photographica – the Flower in Photography from 1835 to the Present", Vancouver Art Gallery; New York Public Library; Royal Ontario Museum; Montreal museum of Fine Arts

Installations

1997

"Marin Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship Grantees", Falkirk Cultural Center, San Rafael, California

1992

"Marin Arts Council Individual Artist Fellowship Grantees", Artisans Gallery, Mill Valley, California

Photography

1993

"Under Age: Photographs of Children", San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California

1991

"Silent Cities: Atget and Photographs of the Modern Urban Landscape", Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena, California

1980

"Large Spaces in Small Places: A Survey of Western landscape Photography 1850-1980", Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento, California

1972

"Man and His Environment", Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California

1971

"Five California Photographers", Musée Réattu, Arles France

"A Variety Show of Photographs", California State University, Arcata and travelling exhibition

1970

"The Artist as Adversary", Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

"California Photographers", University of California, Davis; The Oakland Museum; Pasadena Art Museum; University of Nevada

"Photography—New Acquisitions", Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

1969

"Vision and Expression", International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House and travelling exhibition

"Recent Acquisitions", Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California

1968

"Contemporary Photographers III" (Six Photographers) travelling exhibition organized by the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York

"Photography USA", De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts

"American Arts", University of Exeter, Exeter, England

"Photography: Current Report II", travelling exhibition, Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York

1967

"Arts in the Embassies", organized for the U.S. Department of State. The Oakland Museum; Focus Gallery, San Francisco. Individual prints subsequently exhibited in U.S. embassies at Addis Ababa and Manila for three year period.

1964

"24<sup>th</sup> annual North American Photographic Exhibit", Scaramento, California

"Yolo International Exhibition of Photography", University of California, Davis; University of Nevada; University of California, Berkeley

1963

"Yolo International Exhibition of Photography", University of California, Davis; University of Nevada

(Photography)

1968

"Contemporary Photographers III" (Six Photographers), travelling exhibition organized by The International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York

"Photography USA", De Cordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts

"American Arts", University of Exeter, Exeter, England

"Photography: Current Report II", Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York, and traveling exhibition

1967

"Arts in the Embassies", organized for the U.S. Department of State. The Oakland Museum, focus Gallery, San Francisco. Individual prints subsequently exhibited in U.S. embassies at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Manila, Philippines for three year period

1964

"24<sup>th</sup> Annual North American Photographic Exhibit", Sacramento, California

"Yolo International Exhibition of Photography", University of California, Davis; The University of Nevada, Reno; The University of California, Berkeley

1963

"Yolo International Exhibition of Photography", University of California, Davis; The University of Nevada, Reno