AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES
COLLECTION GUIDE

Collection Summary

Title: Eliot Porter/Ansel Adams Correspondence

Date: 1943–1980

Creator(s): Porter, Eliot (1901–1990), and Adams, Ansel (1902–1984)

Extent: .21 linear feet

Code: AAC

Repository: Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives and the Center for Creative Photography

Abstract: Eliot Porter (1901–1990) set the standard for color nature photography. Porter’s contemporary and friend, Ansel Adams (1902–1984), did the same for black-and-white nature photography. These photocopies were acquired from the Center for Creative Photography in October 2000 to supplement the Eliot Porter Papers held by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives.

This guide describes only the materials from Porter's archives housed in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives. Other materials are in the Photography Collection and the Library.

Information for Researchers

Access Restrictions

The collection is open to qualified researchers.

Use Restrictions

The Eliot Porter/Ansel Adams Correspondence collection is the physical property of the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Copies were supplied to the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art acquired copyright to Porter's materials; however, rights to materials produced by others were not acquired. Permission to publish the correspondence written by Ansel Adams must be obtained from the Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art assumes no responsibility for infringement of literary property rights or copyrights or for liability to any person for defamation or invasion of privacy.
Preferred Citation

Ansel Adams Archive, [item identification], Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona.

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Dr. W. Powell Cottrille Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Eliot Porter Papers
Patrick E. Porter Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Porter Family Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Stephen Porter Collection of Eliot Porter Papers

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

Over 10,000 prints and 88,000 transparencies and negatives in the Photography Collection.

Contact the museum archivist at archivist@cartermuseum.org or 817.989.5077 for additional information.

Administrative Information

Acquisition and Custody Information

Gift of copies by the Center for Creative Photography, 2000

Processed By

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Biographical Note

Eliot Porter (1901–1990) set the standard for contemporary color nature photography. In 1939, he forsook a burgeoning career in biochemistry to turn full–time to artistic photography, spurred on by a successful one–person exhibition of his work at Alfred Stieglitz’s renowned An American Place gallery. Initially, Porter concentrated mainly on photographing birds in close–up, seeking to improve by example the quality of ornithological photography. When his highly regarded bird photographs were turned down for publication because they were not in color, making the birds sometimes difficult to distinguish, he taught himself the new dye transfer color printing process, becoming one of the first artist photographers to devote himself full time to color. Quickly, he gained two Guggenheim Foundation grants in support of that pioneering work.

Through the 1940s and 1950s, Porter was best known as a bird photographer. However, he had never given up his interest in depicting his broader surroundings, and by the mid–fifties he was focusing increasingly on nature’s colorful details, taking advantage of the dye transfer process’s exceptional color control to explore the nuance and emotional resonance of the natural world. That work came to fruition in 1962 with the Sierra Club’s publication of his immensely
successful book, *In Wildness Is the Preservation of the World*. Porter astutely built on that success, going on to publish a book of his photographs almost every year through the rest of his life. Many of these books, comprised of Porter’s finely printed images intermixed with texts by Porter himself or his associates, provided ecologically informed portraits of threatened places. Late in his career Porter increasingly focused on broader issues of human history and culture through studies of Greece, Iceland, Africa, and China.

His work also has been published in numerous portfolios and a retrospective catalogue, *Eliot Porter*, published by the Amon Carter Museum of American Art in 1987.

Eliot Porter met Ansel Adams at a dinner party in the late 1920s. Porter credited Adams’ photography with influencing his own work, and despite their differing opinions on color photography, the two men were good friends.

**Scope and Content Note**

Eliot Porter/Ansel Adams Correspondence is a collection of photocopies of forty–seven pieces of original correspondence to, from, and about Eliot Porter found in the Ansel Adams Archive at the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona. Primary correspondents include Ansel Adams, Eliot Porter, and Aline Porter. Subjects include photography, color photography, Polaroid film, the Sierra Club, the Friends of Photography, and Porter’s travel and book projects.

**Inventory**

**Series I. Correspondence**

Box 1, Folder 1: Correspondence 1943, 1951, 1958–1959


Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondence 1960–1961


Box 1, Folder 3: Correspondence 1962, 1964, 1967

Box 1, Folder 4: Correspondence 1970–1972

Box 1, Folder 5: Correspondence 1973–1977

Box 1, Folder 6: Miscellaneous Correspondence and Ephemera