AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES
COLLECTION GUIDE

Collection Summary

Title: Porter Family Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Date: 1953–1988
Creator(s): Porter, Eliot (1901–1990)
Extent: .4 linear feet
Code: PFP
Repository: Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Abstract: Eliot Porter (1901–1990) set the standard for contemporary color nature photography. These papers are copies of those held by individual family members, many, but not all, of which have subsequently been donated to the museum. They illustrate Porter’s diverse projects and publications, notably including letters written in the field offering observations on his work.

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

This collection is restricted. The collection is open to qualified researchers by special request only.

Use Restrictions

The Porter Family Collection of Eliot Porter Papers is the physical property of 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. 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
Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Dr. W. Powell Cottrille Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Eliot Porter/Ansel Adams Correspondence
Eliot Porter Papers
Patrick E. Porter 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


Processed By

Jonathan Frembling

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.

**Scope and Content Note**

The Porter Family Collection of Eliot Porter Papers is comprised of copies of materials donated by individual family members to enrich Eliot Porter’s original bequest. Many of the originals of these copies have subsequently been donated to the museum. The Collection is divided into series by addressee of the correspondence.

**Inventory**

**Series I. Aline Porter**

Box 1, Folder 1: Correspondence, 1964–1966
1. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Great Spruce Head Island, Sunset, Maine, July 8, 1964. To Aline.

2. Eliot Porter. 4 pp, on board Cristobel Carrier, February 19, 1966. To Aline.


5. Eliot Porter. 3 pp, [Galapagos, Ecuador], April 24, 1966. To Aline.

**Series II. Jonathan Porter**

Box 1, Folder 2: Correspondence, 1954–1958


17. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, March 17, 1958. To Jonathan.


Box 1, Folder 3: Correspondence, 1959–1967


Box 1, Folder 4: Correspondence, 1968–1970


Series III. Patrick Porter

Box 1, Folder 5: Correspondence, 1953–1960


8. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, March 9, 1958. To Patrick.


17. Eliot Porter. 3 pp, Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 16, 1960. To Pat, Steve, and Jonathan.


Box 1, Folder 6: Correspondence, 1961–1966.


15. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 21, 1965. To Patrick.


Box 1, Folder 7: Correspondence, 1967–1971.

2. Eliot Porter. 4 pp, Athens, Greece, April 1, 1967. To Patrick.


Box 1, Folder 8: Correspondence, 1972–1973.


**Series IV. Stephen Porter**

Box 1, Folder 9: Correspondence, 1956–1965


Box 1, Folder 10: Correspondence, 1966–1988


