AMON CARTER MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

Collection Summary

Title: Stephen Porter Collection of Eliot Porter Papers
Date: 1913–1996, n.d.
Creator(s): Porter, Eliot (1901–1990)
Extent: .6 linear feet
Code: SPP
Repository: Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Abstract: Eliot Porter (1901–1990) set the standard for contemporary color nature photography. These papers illustrate his 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 Stephen Porter 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

Stephen Porter Collection of Eliot Porter Papers, [series information], [item identification], Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives.
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
Porter Family 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

Paula Stewart, Karin Strohbeck, and 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.

Stephen Porter (b. 1941) is the son of Eliot and Aline Porter.

**Scope and Content Note**

The Stephen Porter Collection of Eliot Porter Papers is comprised of materials donated through the years by Eliot Porter’s son Stephen.

**Series I [A1997.030]** contains an essay, “An Account of a Robin’s Nest,” written by Eliot Porter when he was in fourth grade, and 153 letters written by Porter to his wife Aline and to his son Stephen between 1953 and 1989 (bulk 1960s). While most of these letters were written from Santa Fe, New Mexico, several were written during Porter’s travels. These letters, which primarily relate to Porter’s relationships with his wife and son, often offer insight into his work.

**Series II [A2002.009]** contains thirty–one letters written between 1961 and 1987 and originating in Santa Fe, New Mexico; Sunset, Maine; Blue Mountain Lake, New York; and Nairobi, Kenya. Arranged chronologically.

This series also includes several clippings and a number of publications drawing on Porter’s photographic work. Arranged chronologically.

**Series III [A2003.242]** contains forty–two letters written between 1966 and 1981. The letters originated in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Gatlinburg, Tennessee; Nairobi, Kenya; aboard the U.S. Antarctic Research Vessel “Hero”; Christchurch, New Zealand; McMurdo, Antarctica; and Turpan, Xinjiang, China. Arranged chronologically.

**Series IV [A2004.256]** contains an assortment of clippings, photocopies, and ephemera.

**Inventory**

**Series I [A1997.030]**

Box 1, Folder 1: An Account of a Robin’s Nest, 1913

Box 1, Folder 2: Letters to Aline, 1953–1985

2. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, January 14, 1958. To Aline Porter.
3. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, June 3, 1959. To Aline Porter.


33. Eliot Porter. 4 pp, Xian (Sian), June 21, 1980. To Aline Porter.
34. Eliot Porter. 6 pp, Xian (Sian), July 2, 1980. To Bunny.
37. Eliot Porter. 1 p, China, October 5, 1981. To Aline Porter.
38. Eliot Porter. 1 p, China, October 7, 1981. To Aline Porter.

Box 1, Folder 3: Letters from Daddy, 1954–1961
2. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 6, 1958. To Steve Porter.


Box 1, Folder 4: Eliot Porter Letters, 1963–1989


27. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 24, 1969. To Bebo and Tony.
37. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, December 5, 1974. To Marcie Porter.
45. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, September 1, 1977. To Marcie Porter.
52. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 12, 1981. To Steve Porter.


60. Eliot Porter. 3 pp, Hong Kong, May 20, 1985. To Aline Porter.


64. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, February 6, 1986. To Steve Porter.


**Series II [A2002.009]**

Box 1, Folder 5: Correspondence with Betty and Powell Cottrille, 1961–1969

1. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 13, 1961. To Betty Cottrille.


Box 1, Folder 6: Correspondence with Betty and Powell Cottrille, 1970–1987


12. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, October 6, 1972. To Betty Cottrille.


Box 1, Folder 7: Exhibition Catalogue, 1938–1939

Box 1, Folder 8: Brochure, 1975

Box 1, Folder 9: Article Reprints, 1938–1941


Box 2: Print Matter, 1965–1996


14. The Atlantic, 264, no. 6 (December 1989).


16. Life, 14, no. 2 (February 1991).


Box 1, Folder 10: Transparency, n.d.

1. Transparency of Bottle Box by Eliot Porter.

Series III [A2003.242]
1. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, November 2, 1966. To Kathy Porter.

2. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, August 9, 1967. To Steve Porter.


Box 1, Folder 12: Correspondence, 1970


Box 1, Folder 13: Correspondence, 1971–1975
2. Eliot Porter. 1 p, Santa Fe, New Mexico, May 2, 1972. To Marcie and Steve Porter.

Box 1, Folder 14: Correspondence, 1976–1981

**Series IV [A2004.256]**

Box 1, Folder 15: Biography, n. d.
1. Eliot Porter Biography [computer diskette]

Box 1, Folder 16: Clippings, 1939–1940, n. d.


3. Photo of Ansel Adams, Aline Porter, and Eliot Porter, n. d. [photocopy]