

Elizabeth Olds:

An Inventory of the Benjamin O. Rees Collection of Elizabeth Olds in the Art Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

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| Creator: | Olds, Elizabeth, 1896-1991 |
| Title: | Benjamin O. Rees Collection of Elizabeth Olds |
| Dates: | 1925-1990s, undated |
| Extent: | 2 boxes (75 prints and drawings); 1 document box (116 photographs) |
| Abstract: | Includes works by American artist Elizabeth Olds, largely lithographic images and a few drawings depicting mainly Depression-era subject matter, such as working conditions and unemployment, as well as portraits, landscapes, and nature studies; some lithographs by other artists; and photographic documentation of the Rees Collection of Elizabeth Olds. |
| Call Number: | Art Collection AR-00196 |
| Language: | English |
| Access: | Open for research. A minimum of twenty-four hours is required to pull art materials to the Reading Room. |

Administrative Information

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| Acquisition: | Gifts (G11204, G12250), 1998, 2003 |
| Processed by: | Helen Young, 2003 |
| Repository: | Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin |

Biographical Sketch

Elizabeth Olds was born December 10, 1896, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Fred Allen Olds and Harriet (Trussell) Olds. As a girl she had an interest in drawing; she also participated in competitive swimming and horseback riding. After studies at the University of Minnesota (1916-1918) and the Minneapolis School of Arts (1918-1921), she attended the Art Students' League in New York as a scholarship student, where she studied under George Luks and other Social Realists. She would accompany Luks to New York's Lower East Side and other ethnic neighborhoods where the two would sketch the immigrant culture. Olds soon became Luks' assistant. Through Luks' friend Edward Root, she spent some time with James Agee and Alexander Woollcott.

In 1925 Olds traveled to Paris. There she produced numerous crayon and watercolor sketches and drawings; she also performed as a trick bareback rider with the Fratellini Brothers' Cirque d'Hiver. The next year she became the first woman to win a Guggenheim Fellowship, which she used to continue her studies in Europe until 1929.

After returning to the United States, Olds stayed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Tamworth, New Hampshire, where, although initially sheltered from the Great Depression, she observed the misery others endured. Her response resulted in the development of a new style with a focus on workers as subject matter.

In 1932 Olds accepted a commission to produce a series of portraits of the prominent Samuel Rees family in Omaha, Nebraska. Although she was a proficient portrait artist, she quickly found the work boring. Samuel Rees, aware of her frustration, encouraged her to visit the Rees Printing Company where she could learn lithography from the printer. Olds learned the entire process and soon was creating lithographs. In 1934 during her stay in Omaha, Olds went to the Swift and Company slaughterhouse and asked permission to sketch the men working in the plant. She was allowed to take her sketchpad to the killing floor and her sketches resulted in *The Stockyard Series*, a set of lithographs that received critical acclaim in New York.

Olds returned to New York in 1935 and worked for the Federal Art Project's graphic division. She continued creating lithographs depicting people struggling with the hardships of the Depression. She joined the Artists Union, the Artists Congress, and the Graphic Division of the Works Projects Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP). In 1939, she participated in the FAP's silkscreen unit as it worked to develop serigraphy as a fine art medium. Committed to the idea that art should be democratic and available to all people, Olds found silkscreen to be a medium suited for this purpose. In 1936 and 1937 Olds also did political illustrations for *The New Masses*.

After World War II, Olds accepted assignments as an illustrator-reporter for *The New Republic* and *Fortune*. She provided illustrations for articles on labor issues and in 1954 she traveled to Florida and New Orleans to gather information for an article on the Lykes Bros. Industry for *Fortune*. She also wrote and illustrated children's books. Four of these were chosen as Junior Literary Guild selections.

In 1949 Olds began to spend summers on Long Island Sound, where she spent time observing the shore birds, which became the subjects of numerous watercolors and wood block prints. She visited Mexico and Guatemala in 1951 and made studies of the people, animals, and boats.

In the 1950s, Olds began to work with multi-media collages, combining her silk screens and wood cuts with scraps of paper. She was also an artist in residence at two artists' colonies: Yaddo, near Saratoga Springs, New York, and McDowell, in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Olds moved to Florida in 1971. She died March 4, 1991.

Sources:

Olds, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth Olds: Retrospective Exhibition*. Austin, Tex.: RGK Foundation, 1986.

Scope and Contents

The collection comprises seventy-five original works on paper. Of these, seventy-four of the works were given to the Ransom Center by Benjamin O. Rees; a screen print was the gift of his daughter-in-law, Caroline Bridgman-Rees. These are organized into two series: I. Works by Elizabeth Olds, and II. Works by Other Artists. A group of photographs is described as Series III., Photographic Materials. Titles are transcribed from the works. Cataloger's titles appear in brackets.

Series I. includes sixty-five works by Elizabeth Olds which were, for the most part, created during 1932 to 1935 while she was a resident artist in the household of Benjamin O. Rees' parents, Samuel Rees and his wife, in Omaha, Nebraska. During this time she was introduced to lithography, and the collection includes forty-three different lithographic images (including multiple prints of some) depicting mainly Depression-era subject matter, such as working conditions and unemployment, as well as portraits, landscapes, and nature studies. There are also eight drawings.

Series II., Works by Other Artists, is mainly comprised of a group of nine lithographs, each stamped "First Annual Print Series, 1936. Issued by the American Artists School, New York City." Olds' lithograph *Sidewalk Engineers*, which is listed with her works, had originally been part of this group. Other artists whose works were in the print series include Stuart Davis, Eugene C. Fitch, Harry Gottlieb, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Anton Refregier, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Raphael Soyer, and Max Weber. The final work is George Luks' Christmas greeting to Olds with an original drawing by Luks.

Series III., Photographic Materials, includes 116 color photographs, numbered by Benjamin O. Rees, of his collection of Elizabeth Olds; these include works not given to the Ransom Center. The photographs are housed with a copy of a numbered list provided by Rees; the photographs numbered 79-97 are not described on Rees' list. There are also six color slides from Mrs. Caroline Bridgman Rees of some of Olds' portraits of

members of the Rees family.

Related Material

The Ransom Center's Art Collection also has the Emmett L. Hudspeth Collection of Elizabeth Olds, and the George Luks Collection (works from Elizabeth Olds' personal collection). The Ransom Center also has Elizabeth Olds materials in its Manuscripts Collection, its Library, and its Film Collection.

Series I. Works by Elizabeth Olds, 1932-1940, undated

- Accession Number: 2003.12.01** Sheep skimmers [men with hanging carcasses]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 21.7 x 30 cm. **Box** 1.1
- Accession Number: 2003.12.02** [Man wearing hat and apron, resting against table; two men working in background]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 19.9 x 30.2 cm. **Box** 1.2
- Accession Number: 2003.12.03** Sheep Luggers. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 22 x 30.8 cm. **Box** 1.3
- Accession Number: 2003.12.04-.05** Beef Luggers. 4/9, unnumbered proof. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), 21.1 x 29.8 cm., on board 51 x 40.7 cm. (Olds' mat) **Box** 1.4-.5
- Accession Number: 2003.12.06-.07** The Knocker. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 29.6 x 20.9 cm. **Box** 1.6-.7
- Accession Number: 2003.12.08-.10** Floorsmen at Swift & Co. [Beef Skinners No. 2]. 1st state, 2nd state, 3rd state. 1934. 3 prints (lithograph), image 20.8 x 30.6 cm. **Box** 1.8-.10
- Accession Number: 2003.12.11-.12** Workers on Floor, Swift & Co. [also titled: Beef Skinners, No. 2; Floorsmen at Swift & Co.]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 21.6 x 30.3 cm. **Box** 1.11-.12
- Accession Number: 2003.12.13-.14** The Sticker [worker with hanging beef carcass]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 28 x 20 cm. **Box** 1.13-.14
- Accession Number: 2003.12.15** [Six workers in plant]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), image 27.5 x 36 cm. **Box** 2.1
- Accession Number: 2003.12.16** [Two men's heads with hard hats]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 29.8 x 22 cm. **Box** 1.15
- Accession Number: 2003.12.17** Hunchback Tailor. 14/15. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 27.6 x 32.3 cm. **Box** 1.16
- Accession Number: 2003.12.18** [Man operating printing press]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 24.7 x 37.3 cm. **Box** 1.17
- Accession Number: 2003.12.69** Olds, Elizabeth. Sidewalk Engineers. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 22.7 x 33.2 cm. **Box** 1.18
- Accession Number: 2003.12.19** After Uncle Sam's Noon-day Meal at the Transient Home [Flop House: two men lying on cots]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 20 x 40.5 cm. **Box** 1.19
- Accession Number: 2003.12.20** Black Jack at the Transient Shelter [group of men playing cards]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 38.2 x 27.9 cm. **Box** 1.20

- Accession Number: 2003.12.21-.22** Boy Artist at Transient Center [boy sitting on floor, drawing]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 18.9 x 28.1 cm. **Box** 1.21-.22
- Accession Number: 2003.12.23** The Preacher's Message to the Homeless Men [man sitting in pews]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 26.5 x 49.7 cm. **Box** 2.2
- Accession Number: 2003.12.24-.27** Miss Manchester's Musical Program for Homeless Men. 39/52, and 3 variant unnumbered states. 1934. 4 prints (lithograph), image 22.8 x 40.7 cm. **Box** 1.23-.26
- Accession Number: 2003.12.28-.29** C.W.A. Employment Line No. 2 [facing left; 2 states]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 22.6 x 40 cm. **Box** 1.27-.28
- Accession Number: 2003.12.30-.31** Employment Line [facing right]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 22.7 x 40.4 cm. **Box** 1.29-.30
- Accession Number: 2003.12.32** [Unemployment line, facing left in perspective]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 27.5 x 35.1 cm. **Box** 1.31
- Accession Number: 2003.12.33** [Unemployment line, facing right and forward]. 1934? 1 print (lithograph), image 22.1 x 40 cm. **Box** 1.32
- Accession Number: 2003.12.34** [Children receiving shots]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 22.9 x 40.5 cm. **Box** 1.33
- Accession Number: 2003.12.35-.36** [Group of children in waiting room]. 1934. 2 prints (lithograph), image 27.6 x 35.5 cm. **Box** 1.34-.35
- Accession Number: 2003.12.37** Waiting Room, C.W.A. Dental Clinic [group of children, one crying]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 27.5 x 39.4 cm. **Box** 1.36
- Accession Number: 2003.12.38** [Woman kneeling to right of man (John Dillinger?) sitting on ground, with arms around his shoulders]. 1932. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 43.3 x 28.4 cm. **Box** 1.37
- Accession Number: 2003.12.39** [Woman kneeling to left of man (John Dillinger?) sitting on ground, with arms around his shoulders]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 29.5 x 30.7 cm. **Box** 1.38
- Accession Number: 2003.12.40** Caught, But Will He Get Out? [Samuel Insull imprisoned in a pyramid, crushing citizens below]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), image 22.5 x 40.8 cm. **Box** 1.39
- Accession Number: 2003.12.41** The D.A.R., America's Sweethearts [five women with banner "Armament for Self Defense"]. 1934. 1 print (lithograph), image 21.3 x 40.5 cm. **Box** 1.40
- Accession Number: 2003.12.42** [Charles Harding, head and shoulders portrait]. Circa 1932. 1 drawing (charcoal), 41.5 x 31.2 cm. **Box** 1.41

- Accession Number: 2003.12.43** [Half-length profile of man, rough sketch]. Undated. 1 drawing (crayon), 22.6 x 15 cm. **Box** 1.42
- Accession Number: 2003.12.44** [Three waiters]. Undated. 1 drawing (pencil), 19 x 27.9 cm. (in mat) **Box** 1.43
- Accession Number: 2003.12.45** [Face and right shoulder of person]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 17 x 10.9 cm. **Box** 1.44
- Accession Number: 2003.12.46** [Man wearing glasses and clerical hat, facing front]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), image 21.2 x 15 cm. **Box** 1.45
- Accession Number: 2003.12.47-48** [Man kneeling with head bent down, one hand clasping the other wrist, arms raised up]. 1935. 2 prints (lithograph), image 32.2 x 23.5 cm. **Box** 1.46-47
- Accession Number: 2003.12.49** [Old woman wearing head scarf; head and shoulders]. 1930s. 1 print (lithograph), image 21.4 x 29.5 cm. **Box** 1.48
- Accession Number: 2003.12.50** [African-American boy, sitting; three-quarter length]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 37.6 x 25.8 cm. **Box** 1.49
- Accession Number: 2003.12.51** [Female nude with long hair, sitting; three-quarter length]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 36.9 x 24.4 cm. **Box** 1.50
- Accession Number: 2003.12.52** High Art - or - How the Omaha Kids Got Lost in Bermuda - In Five Reels and Four Wheels [cartoons drawn over poster illustration of woman on bicycle]. 1930s. 1 drawing (ink and pencil), 46.8 x 33.9 cm. **Box** 2.3
- Accession Number: 2003.12.53** Bermuda. Hitting the High Spots [cartoons drawn over poster illustration of woman on bicycle]. 1930s. 1 drawing (ink, pencil, watercolor), 46.8 x 33.9 cm. **Box** 2.4
- Accession Number: 2003.12.54** [Cartoons drawn on package wrapping, addressed to "Mr. & Mrs. Samuel Rees ... Omaha, Nebraska"]. 1930s. 1 drawing (ink), 132.5 x 61 cm. folded to 35.6 x 51.5 cm. **Box** 2.5
- Accession Number: 2003.12.55** [Seated man wearing horse-riding outfit, seated man wearing hat]. Undated. 1 drawing (crayon), 25.7 x 23.3 cm. **Box** 1.51
- Accession Number: 2003.9** Three Men and a Fish. 1940. 1 print (screen print, col.), 25.5 x 45.7 cm. **Box** 2.6
- Accession Number: 2003.12.56** [Bridled horse]. Undated. 1 drawing (crayon), 25.3 x 20 cm. **Box** 1.52
- Accession Number: 2003.12.57** [Landscape with water and shore (Missouri River near Omaha?), light beams from sun]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 26.2 x 41.1 cm. **Box** 1.53

- Accession Number: 2003.12.58** [Landscape with trees and winding road]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 44.3 x 29.6 cm. **Box** 1.54
- Accession Number: 2003.12.59** [Four zinnias]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 19.3 x 19.7 cm. **Box** 1.55
- Accession Number: 2003.12.60** [Three irises]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 30.3 x 16.1 cm. **Box** 1.56
- Accession Number: 2003.12.61** [Vincent Van Gogh: copy of *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe*]. 1933. 1 print (lithograph), image 22.6 x 17.8 cm. **Box** 1.57
- Accession Number: 2003.12.62** [Group of five full-length figures in Renaissance costume: copy from a painting]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 42.9 x 27.7 cm. **Box** 1.58
- Accession Number: 2003.12.63** [Three women in Renaissance costume: copy from a painting]. Undated. 1 print (lithograph), sheet 34.8 x 28 cm. **Box** 1.59

Series II. Works by Other Artists, 1925-1936

- Accession Number: 2003.12.64** Davis, Stuart. Anchor. 1935. 1 print (lithograph), image 21.6 x 32.8 cm. **Box** 1.60
- Accession Number: 2003.12.65** Fitsch, Eugene C. Unemployed, Union Square [group of men sitting on bench or standing]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 23.1 x 33.3 cm. **Box** 1.61
- Accession Number: 2003.12.66** Gottlieb, Harry. Waiting for Work. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 23.3 x 35 cm. **Box** 1.62
- Accession Number: 2003.12.67** Kuniyoshi, Yasuo. [Three-quarter length of woman wearing ostrich-feather hat and holding cigarette in holder, standing on stage in front of piano]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 29.7 x 24.4 cm. **Box** 1.63
- Accession Number: 2003.12.68** L. T. (?) [Two men (one looking through telescope) on mountain overlooking town and river]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 16 x 26 cm. **Box** 1.64
- Accession Number: 2003.12.70** Refrigier, Anton. [Standing woman, crawling toddler, baby in cradle, three boys dressed as soldiers, all next to open grave]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 22.8 x 33 cm. **Box** 1.65
- Accession Number: 2003.12.71** Siqueiros, David Alfaro. Workman. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 30.2 x 22.2 cm. **Box** 1.66
- Accession Number: 2003.12.72** Soyer, Raphael. Nude [seated female nude]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 34.6 x 24 cm. **Box** 1.67
- Accession Number: 2003.12.73** Weber, Max. [Conductor and musicians on stage]. 1936. 1 print (lithograph), image 18.1 x 23.9 cm. **Box** 1.68
- Accession Number: 2003.12.74** Luks, George. George thinking of Elizabeth. A Helluva Xmas for me. George Luks [three-quarter length profile of seated man, next to wine bottle and glass on table]. 1925. 1 drawing (watercolor, red ink, pencil), 17.5 x 12.4 cm. **Box** 1.69

Series III. Photographic Materials, 1990s

Photographs of works by Elizabeth Olds collected by Benjamin O. Rees. 1990s. 116
photographic prints (col.), 10.2 x 15.1 cm.

Box
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