

# Nicholas Ray:

## An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

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### Descriptive Summary

**Creator:** Ray, Nicholas, 1911-1979

**Title:** Nicholas Ray Papers

**Dates:** 1929-1998

**Extent:** 18 document boxes, 7 oversize boxes, 3 oversize folders (osf) (12.06 linear feet)

**Abstract:** The Nicholas Ray Papers, 1929-1998, include scripts, storyboards, production photographs and film stills, correspondence, photographs, manuscript drafts, interview transcripts, notebooks and note cards, clippings, artworks, address books, and personal effects purchased from Nicholas Ray's widow, Susan Ray.

**Call Number:** Film Collection FI-054

**Language:** English, French, and German

**Access:** Open for research

Redactions Note: **The production and research materials contain a number of items from which personal information has been redacted or restricted to protect an individual's privacy.** Examples are social security, telephone, and account numbers; the names of medical patients and prisoners; and personnel records. The originals were removed and have been replaced with redacted photocopies, which have an identifying statement at the top.

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### Administrative Information

**Acquisition:** Purchase, 2011

**Processed by:** Ancelyn Krivak, 2011, 2012

**Repository:** The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center

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## Biographical Sketch

Nicholas Ray (born Raymond Nicholas Kienzle, Jr., on August 7, 1911, in Galesville, Wisconsin) was a film director active in Hollywood between 1944 and 1963. Revered by American and European critics and filmmakers, Ray put his personal touch on every film he made, despite the constraints of the studio system. His films are marked by a sensitive handling of actors, a distinctive visual style that includes an expressionistic use of color and dramatic compositions, and unconventional subject matter. Ray's evocative depictions of young rebels, troubled outsiders, and characters on society's margins have won wide recognition in the United States and abroad as among the most aesthetically and culturally significant American films.

After briefly attending the University of Chicago, Ray began his career in the 1930s with a short stint as an apprentice at Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Fellowship in Wisconsin. Ray then moved to New York, where he performed as part of a left-wing theater troupe, the Theatre of Action. He worked as an actor and stage manager for the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theatre Project and co-produced a folk music radio show with Alan Lomax. During World War II, Ray was hired by John Houseman to work on *Voice of America* radio programs. In 1944 he went to Hollywood to assist Elia Kazan on his film adaptation of Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. After returning to New York to direct works for television and the Broadway stage, Ray returned to Hollywood to direct his first feature at RKO Studios, *They Live By Night* (1949).

Ray directed nineteen feature films for various Hollywood studios from 1949 to 1963, including *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), and his best-known and most successful film, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). By the late 1950s, however, Ray's alcohol and drug abuse had begun to have increasingly serious repercussions for his career and personal health. After collapsing on the set of *55 Days to Peking* (1963), Ray was removed from the film and never worked for a major studio again. He traveled through Europe in the 1960s, trying to get financial backing for a string of film projects, before returning to the United States to film the conspiracy trial of the Chicago Seven in 1969. In 1971, Ray was hired to teach filmmaking at Harpur College, State University of New York at Binghamton. Believing the best way to teach filmmaking was to make a film, Ray and his students made *We Can't Go Home Again* (screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 1973 under the title *The Gun Under My Pillow*), an experimental work shot in a variety of formats.

In 1977, a newly sober Nicholas Ray obtained work teaching film directing and film acting at the Lee Strasberg Institute and New York University, and appeared in Wim Wenders's film *The American Friend*. Later that year, he learned he had lung cancer. He continued to teach and had a small role in Milos Forman's film *Hair*, but his health continued to decline. Wim Wenders's documentary *Lightning Over Water (Nick's Story)* chronicles the last few months of Ray's life in New York. Nicholas Ray died on June 16, 1979.

Ray was married four times: to journalist Jean Evans (circa 1931-1940), to actress Gloria Grahame (1948-1952), to dancer Betty Utey (1958-1966), and to writer Susan Schwarz, whom he met in 1969 and who remained with him until his death. He was survived by two sons, Anthony and Timothy, and two daughters, Julie and Nicca.

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### Source:

Eisenschitz, Bernard. "Nicholas Ray: A Biographical Outline". In *I Was Interrupted: Nicholas Ray on Making Movies*, Nicholas Ray, edited and introduced by Susan Ray, xli-xlvi. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

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### Scope and Contents

The Nicholas Ray Papers, 1929-1998, include scripts, storyboards, production photographs and film stills, correspondence, photographs, manuscript drafts, interview transcripts, notebooks and note cards, clippings, artworks, address books, and personal effects purchased from Nicholas Ray's widow, Susan Ray. The material is divided in two series: I. Nicholas Ray, 1929-1979 and II. Susan Ray, 1974-1998.

The bulk of the Nicholas Ray series is comprised of materials related to specific films, such as scripts, storyboards, production photographs, and stills. Most of the films Ray directed are represented here, with the notable exception of *Johnny Guitar*. There is also a significant amount of personal and career-related materials from the 1960s and 1970s, including correspondence, journals, and photographs, much of it related to Ray's teaching activities at Harpur College, the Lee Strasberg Institute, and New York University. Most of the materials in the Susan Ray series are related to her work editing Nicholas Ray's autobiography, *I Was Interrupted*.

A complete Index of Correspondents is located at the end of this finding aid. Also located at the end of this finding aid is an Index of Photographic Subjects. Subjects of production photographs, film stills, portraits, and snapshots are indexed if their names are identified on the photograph itself or if their identity is readily apparent. However, the subjects of many photographs in the collection, particularly those related to Ray's teaching activities, remain unidentified.

Additional manuscript materials, primarily related to the film *We Can't Go Home Again*, were processed and added to the container list in 2012.

In addition to the materials described in this finding aid, the Papers include film, video, and audio materials, most of them related to Ray's film *We Can't Go Home Again*.

## Series Descriptions

### Series I. Nicholas Ray, 1929-1979

Materials in Series I. Nicholas Ray are divided into two subseries: A. Films and Stage Plays, 1944-1979 and B. Professional and Personal Papers, 1929-1979. Subseries A. contains materials related to specific film and stage productions. The subseries is further divided into 1. Films directed or contributed to by Ray, 2. Unrealized and uncompleted film projects, 3. Plays, and 4. Other films. Among the notable materials related to films directed by or contributed to by Ray are a screenplay, storyboards, and production photographs from *Rebel Without a Cause*; the final shooting script for *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn* with annotations by Ray, who was Elia Kazan's assistant on the film; storyboards for the movies *55 Days in Peking*, *Flying Leathernecks*, and *Run for Cover*; original scripts for *They Live By Night*, *In a Lonely Place*, *Bitter Victory*, and *The Savage Innocents*; behind-the-scenes photographs of Ray directing actors such as James Dean, Natalie Wood, Humphrey Bogart, and Jane Russell; and photographs of Ray on the set of the films *We Can't Go Home Again* and *Lightning Over Water*. 2. Unrealized and uncompleted film projects includes original scripts and treatments by Ray that were never filmed, such as *Heroic Love*, *Under Western Eyes*, *City Blues* and *Conspiracy*, as well as scripts by other authors (*Down to the Sea in Ships*, *Pilate's Wife*) that were potential projects for Ray. The two play scripts found in the Ray papers, *Experience: A New Musical* and *The Trial of William Shakespeare* are not known to have been produced or directed by Ray. Finally, the scripts and stills in 4. Other films are materials collected by Ray related to movies that he had no direct professional involvement with. Subseries B. Professional and Personal Papers is also subdivided into several smaller groups of materials. 1. Journals, Notebooks, Notes, and Sketches contains a variety of Ray's personal notes from the 1970s, both loose and bound, on topics such as the film *We Can't Go Home Again*, material for his planned autobiography, notes for his classes at New York University and the Lee Strasberg Institute, notes for scripts, and drafts of speeches. 2. Correspondence begins with letters written and received by Ray in the 1960s, when he was living in Europe and trying to promote a variety of film projects, through the early- to mid-1970s, when he was working on the film *We Can't Go Home Again*, to the end of his life when he was teaching in New York and working on the film *Lightning Over Water*. 3. Photographs contains several portraits of Ray, including a high school yearbook picture from 1929, photographs of Ray at work for the WPA and Theatre of Action, portraits of Ray with his wives Jean Evans and Susan Ray, pictures with Dennis Hopper in New Mexico and with director Wim Wenders, photographs of Ray teaching students at Harpur College, and photographs from the San Sebastian Film Festival. 4. Clippings contains an undated *Confidential* magazine article about Ray's relationship with Marilyn Monroe and a folder of obituaries collected after Ray's death in 1979. 5. Address Books and Personal Effects contains address books, passports, and other personal documentation dating from the 1960s and 1970s. The last group in Subseries B., Artworks, includes an original work on paper by artist Beverly Pepper inscribed to Ray.

### Series II. Susan Ray, 1974-1998

Series II. Susan Ray, 1974-1998 is divided in two subseries: A. *I Was Interrupted* and B. Personal Papers and Effects. Materials related to the book *I Was Interrupted* include an early proposal for the autobiography written by Nicholas Ray, typescript drafts of the book (some containing editor's and typesetter's corrections) and a galley file. Among the personal papers and effects are correspondence, transcripts of a 1982 interview with Susan Ray, and photographs.

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## Related Material

The *Rebel Without a Cause* Collection at the Harry Ransom Center contains contracts and legal correspondence related to Nicholas Ray's 1955 film *Rebel Without a Cause*.

The James Jones Papers at the Harry Ransom Center contain correspondence with Nicholas Ray, notes and a treatment for the unproduced script *Under Western Eyes*, and Ray's unproduced script *The Doctor and the Devils*.

The Magnum Photos, Inc., Photography Collection, also at the Harry Ransom Center, contains a folder of images of Nicholas Ray.

The Ransom Center collection of film and television publicity materials includes film stills, lobby cards and posters for a number of Ray's films.

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## Separated Material

Twelve floppy disks containing transcripts of audio tapes of Nicholas Ray used to compile the book *I Was Interrupted*, and drafts of the text of the book, were transferred to the Electronic Records Collection.

Film, video and audio tapes were separated from the Nicholas Ray Papers and transferred to the Film Collection.

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## Index Terms

### People

Ray, Nicholas, 1911-1979

Ray, Susan

### Subjects

Motion pictures--Production and direction

Motion pictures--Study and teaching

Motion pictures--United States

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**Series I. Nicholas Ray, 1929-1979**

Adobe ColdFusion Developer/Trial Edition  
Not for Production Use

**Series II. Susan Ray, 1974-1998**

Adobe ColdFusion Developer/Trial Edition  
Not for Production Use