Nicholas Ray:
An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

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

Administrative Information

Acquisition: Purchase, 2011
Processed by: Ancelyn Krivak, 2011, 2012
Repository: The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center
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.

Source:


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.

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.

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.

Index Terms

People
Ray, Nicholas, 1911-1979
Ray, Susan

Subjects
Motion pictures--Production and direction
Motion pictures--Study and teaching
Motion pictures--United States
Series I. Nicholas Ray, 1929-1979

Subseries A. Films and Stage Plays, 1944-1979

1. Films directed or contributed to by Ray

55 Days at Peking (1963)
   Still
   Container 1.1
   Storyboards
   Container 15.1-5

The American Friend (1977)
   Poster [in German]
   Container osf 1
   Production photographs and stills
   Container 1.2

Bitter Victory (1957)
   Screenplay by Rene Hardy, Gavin Lambert, and Nicholas Ray
   First rough draft, 13 August 1956
   Container 1.3
   Temporary revised draft, 6 November 1956
   Container 1.4
   Final shooting script, undated
   Container 1.5
   Still
   Container 1.6

Born to Be Bad (1950), production photographs
   Container 1.7

Flying Leathernecks (1951)
   Screenplay by Beirne Lay, Jr., and James Edward Grant
   Revised final script, 19 October 1950
   Container 1.8
   Second revised final script, 17 November 1950
   Container 1.9
   Storyboards
   Container 2.1
   Production photographs and still
   Container 2.2

Hair (1979), stills
   Container 19.2

Hot Blood (1955)
Ray, Nicholas, 1911-1979

Production photographs

Album ("Tambourine") inscribed by Jane Russell and Cornel Wilde, with production photographs and script

_I'm a Stranger Here Myself_ (1975), still

_in a Lonely Place_ (1950)

Screenplay by Andrew Solt, first estimating draft, 9 September 1949

Revised script, October-November 1949

Production photograph and stills

_The Janitor_ ("Take Your Own Trip") from _Wet Dreams_ (1974), script, notes, and photographs

_King of Kings_ (1961), production photographs

_Knock on Any Door_ (1949), still

_Lightning Over Water_ (1980)

Script, 1979

Production photographs and stills

_The Lusty Men_ (1956), still and copies of production photographs

_On Dangerous Ground_ (1952), production photographs, original and copies

_Party Girl_ (1958), stills

_Rebel Without a Cause_ (1955)

Production photographs and stills

Screenplay by Irving Shulman ("Juvenile Story"), 3 December 1954

Storyboards

Numbers 1-44

Numbers 45-80
Run For Cover (1955)

Script fragments

Storyboards

The Savage Innocents (1960)

Poster

Production photographs and still

Screenplay by Nicholas Ray ("Top of the World"), first draft, 26 February 1959

They Live By Night (1949), script ("Thieves Like Us"), 8 May 1947

A Tree Grows In Brooklyn (1945), screenplay by Tess Schlesinger and Frank Davis, with contributions by Anita Loos, shooting final script, 1 May 1944

The True Story of Jesse James (1957)

Writer's working script, 29 May 1956

Press kit

We Can't Go Home Again ("The Gun Under My Pillow") (1976)

Budgets, undated

Continuity notes, 1972-1973, undated

Cue sheet, undated

Editing notes, 1972-1974, undated

French subtitles, undated

French translation, undated

Lab notes, 1974, undated

Logs, 1974, undated

Master list of film storage boxes, undated

Notes, 1971-1972, undated
Production photographs and stills, 1971, undated  Container 4.5

Production schedule with illustrations and other charts, undated Container osf 3

Screening notes, 1974 Container 22.3

Script notes and fragments, 1972-1974, undated Container 22.4-8

Script notes and fragments [continued] Container 23.1.5

Script notes and fragments [continued] Container 24.1

Sound and music notes, 1972, undated Container 24.2

Student biographies, 1973, undated Container 24.3

Empty folders, undated Container 24.4

Wind Across the Everglades (1958), contact sheets and production photograph Container 4.6

A Woman's Secret (1949), production photographs, copies Container 4.7

2. Unrealized and uncompleted film projects

The Bill W. Story

Screenplay by Andy Lewis and Nicholas Ray, undated Container 5.1

Script fragments and notes, undated Container 16

The Chinese Executioner, treatment by Nicholas Ray and John McNab, adapted from the novel by Pierre Boulle, undated Container 5.2

City Blues

Costume sketches Container 19.1

Cast photographs, 1976 Container 5.3

"Murphy" screenplay by William Maidment, additional scenes and dialogue Container by Jan-Pieter Welt, 1976 Container 5.4
Screenplay by Nicholas Ray, 1976

Screenplay by Nicholas Ray with additions by Norman Mailer and Jan-Pieter Welt, 1976

Container 5.5

Container 5.6

Conspiracy

Correspondence and contracts, 1969-1970

Production photographs, 1970

Script, undated

Container 5.7

Container 5.8

Container 17

Down to the Sea in Ships, revised final screenplay by Talbot Jennings, 15 June 1942

Container 5.9

An Enemy of the People, script, 25 June 1946

Container 5.10

The Entertainment, script by Nicholas Ray and Victor Perkins [?], undated

Container 6.1

L'Evade or The Substitute, script by Nicholas Ray, undated

Container 6.2

Heroic Love, story by Ed Loomis and Nicholas Ray, treatment by Jay Simms

Treatment and correspondence, 1975

Treatments, 1975

Container 6.3

Container 6.4

I'm a Stranger Here Myself, original story and screenplay by Nicholas Ray, 1965

Container 6.5

In Between Time, screenplay by Nicholas and Tim Ray, undated

Container 6.6

New York After Midnight ("One Dollar Bill, Baby") by Nicholas Ray

Script, first draft, 1974

Script fragments, 1979

Container 6.7-8

Container 7.1

Pilate's Wife, treatment by Clare Boothe Luce, 25 September 1951

Container 7.2

Rolls Reserected [sic] outline, undated

Container 21.1
Under Western Eyes, original story by Nicholas Ray and correspondence, 1963

World Without End, screenplay by W. Howard, March 1, 1956

3. Plays

Experience: A New Musical, script by Lee Benjamin and Phil Medley with Nicholas Ray, 1971

The Trial of William Shakespeare, script by Luis Kutner, undated

4. Other films

Giant, screenplay by Fred Guiol and Ivan Moffat, final script, 4 April 1955

Hammett, screenplay by Joe Gores ["Wenders version"], 1975

Stills

Beat the Devil (1953)

My Life to Live (1962)

Alphaville (1965)

Subseries B. Professional and Personal Papers, 1929-1979


'Journal' [loose notes], 1970-1979

Notes [includes notes for autobiography, teaching, and movie roles, and drafts of speeches], 1970s

Notes for NYU, Lee Strasberg Institute classes, 1977-1978

Notebooks, 1976-1977
2. Correspondence, 1965-1979

[includes list of story ideas], 1965-1966

1971-1973

1974

1975-1979, undated

3. Photographs, 1929-1979

Kienzle family, 1948, undated

Nicholas Ray portraits, 1929-1979

Nicholas and Susan Ray, 1972-1979

Nicholas Ray and Dennis Hopper, circa 1972-1977

Nicholas Ray and Wim Wenders, 1978, undated

San Sebastian Film Festival, 1974

Teaching photographs, 1970s

Miscellaneous portraits, 1970-1978, undated

Miscellaneous landscapes, undated

Photograph album, "Guatemala in Context," undated

4. Clippings, 1979, undated
Confidential magazine article about Nicholas Ray and Marilyn Monroe, undated

Obituaries, 1979

5. Address Books and Personal Effects, circa 1960s-1978

Address book, large, circa 1960s

Address book, small, 'Telephone,' circa 1960s

Address books, circa 1960s-1970s

Passport and personal documentation, 1970-1978

Engraving plate

6. Artworks, 1977, undated

Artwork on paper by Beverly Pepper, inscribed to Nicholas Ray, 1977

Artworks on paper by Nicholas and Susan Ray, undated

Painting on wooden panel, undated
Series II. Susan Ray, 1974-1998


Proposal for biography, circa mid-1970s

Early draft fragments ('Proposal for Cahiers'), undated

Draft fragments, undated

Draft [incomplete], undated

Draft, undated

Late draft with editor's and typesetter's annotations, undated

Galley, 1993

Subseries B. Personal Papers and Effects, 1974-1998

Correspondence, 1979-1998

Interview transcripts, 1982

Photographs, 1974, undated

"Mon Vieux Lucien," poem and illustration by Patti Smith, inscribed to Susan Ray for her birthday, 1973

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