

New York Poets Theatre:

An Inventory of Its Records at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	New York Poets Theatre
Title:	New York Poets Theatre Records
Dates:	circa 1960-1965, undated
Extent:	2 document boxes (.84 linear feet)
Abstract:	The New York Poets Theatre was a theater company founded in 1961. Before disbanding in 1965, the group produced numerous works by avant-garde writers, performers, and artists working in New York's East Village and Lower East Side.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-5038
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase, 1965
Processed by:	Chelsea Weathers, 2011
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Organizational Sketch

The New York Poets Theatre was a theater company founded in 1961 Diane di Prima, Fred Herko, Alan Marlowe, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), and James Waring. The purpose of the Theatre was to showcase works by poets, writers, dancers, and artists working in the East Village and Lower East Side in the 1960s. Di Prima and Jones were active poets in this scene, and co-edited the poetry newsletter *The Floating Bear*. Waring was a choreographer and dancer, and McDowell was a composer. Between 1961 and 1962, the Theatre produced several projects in two different rented theater venues--first at the Off-Bowery Theatre on East 10th Street and then at the Maidman Playhouse on 44th Street. Among the performances were one-act plays written by di Prima, Jones, Waring, and many of their colleagues and friends; dance performances choreographed by Freddy Herko and Yvonne Rainer; and happenings by Allan Kaprow and Robert Whitman. From 1964 to 1965, operating under the name American Theatre for Poets, the group rented the New Bowery Theatre on St. Mark's Place and then the East End Theatre on East 4th Street. During this period, the company put on several plays and dance series, and hosted musical performances, poetry readings, and screenings of underground films. Some artists and writers who participated in the Theatre's productions during this time were the poets Brion Gysin and William Burroughs, the rock band The Fugs, and Andy Warhol.

Sources:

In addition to material found within the New York Poets Theatre Records, the following sources were used:

DiPrima, Diane. *Recollections of My Life as a Woman: The New York Years*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Bottoms, Stephen J. *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004.

Scope and Contents

The New York Poets Theatre Records contain several mimeographed scripts of plays, as well as documents, programs, and press clippings associated with the Theatre's productions. The Records are arranged in two series: I. Works, circa 1960-1965, undated; and II. Publicity Materials, 1961-1965, undated.

Notable authors of scripts include Robert Duncan, Gertrude Stein, Frank O'Hara, and Kenneth Koch. The programs in folder 1.7 also include poetry by Bryon Gysin and Robert Filliou, among others; transcripts of a reading by William Burroughs and a recording by Antonin Artaud; as well as cast and crew credits for play productions. The clippings files contain announcements for performances as well as critical reviews. Many of the clippings also address Jack Smith's film *Flaming Creatures*, which was seized by New York City Police for obscenity at the New Bowery Theatre in 1964, where it was being screened by the Filmmaker's Cinémathèque, an organization that shared the venue with the American Theatre for Poets.

Index Terms

People

Baraka, Amiri, 1934- .
Di Prima, Diane.
Duncan, Robert, 1919-1988.
Guest, Barbara.
O'Hara, Frank, 1926-1966.
Schuyler, James.
Stein, Gertrude, 1874-1946.
Waring, James, 1922-1975.
Wieners, John, 1934-2002.

Subjects

American Theatre for Poets.
Dance--Performances.
Experimental theater
One-act plays, American--20th century.
Theater--New York (State)--New York

Document Types

Prospectuses.
Scripts.
Theater programs.

Series I. Works, circa 1960-1965, undated

Duncan, Robert, Faust Foutu (1960), bound mimeograph, undated

Container
1.1

Guest, Barbara, Port: A Murder in One Act (1964), bound mimeograph, undated

Container
1.2

O'Hara, Frank, Awake in Spain (1960), bound mimeograph, undated

Container
1.3

One-act plays and programs, copies and drafts, undated

Container 1.4

One-act plays, bound together, undated

Container 1.5

Series II. Publicity Materials, 1961-1965, undated

Prospectus, American Theatre for Poets, 3 bound mimeographs, 1965	Container 1.6
Programs, 1961-1965, undated	Container 1.7
Press releases, 1961-1965	Container 2.1
Clippings, announcements, advertisements, reviews, 1961-1965	Container 2.2-3
'Throw Aways,' extra programs, membership forms, 1961-1965, undated	Container 2.4-5

Index of Authors and Works

- Di Prima, Diane
 - The Discontent of the Russian Prince--1.5
- Murder Cake--1.4-5

- Duncan, Robert, Foust Foutu--1.1
- Guest, Barbara, Port: A Murder in One Act--1.2
- Jones, LeRoi, The Eighth Ditch (from The System of Dante's Hell)--1.5
- Koch, Kenneth, Guinevere or the Death of the Kangaroo--1.4-5
- McClure, Michael
 - The Blossom or Billy the Kid--1.4-5
- Pillow--1.5

- O'Hara, Frank
 - Awake in Spain--1.3
- Loves Labor, an Eclogue--1.4-5

- Schuyler, James, Shopping and Waiting--1.4
- Stein, Gertrude, Photograph: A Play in Five Acts--1.4
- Waring, James, Nights at the Tango Palace--1.4-5
- Wieners, John, Still Life--1.4-5