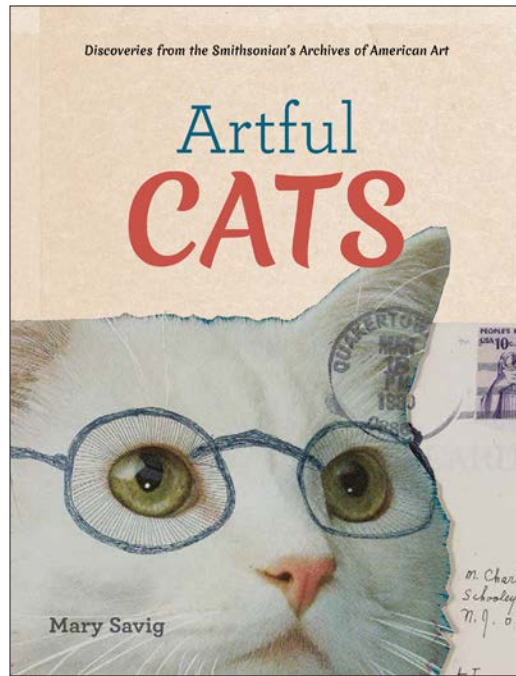


Long before cats conquered Instagram, they were celebrated in the Archives of American Art



Artful Cats

Discoveries from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art
Mary Savig

Cats, cats, and more cats! Expressive or aloof, affectionate or enigmatic, cats have complicated characters that make them compelling artists' muses. *Artful Cats* explores the quirky and charming relationships of artists with their cats in 130 rarely seen photos, paintings, sketches, manuscripts, and letters from the Archives of American Art. Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, Louise Nevelson, Marcel Breuer, Yves Tanguy, Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Weston, Robert Indiana, Judy Chicago, Berenice Abbott, and Romare Bearden show off their artful cats, which appear as companions, inspirations, instigators, and often regents of the home or studio. The images, culled from the archive's extensive holdings from the nineteenth century through today, celebrate our cultural heritage through our enduring fascination, love, and bemusement with our feline familiars. A foreword by Kate Haw, director of the Archives of American Art, describes how these archival treasures provide a window on unexpected and personal details of celebrated artists' lives and work.

Mary Savig is the curator of manuscripts at the Smithsonian Archives of American Art and the author of *Pen to Paper: Artists' Handwritten Letters from the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art*. She resides in Arlington, Virginia.

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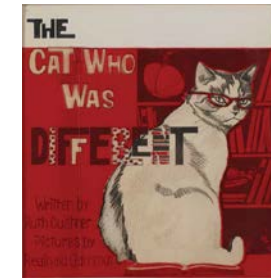


Reginald Gammon

Reginald Gammon, storyboard for THE CAT WHO WAS DIFFERENT

1942
 19 1/2 x 17 1/2 in. (50 x 45 cm)
 Reginald Gammon papers

Though Reginald Gammon (1884-1957) was known for his sensitive portraits of African Americans, and not cats, in the mid-1940s he contributed images to a children's book that chronicles the friendship between a boy and a benevolent cat. Gammon completed some of the drawings, but the project was never finished. Soon after, Gammon illustrated a different children's book about frames.



86 ARTFUL CATS



CATS AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS 87

Hedda Sterne

Hedda Sterne with Poussin

c.1933
 Photograph by Evelyn Heller
 18 1/2 x 9 1/2 in. (50 x 25 cm)
 Hedda Sterne papers

Romanian-born Hedda Sterne (1910-2011) was a key figure (and one of the few women) in the legendary New York School of abstract painters. In this photograph, Sterne—in an elegant black dress—effortlessly balances the chin of her cat Poussin, in the courtyard of her home at 179 East Seventy-Fifth Street, New York City. Poussin was the model of many abstracts and a few portraits by Sterne. Her husband, New Yorker illustrator Saul Steinberg, drew a portrait of Poussin inside the cabinet under their kitchen sink; the idea was to keep away mice.



28 ARTFUL CATS

Berenice Abbott

Berenice Abbott holding a cat

1942 or 1943
 Photograph by Arnold H. Crane
 Reproduced with permission of Cynthia Crane
 11 1/2 x 11 in. (30 x 28 cm)
 Arnold Crane portfolio of photographs

Berenice Abbott took unorthodox photographs of New York City with her wide-format camera in the 1920s and '30s. As she shaped her countless awards over the modernizing urban landscape, she also realized gender roles, albeit unconsciously: more as pants rather than skirts and lived with her partner, art critic Elizabeth McCausland, and their cats for decades. Here, we see Abbott on the other side of the camera. Fellow photographer Arnold Crane captured Abbott posing with a terry towel in Maine.



STEERING A POUSE 29

Lenore Tawney mail art to Maryette Chariton

Fiber artist Lenore Tawney developed a deeply personal visual vocabulary through her correspondence. She interwove images with found images, feathers, and flowers to make exquisite assemblages. Several of her most art colleges for Romare Bearden's Chariton feature cats. It was Chariton who encouraged Tawney to use the standard blank envelopes issued by the United States Postal Service for her mail art works. These works collapse the boundaries between art and archive, public and private—a telling reflection of Tawney's creative sensibilities and her friendship with Chariton.

1980
 4 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (11 x 14 cm)
 Maryette Chariton papers



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CAT CORRESPONDENCE 123

Lenore Tawney