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Collection 99
Monty Lewis (1907-1997) Collection

By Laura M. Poll
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Biography

Muralist painter Monty Lewis was born in Wales in 1907 and immigrated as a teenager to New York City with his mother. In 1924, he graduated from the New York School of Applied Textile Art and went on to study for three years at the Art Students League of New York, an informal art school without degree programs or grades. He received a grant from the Tiffany Foundation in 1929. In 1930, he was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship, given to artists to allow them the time to work on their craft. He lived abroad for 18 months, mostly in Florence, Italy. Back in the United States, he executed in part the murals on the exterior of the Hall of Man Building at the New York's World's Fair (1939-1940).

As a member of the Federal Art Project, the New Deal program sponsored by the Works Progress Administration, he was the supervisor of the Mosaic Unit for the New Jersey Arts & Crafts Project, and introduced to that project the mosaic craft in connection with murals. His first works in mosaic were in Roosevelt Park in Metuchen, and the Franklin School in Newark.

For about a year beginning in 1940, he created a series of four glazed tile mosaics for the main entrance lobby of the Trenton Central High School entitled "Youth Carrying the Heritage of the Arts of the Past into the Future." The four works, "Painting and Sculpture," "Architecture and Engineering," "Science and Research," and "Music, Theatre and Dance," were installed by the end of the summer of 1941. They were removed prior to the demolition of the high school in 2016 and will be reinstalled in the new school when it is completed in the fall of 2019.

Lewis moved his family to California in 1942 to help with the war effort and while working in the planning department of the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Corporation, opened a class studio in the

College of Commerce Building in San Diego for war workers and those in the service. Three years later he founded the Coronado School of Fine Arts, which operated for 44 years, closing in 1989.

His work has been exhibited at such places as the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. His papers are located at the Archives of American Art: <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/monty-lewis-papers-6187> [accessed 24 March 2019]

Scope and Content Notes

This collection contains only a small sampling of items about Monty Lewis, mostly exhibition programs. Of note are the items related to the four mosaics that had been installed in the main entrance of the Trenton Central High School in the summer of 1941. These items include a few letters of general interest about the artwork.

Series Description:

Series 1. Exhibit Programs

This series includes programs where Lewis had artwork exhibited, both in group and solo shows. The program (2 copies) for the Art Students League Gallery (24 November – 7 December 1941) states that full scale pen and ink and watercolor drawings of the high school mosaics were on display. Most are original programs, with a black and white photocopy of the Museum of Modern Art's "Murals by American Painters and Photographers" (3-31 May 1932). This series also includes an original silk-screened booklet, "Mosaic – A Lost Art Recovered," the second in a series put out by the New Jersey Arts & Crafts Project that describes project activities.

Series 2. Trenton Central High School Mosaics

This series includes color photocopies of the four full mosaics, and photocopies of correspondence (1940-1941). Topics of correspondence include the approval of the sketches by Walter M. Kiplinger, Public Activities Programs Director (6 Feb 1941), and concern from Trenton Central High School Principal P.R. Spencer that other artists other than Lewis might complete the mosaics due to budget cuts (24 June 1941).

The series also contains a copy of the agreement for Allocation of New Deal Artworks between the Trenton Public Schools and the Fine Arts Program, Public Buildings Service (2016).

Series 3. Interviews & Articles

This is a relatively small series that includes the front page section of the *San Diego Union* newspaper (11 February 1945) and a transcript of an oral history interview with Lewis conducted in 1964. The paper contains a front page article, "Outstanding San Diego Artists Teaching Classes for Servicemen" and a photo of Lewis with one of the students.

Container List

Box 1, Folder 1	Exhibit programs (1926-1941)
Folder 2	Exhibit program, "Murals by American Painters and Photographers" (1932)
Folder 3	Booklet, "Mosaic – A Lost Art Recovered"
Folder 4	Trenton Central High School mosaics
Folder 5	<i>San Diego Union</i> newspaper (11 February 1945)
Folder 6	Transcript of oral history interview (25 June 1964)

Provenance

Gift of daughter Kathryn Crane via Karl Fleisch, Trenton Historical Society (acc. #2018.26)

Bibliography

Ferguson, Anne. "Artist Monty Lewis' Daughter Recalls His Life and Work." *Coronado Eagle and Journal* [California] 20 February 2002: 4, 16.

<https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=CJ20020220.2.15&c=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----1>
[accessed 24 March 2019]

Interview with Monty Lewis conducted by Betty Hoag at Coronado School of Fine Arts, San Diego, 25 June 1964.

<https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-monty-lewis-12016>
[accessed 24 March 2019]