

George Platt Lynes:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	George Platt Lynes, 1907-1955
Title:	George Platt Lynes Collection
Dates:	1926-1997 (bulk 1930s-1940s)
Extent:	8 boxes (134 gelatin silver prints, 1 needlepoint)
Abstract:	The George Platt Lynes Collection consists of 134 photographs, including portrait, fashion, nude, and theatrical photography, documentation of the evolution of Paul Cadmus' painting <i>Conservation Piece</i> (1940) and images of Lynes. Also included are manuscript materials and a piece of needlepoint.
Call Number:	Photography Collection PH-1920
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Gifts, 2002, 2003 (G12176, G12351)
Provenance:	All items were donated by Dora Maxwell Harrison, Lynes' assistant from 1936 to 1944, except one item (2003:0035:0001) which was donated by Richard Avedon who took over Lynes' studio after his death.
Processed by:	Trish Nugent and Mary Alice Harper, 2003
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

George Platt Lynes was born April 15th, 1907, in East Orange, New Jersey, to Joseph Russell and Adelaide Sparkman Lynes. Lynes spent his childhood in New Jersey, but attended the Berkshire School in Massachusetts as a teenager. During high school, Lynes demonstrated a great interest in becoming a writer but was generally not successful in school. In 1925 Lynes was sent to Paris in hope of better preparing him for college. While in Paris, he became acquainted with Gertrude Stein and her circle of friends, including Glenway Wescott and Monroe Wheeler.

Lynes returned to the United States intent on pursuing a literary career. He dabbled in publishing and even opened a bookstore in Englewood, New Jersey in 1927. That same year Lynes received training from a local professional photographer. Although not interested in pursuing photography as a career, Lynes began taking portraits of his friends and family and exhibiting his work in the bookstore.

In 1928 Lynes again traveled to France, this time accompanied by Wescott and Wheeler. For the next few years Lynes traveled around Europe, all the while honing his photography skills. He developed friendships with numerous artists and patrons including Pavel Tchelitchew, Jean Cocteau, and the influential art dealer and critic Julien Levy. Lynes eventually returned to the United States, and in 1932 opened his first photo studio. That same year, Levy exhibited Lynes' work alongside that of Walker Evans at his gallery in New York City.

Levy's promotional efforts, combined with Lynes' innovative style and mastery of lighting, made Lynes one of the most sought after photographers in the country. By 1934 he was receiving regular commissions from *Harper's Bazaar*, *Town & Country*, and *Vogue*, and in 1935 he was invited to document the principal dancers and productions of Lincoln Kirstein's and George Balanchine's newly founded American Ballet company (now the New York City Ballet). Throughout the remainder of the 1930s and the early 1940s Lynes continued to shoot fashion photographs, getting accounts with such major clients as Bergdorf Goodman and Saks Fifth Avenue. In addition to his commercial work, Lynes began a series of photographs which interpreted characters and stories from Greek mythology.

By the mid-1940s Lynes began to lose interest in his commercial fashion photography and grew disillusioned with New York. In 1946 he left for Hollywood where he took the post of Chief Photographer for the *Vogue* studios. There he photographed major figures in the film industry, including Katharine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, Gloria Swanson and Orson Welles, as well as leading figures of the arts and literature, among them Aldous Huxley, Igor Stravinsky and Thomas Mann. After just two years Lynes ran into financial trouble, and in 1948 his friends helped sponsor his move back to New York.

Lynes returned to a post-war New York where new photographers, such as Richard Avedon and Irving Penn, had taken his place in the fashion world. This fact, coupled with Lynes' increasing disinterest in commercial work, meant he was never able to regain the successes he once had. Lynes spent most of his time focusing on homoerotic imagery, and he began working with Dr. Alfred Kinsey and his Institute in Bloomington,

Indiana. Lynes' financial troubles persisted, and twice he was forced to declare bankruptcy.

In May of 1955 Lynes was diagnosed terminally ill with lung cancer. He closed his studio and even destroyed much of his print and negative archives. After a final trip to Europe, Lynes returned to New York City where he died December 6, 1955.

Sources:

Crump, James. *George Platt Lynes: Photographs from the Kinsey Institute*. Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1993.

Leddick, David.

- *George Platt Lynes*. New York: Taschen, 2000.
- *Intimate Companions: a Triography of George Platt Lynes, Paul Cadmus, Lincoln Kirstein, and Their Circle*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Woody, Jack. *Portrait: The Photographs of George Platt Lynes, 1927-1955*. Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 1994.

Scope and Contents

The George Platt Lynes Collection consists of photographs, manuscript materials, and a piece of needlepoint collected by Dora Maxwell Harrison, Lynes' assistant from 1936 to 1944. The materials are divided into three series: I. Works, circa 1926-1950, II. Photographs of Lynes & Exhibitions, 1930s-40s, and III. Manuscript Materials, 1934-1997.

The works by George Platt Lynes are comprised of 122 gelatin silver prints (98 loose, 23 in a disbound album, 1 framed) and one needlepoint. The loose prints, a combination of exhibition and work prints, provide a good representation of most genres of Lynes' work: portrait, fashion, nude, and theatrical photography. Notable subjects include Jean Cocteau, Marsden Harley, Katharine Hepburn, W. Somerset Maugham, Rosalind Russell, and Diana Vreeland. The Subject Index at the end of this guide lists all sitters featured in this collection. The album documents the evolution of Paul Cadmus' painting *Conservation Piece* (1940), a portrait of Lynes and his two long-time friends and lovers Monroe Wheeler and Glenway Wescott.

The second series, Photographs of Lynes & Exhibitions, consists of 12 loose gelatin silver prints. While several of these prints were taken by unidentified photographers, there are also works by Cecil Beaton, George Hoyningen-Huene, and Janet Taylor. The photographs include both formal portraits and candid shots of Lynes, and two photographs taken at the 1941 exhibition "Two Hundred Portraits by George Platt Lynes" at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York City.

The third series, Manuscript Materials, is comprised of tear sheets, clippings, Lynes exhibition announcements and Christmas cards. The tear sheets, a mixture of articles about Lynes and pages featuring his photography, also include an article by Lynes which appeared in the April 1937 issue of *Bachelor* magazine. The clippings are about Lynes' friends and/or subjects, with Diana Vreeland featured heavily. The Christmas cards feature artwork by Jean Cocteau and James Thurber.

Notes Concerning the Item List

Photograph titles were taken from the versos of the prints. Additional identification information, which appears in brackets, and all dates were found in tear sheets within the collection and/or the published sources previously cited in the Biographical Sketch of this finding aid.

Series I. Works, circa 1926-1950

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0013** Paul Cadmus. 1941 or earlier. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0014** Fidelma Cadmus Kirstein, sister of Paul Cadmus. 1941. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0015** Marsden Hartley. 1943. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0016** John Gunther. Undated. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0017** Katherine Anne Porter. Undated. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0018** Gracie Allen [double exposure; 1939 handwritten letter to Dora Maxwell on verso of photograph]. 1938. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0019** [W.] Somerset Maugham. 1941. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0020** Mrs. Vincent Sheehan [sic, Sheean]. Undated. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0021** Mrs. Harrison Williams [a.k.a., Mona von Bismarck]. 1941 or earlier. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0022** Hope Hampden. Undated. **Box 1**

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0023** Debutante in Waldolf Astoria for *Town & Country*. 1941 or earlier. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0024** [Unidentified man]. Undated. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0025** Bill Harris [for] Marshall Field, Chicago. 1941 or earlier. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0026** [Betty McLaughlin with child, a.k.a. "Evening Gown"]. Circa 1950. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0027** Countess Castelbarco in *Harper's Bazaar* or *Town & Country*. Undated. **Box 1**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0028** [Unidentified woman]. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0029** Fernanda Munn. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0030** [Foresta Wood, wife of National Geographic explorer Walter Abbott Wood]. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0031** [Olympic skier Helen Boughton-Leigh and Carroll P. Reed]. Circa 1937. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0032** [Ruth Ford? and George Platt Lynes?]. Undated. **Box 2**

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0033** Nicki Magdalones [sic, Magallanes] & ? [probably Marie-Jeanne]. 1941 or earlier. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0034** [Male nude, possibly Jonathan Tichenor]. 1944?. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0035** Alicia Markova, English ballerina. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0036-0037** Ruth Ford. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0038-0040** [Helen] Bennett, model. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0041** Ros [i.e., Rosalind] Russell. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0042** Rosalind Russell & Clara La Roche made up to look like each other. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0043** Barbara Mortimer, 2nd Cushing sister [sic, Betsey Cushing Roosevelt Whitney]. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0044** Cushing sister [either Betsey or Barbara Cushing]. Undated. **Box 2**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0045** Mrs. Vincent Astor (one of them), the third Cushing sister (Minnie). Undated. **Box 2**

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0046-0049** Gloria Swanson. Circa 1939. **Box**
2
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0050-0051** K. [Katharine] Hepburn. Circa 1939. **Box**
2
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0052** Mr. & Mrs. Courtney [sic, Courtlandt] Barnes. **Box**
Undated. 2
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0053** Mrs. Courtland [sic, Courtlandt] Barnes. Undated. **Box**
2
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0054-0057** Ballerina wearing Muriel King dress. **Box**
Undated. 2
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0058** Muriel King, dress designer. Undated. **Box**
3
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0059-0061** Marianne Moore, poet. Circa 1945. **Box**
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- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0062** Laurie Douglas [wearing] earrings made by Fulco di **Box**
Verdura. Undated. 3
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0063-0066** Laurie Douglas [nude]. 1940. **Box**
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- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0067-0073** Diana Vreeland at her home. Circa 1938. **Box**
3

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0074-0075** [Two unidentified women]. Undated. **Box**
3
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0076-0082** [Unidentified woman]. 1941 or earlier. **Box**
3
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0083-0085** [Unidentified woman and man]. 1941 or
earlier. **Box**
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- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0086-0091** Ezio Pinza as Don Giovanni. 1941 or earlier. **Box**
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- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0092** "GPL, 1938," [drawn portrait of George Platt
Lynes] by Paul Cadmus. 1938 or later. **Box**
4
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0093** "George Platt Lynes" [drawn portrait] by Paul
Cadmus. Undated. **Box**
4
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0094** [George Platt Lynes reclining on couch, 1937,
drawing], by Paul Cadmus. 1937 or later. **Box**
4
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0095** "Adelaide Lynes" [drawn portrait] by Paul Cadmus. **Box**
1941 or later. 4
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0096** "Monroe Wheeler, 1937," [drawing] by Paul
Cadmus. 1937 or later. **Box**
4
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0097** "Aviator, 1941 and '42," [drawing] by Paul Cadmus. **Box**
1942 or later. 4

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0098 "Glenway Wescott, 1926," [drawing] by Jean Cocteau. 1926 or later. **Box 4**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0099 Frederick [sic, Frederic] Prokosch, author. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0100 Betty McLaughlin, Powers model, w[ith] George Platt Lynes exhibition as background, for *Harper's Bazaar*. 1941. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0101 George Platt Lynes & Dora Harrison. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0102 Casper Reardon, jazz harpist. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0103 George Tichenor. 1941 or earlier. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0104 E. McKnight Kauffer, illustrator. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0105 Vera Zorina. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0106 Liz Gibson [sic, Gibbons], Powers model. Undated. **Box 5**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0107 Betty McLaughlin. Circa 1950. **Box 5**

- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0108** Lisa Fonssagrives [for Marshall Field and Company]. 1940. **Box 5**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0109** Jimmie [sic, Jimmy] Daniels. Undated. **Box 5**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0110** Jean Cocteau. 1936. **Box 5**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0111** ["Conversation Piece, 1940," painting by Paul Cadmus]. 1940 or later. **Box 6**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0112-0122** [Studies for "Conversation Piece, 1940," by Paul Cadmus]. 1940 or earlier. **Box 6**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0123-0133** [Details of "Conversation Piece, 1940," by Paul Cadmus]. 1940 or later. **Box 7**
- Accession Number: 2002:0045:0134** [Needlepoint wedding gift for Dora Maxwell Harrison]. 1944. **Box 8**
- Accession Number: 2003:0035:0001** Gertrude Stein [framed print with stamped inscription and initials of Richard Avedon on mount verso]. Undated. **Box 8**

Series II. Photographs of Lynes & Exhibitions, 1930s-1940s

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0001 Beaton, Cecil. G.P.L. [i.e., George Platt Lynes]. 1937 or earlier. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0002 Hoyningen-Huene, George. G.P.L. [i.e., George Platt Lynes]. 1930s?. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0003 [Unidentified photographer]. [George Platt Lynes]. 1940s?. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0004 [Unidentified photographer]. G.P.L. [i.e., George Platt Lynes] watching Liz [Gibbons do her] makeup. 1930s?. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0005 Taylor, Janet. Fun while doing a fashion shoot for Marshall Field, Chicago. 1930s?. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0006-0008 [Unidentified photographer]. [George Platt Lynes and assistants photographing Paul Cadmus]. 1941 or earlier. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0009-0010 [Unidentified photographer]. [George Platt Lynes exhibit at Pierre Matisse Gallery]. 1941. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0011 [Unidentified photographer]. [George Platt Lynes at Pierre Matisse Gallery]. 1941. **Box 1**

Accession Number: 2002:0045:0012 [Unidentified photographer]. [Pierre Matisse at Pierre Matisse Gallery]. 1941. **Box 1**

Series III. Manuscript Materials, 1934-1997 1934-1997

Clippings, 1941, 1984-1997, undated. *These materials are located in the Various Collections Manuscript Materials Box	Container 1.3*
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Exhibition announcements, 1934, 1941, 1981. *These materials are located in the Various Collections Manuscript Materials Box	Container 1.5*
Tear sheets, 1936-1937, 1993-1996, undated. *These materials are located in the Various Collections Manuscript Materials Box	Container 1.6*

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