

Desmond Harmsworth:

An Inventory of His Art Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Harmsworth, Desmond, 1903-1990
Title:	Desmond Harmsworth Art Collection
Dates:	1932, 1960, undated
Extent:	1 box, 2 framed paintings
Abstract:	The Desmond Harmsworth Art Collection includes seven original portraits, five drawings and two paintings, by Desmond Harmsworth. All of the subjects are well-known literary figures.
Call Number:	Art Collection AR-00116
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research. A minimum of twenty-four hours is required to pull art materials to the Reading Room.

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchases (R226, R227, R369) 1959-1961
Processed by:	Lauren Algee, 2010
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Desmond Harmsworth Cecil was a British painter, publisher, and poet. Born Cecil Desmond Bernard Harmsworth on August 19, 1903, the son of the first Baron Harmsworth of Egham, he was educated at Eton and Christ Church, Oxford, where he gained an M.A. in English language and literature. He met Dorothy Alexander Heinlein of Bridgeport, Ohio, during his time at Oxford and the two married in 1926. The union produced a daughter, Margaret.

Harmsworth became known in the 1930s as a publisher of Roy Campbell, Wyndham Lewis, James Joyce, Norman Douglas, Ezra Pound, and Mulk Raj Anand. He contributed prose and verse to literary magazines in Europe and America, including most notably a verse translation of Paul Valéry's "le Cimetière marin," begun in the early 1930s but not published until 1969. In an exchange of letters with T. S. Eliot he wrote that "at the heart of verse translation, as at the heart of portraiture, it seems to me there is a mystery; what is the original really like?"

After several years in the family newspaper and publishing business, Associated Newspapers, Harmsworth left to study drawing at the Académie Julian in Paris. His public debut as an artist was at the Galerie des Quatre-Chemins in Paris in 1933. Harmsworth painted many of his literary associates, including Joyce, Douglas, Sylvia Beach, Havelock Ellis, and Osbert Sitwell.

Harmsworth's first London show was at the Wildenstein Gallery in 1938. He worked for the British Information Services in New York from 1940-1946, but found time for an exhibition at the Bonestell Gallery in New York. In 1948, his father died and Desmond became Baron Harmsworth. He moved back to Egham in 1950, but always felt his true home was Paris.

Harmsworth's first post-war exhibition in London was at the Roland, Browse & Delbanco Gallery in 1954. Harmsworth's next one-man show was not until 1988 in a retrospective at the Berkeley Square Galleries. He had continued painting, in Egham and Paris, until his sight weakened in the 1980s. He always considered himself a colorist and signed most of his pictures "Desmond," a habit left over from the 1930s when he found the French had great difficulty pronouncing "Harmsworth."

Harmsworth died in Egham on June 2, 1990 at the age of eighty-six.

Sources:

Grindea, Miron. "Obituary: Lord Harmsworth." June 5, 1990. *The Independent (London)*. Gazette: 18.

"Lord Harmsworth." June 4, 1990. *The Times*. Features.

"The Heir Who Saw The Light." July 1, 1988. *Evening Standard*. 28.

Additional biographical material on Desmond Harmsworth can be found in newspaper clippings and other materials in the Art Collection's vertical file.

Scope and Contents

The Desmond Harmsworth Art Collection includes seven original portraits, five drawings and two paintings, by Desmond Harmsworth. All of the subjects are well-known literary figures. The drawings depict Sylvia Beach, Havelock Ellis, Gilbert Stewart, and James Joyce and the paintings are portraits of Norman Douglas and Osbert Sitwell.

The works are listed by medium and alphabetically by subject. Titles are transcribed from the items if present; cataloger's titles appear in brackets.

Series I. Works, 1932, 1960, undated

- Accession Number: 65.238** [Portrait of Sylvia Beach, half figure, seated].1960. 1 drawing (graphite pencil on paper), 33 x 24 cm. **Container**
1.1
- Accession Number: 65.328** [Portrait of Havelock Ellis, head]. 1932. 1 drawing (charcoal on paper), 45.5 x 31 cm. **Container**
1.2
- Accession Number: 65.324** [Portrait of Stuart Gilbert, full figure, seated]. Undated. 1 drawing (black ink and wash on paper), 31 x 23 cm. **Container**
1.3
- Accession Number: 65.64** Joyce At Midnight [James Joyce, full figure, kicking].Undated. 1 drawing (black ink on paper), 23.5 x 31.5 cm. **Container**
1.4
- Accession Number: 65.182** [Portrait of James Joyce, head].1932. 1 drawing (black ink on paper), 32 x 24 cm. **Container**
1.5
- Accession Number: 65.97** [Norman Douglas].Undated. 1 painting, 95.5 x 114.2 cm. in frame. **PS**
Painting storage
- Accession Number: 65.165** [Osbert Sitwell].Undated. 1 painting, 57.5 x 71 cm. in frame. **PS**
Painting storage