Collection Summary

**Title:** Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers

**Date:** 1900–1988, bulk 1910–1930

**Creator(s):** Struss, Karl (1886–1981)

**Extent:** 2.5 linear feet

**Code:** SWC

**Repository:** Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

**Abstract:** The Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers provides considerable insight into the life and career of the groundbreaking photographer and cinematographer Karl Struss. The collection, which was accumulated by gallery owner Stephen White, contains personal and business correspondence, exhibition catalogues and records, clippings, items illustrated with Struss’ work, business records, and technical materials.

Information for Researchers

**Access Restrictions**

The collection is open to qualified researchers.

**Use Restrictions**

The Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers is the physical property of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art. The Amon Carter Museum of American Art assumes no responsibility for infringement of literary property rights or copyrights or for liability to any person for defamation or invasion of privacy.

**Preferred Citation**

Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers, [item identification], Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives.

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art Archives

Craig Rhea Collection of Karl Struss Papers
John and Susan Harvith Collection of Karl Struss Papers

Related Collections in the Amon Carter Museum of American Art

More than 200 prints, 55 Lumière autochromes, and over 5000 negatives by Struss in the Photography Collection.

Contact the museum archivist at archivist@cartermuseum.org or 817.989.5077 for additional information.

Administrative Information

Acquisition and Custody Information

Purchased from Stephen White, 2000

Processed By

Jonathan Frembling and Karin Strohbeck

Biographical Note

Karl Struss (1886–1981) was one of the leading pictorial photographers of the pre–World War I era. His reputation was established when Alfred Stieglitz selected Struss’ work for the 1910 International Exhibition of Pictorial Photography and then published a portfolio in Camera Work in 1912. In 1909 Struss invented the Struss Pictorial Lens, a soft–focus lens that proved immensely popular with other photographers of the period, including Laura Gilpin. After studying with Clarence White, Struss took over White’s studio in 1914 and specialized in portraiture, advertising, and magazine illustration. Five years later he moved to Hollywood and became Cecil B. DeMille's still–cameraman. Struss soon turned from still photography to cinematography, filming such works as Ben Hur (1925) and Sunrise (1927), for which he received the first Academy Award for cinematography. Struss’ Hollywood career spanned more than two decades of black–and–white and color cinema and incorporated silent and talking films, musicals, and 3–D features. In the 1950s and 1960s, as Struss’ motion picture work decreased, he began filming television series, industrial films, and commercials. In the 1970s Struss, in his late eighties and retired, was rediscovered after his Man with a Camera photographic exhibition and film festival tour.

Scope and Content Note

The Stephen White Collection of Karl Struss Papers provides considerable insight into the life and career of the groundbreaking photographer and cinematographer. The collection, which was accumulated by gallery owner Stephen White, contains personal and business correspondence, exhibition catalogues and records, clippings, items illustrated with Struss’ work, business records, and technical materials. Materials in the collection date from 1900 to 1988, with the bulk being from 1910 to 1930. The collection has been organized into eight series: Correspondence,
Photographs, Exhibitions, Periodicals, Clippings, Technical and Commercial, Stephen White Papers, and Oversized.

Correspondence: A wealth of correspondence, including both personal writings to and from family and friends and professional communication with colleagues, is available in this series.

Photographs: This small series contains several negatives and snapshots.

Exhibitions: Struss exhibited his photographs widely, and those exhibitions are well documented in this series. Although it includes some correspondence associated with the exhibitions, the series primarily contains published catalogues, which illustrate his career and a lifelong love of both still and moving photography.

Periodicals: Throughout his lifetime, Struss was an active member in several photographic clubs; these periodicals document his interests in and association with these clubs.

Clippings: Struss actively clipped items relating to his work and the movie industry. He kept examples of his photographic work that appeared in commercial publications, such as newspapers and advertising campaigns, and he clipped references to his role in the various movies. He also kept items of personal interest from Hollywood trade periodicals.

Technical and Commercial: Beyond his skill behind the camera, Struss possessed a strong technical and commercial savvy. During his career, he developed a celebrated lens for still photography and made innovations in cinematography. Included in this series are the patents for the Struss Pictorial Lens and various technical treatises on photographic topics.

Stephen White Papers: This series consists of material from Stephen White, the dealer and gallery owner who assembled this collection. The records primarily relate to Struss but also include records related to other artists as well.

Oversized: This series is made up of oversized materials, which require special housing.

A more detailed series description appear at the start of each series in this finding aid.

Inventory

Series 1: Correspondence

Scope and Content Note: Struss’ personal and professional correspondence makes up this series. Of particular note in the personal correspondence are letters to his mother and sisters describing his experiences during the First World War as a quasi–prisoner at Fort Leavenworth and his eventual journey to Hollywood and entry into the blossoming film industry. Professional correspondence includes letters with fellow photographers Alvin Langdon Coburn, John Paul Edwards, Ira Martin, Imogen Partridge [Imogen Cunningham], Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston as well as other business associates, exhibitors, museums, and galleries.
Box 1, Folder 1: Karl Struss Interview by John Dorr, 1968
1. An interview for “An Oral History of the Motion Picture in America” series conducted by John Dorr. Only one section of the interview is present. Also included is the correspondence associated with the interview.

Box 1, Folder 2: Personal Correspondence, 1900–1971, n.d.


3. Manuscript letter from Carl to Mother. April 17, 1903.


8. Typed letter, no author or recipient. January 19, 1952. [3 copies]


19. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Karl and Etchie. February 3, [1958?].

24. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Karl and Etchie. n.d.
29. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Karl and Etchie. n.d.
37. Manuscript letter from Lilian to Karl and Etchie. n.d.
44. Manuscript letter from Craig. August 20, 1971. [2 copies]

45. Clippings about Ethel Wall Struss. n.d.

46. Letter to Karl from [indecipherable]. n.d.

Box 1, Folder 3: Professional Correspondence, 1912–1923


3. Sketch, unsigned. 1912.


18. Typed letter from Helen Fish, Dayton Museum of Arts. March 17, 1922.


35. Typed letter from William A. Barnhill to Frederick Keasbey. August 14, 1923.


37. Typed letter from Lucy S. Silke, Board of Education, City of Chicago. December 5, 1923.

Box 1, Folder 4: Professional Correspondence, 1924–1935


3. Typed letter from William E. Pate. June 1, 1924.

5. Typed letter from Lucy S. Silke, Board of Education, City of Chicago. July 18, 1924.


7. Typed letter from Phil Townsend Hanna. September 20, 1924.


10. Typed letter from Phil Townsend Hanna. May 2, 1925.

11. Typed letter from Phil Townsend Hanna. May 12, 1925.


14. Typed letter to American Railway Express Co. August 7, 1925.


17. Typed letter from Anson Herrick. April 15, 1926.


22. Entry form, American Photography Sixth Annual Competition. 1926.


37. Manuscript letter from Jetta Goudal. September 17, 1928. [copy]
42. Typed letter from Ira W. Martin. April 19, 1929.
43. Typed letter from Carl Klein. April 23, 1929.
44. Typed letter from Frank Woods, April 27, 1929.
46. Invitation. *The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*. May 16, 1929. [2 copies]
48. Typed letter from Jerry D. Drew. February 27, 1930.
49. Typed letter from Albert Jourdan. March 6, 1930.


52. Typed letter from Frank Woods. September 12, 1930.

53. Typed minutes of the “Pictorialist” meeting. October 5, 1930.


55. Typed letter from R. L. Van Oosting. May 1, 1932.

56. Typed letter from R. L. Van Oosting to members of the Pictorial Photographers of America. n.d.


58. Typed letter from Disabled American Veterans of the World War, Department of Rehabilitation. April 11, 1933.


60. Typed letter from Ira Martin to members of the Pictorial Photographers of America. September 12, 1934.


Box 1, Folder 5: Professional Correspondence, 1936–1978, n.d.


8. Typed postcard from Jack [Wurtz?]. April 14, 1945.

45. Typed letter from John and Susan Harvith to Howard W. Koch, April 4, 1978.
49. Typed study of “Sails” by Karl Struss. n.d.
52. Manuscript letter from Ralph E. Smith. n.d.
53. Manuscript letter from Ralph E. Smith. n.d.
54. Typed letter from Clarence W. Koch. n.d.
55. Typed letter from Light and Shade editors to all members of Pictorial Photographers of America. n.d.
56. Typed and written inventories for several exhibitions. n.d.
57. Manuscript note on back of envelope. n.d.
58. Manuscript note that Gregory Peck called while away. n.d.
59. Typed list of “Photo Secession.” n.d.

**Series II: Photographs**

**Scope and Content Note:** A small series of negatives, copy prints, and snapshots.

Box 1, Folder 6: Photographs and Negatives, 1959–1962, n.d.

**Series III: Exhibitions**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series contains exhibition–related items: catalogues from photography and art exhibitions in the United States and Europe and records for exhibitions in which Struss participated, particularly *Karl Struss: Man with a Camera* in 1976. The exhibition records include gallery shots, documents detailing exhibition guidelines, checklists, press releases, invitations, and an interview transcript.

Box 2, Folder 1: Exhibition Catalogues, 1903
1. *Catalogue of the Third San Francisco Photographic Salon at the Mark Hopkins Institute of Art, October Eighth to Twenty-fourth, Nineteen Hundred and Three.*

Box 2, Folder 2: Exhibition Catalogues, 1907

Box 2, Folder 3: Exhibition Catalogues, 1909–1914


5. *An Exhibition Illustrating the Progress of the Art of Photography in America at the Montross Art Galleries, New York, October Tenth to Thirty–First MCMXII.*


Box 2, Folder 4: Exhibition Catalogues, 1915

2. *An Exhibition Illustrating the Progress of the Art of Photography in America at the Rosenbach Galleries, Philadelphia, January Eighteenth to Thirtieth, Nineteen Fifteen.*


Box 2, Folder 5: Exhibition Catalogues, 1916
1. *The Fifteenth Annual Exhibit of the Wilkes–Barre Camera Club, Held at the Club Rooms Poli Building, Wilkes–Barre, PA., February 22nd to 26th, 1916.*


4. *The Twenty-Sixth Annual Exhibition by the Department of Photography of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences*. April 27–May 21, 1916.


Box 2, Folder 6: Exhibition Catalogues, 1916

Box 2, Folder 7: Exhibition Catalogues, 1917

2. *Fourth Annual Pittsburgh Salon of Photography at the Carnegie Institute, Department of Fine Arts, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March the First to Thirty–First, Nineteen Hundred Seventeen*.


Box 2, Folder 8: Exhibition Catalogues, 1920–1922


4. Royal Photographic Society Exhibition, July 23, 1921. [Checklist only]


16. Wanamaker, 1922. [Installation photograph only]

Box 3, Folder 1: Exhibition Catalogues, 1923


Box 3, Folder 2: Exhibition Catalogues, 1924


Box 3, Folder 3: Exhibition Catalogues, 1925


Box 3, Folder 4: Exhibition Catalogues, 1926–1927


Box 3, Folder 5: Exhibition Catalogues, 1928–1929


5. *First Chicago International Photographic Salon.* Art Institute, May 1929.


Box 3, Folder 6: Exhibition Catalogues, 1930–1933


Box 3, Folder 7: Exhibition Catalogues, 1934–1937


15. Karl Struss: A Portfolio. n.d. [2 copies]

Box 4, Folder 1: Exhibition Records, 1912–1948, n.d.
1. Albright Art Gallery — 1912

2. Title plates for Struss works entered in the California State Fair, 1921.

3. Note from The London Salon of Photography, 1921.


5. A typed inventory of items submitted for the John Wanamaker Photographic Salon, 1922.

6. Check from Mary E. March for Struss Photographs, January 5, 1922.

7. The Camera Pictorialists: Los Angeles, [January 1945].


7. *Karl Struss: Man with a Camera.* Interview transcript, [n.d.].

8. Assorted clippings and flyers.

**Series IV: Periodicals**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series includes an incomplete run of the pictorial magazine *Light and Shade* (December 1928 to April–May 1932), an incomplete run of *Bulletin of the Pictorial Photographers of America* (November 1933 to June 1934), and copies of various periodicals that have references to Struss or that show his work.

Box 4, Folder 3: *The Bulletin of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, 1927–1928, 1977

1. *Bulletin No. 1*, June 1, 1927.


5. *Bulletin of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, n 17, fall 1977.

Box 4, Folder 4: *Light and Shade*, 1928–1932

1. *Light and Shade*, v 1, n 1, December 1928.

2. *Light and Shade*, v 1, n 2, January 1929.


5. *Light and Shade*, v 1, n 5, April 1929.


7. *Light and Shade*, v 1, n 7, June 1929.

8. *Light and Shade*, v 2, n 1, October 1929.


12. *Light and Shade*, v 2, n 7, April 1930.


Box 4, Folder 5: *Bulletin of the Pictorial Photographers of America*, 1933–1934


Box 4, Folder 6: Assorted Periodicals, 1913–1981

1. *The Edison Monthly*, June 1913. [2 copies]


5. *The View Finder of the California Camera Club*, June 1929.


7. *ARTnews*, v 75, n 9, November 1976

**Series V: Clippings**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series is comprised of clippings, primarily from newspapers, related to Struss, his still photography, and his cinematography. Some large clippings are in the Oversized series (box 6).

Box 4, Folder 7: Clippings, 1912–1952

Box 4, Folder 8: Clippings, 1953–1981

Box 4, Folder 9: Clippings, n.d.

**Series VI: Technical and Commercial**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series pertains to Struss’ education and work. Of particular interest are a hardbound chemistry notebook for Carl F. Struss, dated 1902–1903; student and teacher certificates from Columbia University dated from 1909 to 1912; letters of appointment for Struss to teach at Columbia University; the Bermuda tourist book done by Struss during his stint as official photographer for that country; and chemical formulas and letters associated with the development of a “photographic fog penetrating device.” An ad for the Struss Pictorial Lens is in folder 4, while the schematics, forms, and correspondence associated with the patent for the lens are with the oversized materials in box 6.

Box 5, Folder 1: Chemistry Notebook, 1902–1903

Box 5, Folder 2: Columbia University Certificates, 1909–1912


3. Announcement, *48 Photographs of the Female Figure*. n.d.


5. A typed inventory of images divided into subject matter categories. n.d.

1. A typed article for *Photography & Focus*. November 25, 1913.


5. Advertisement for “Struss Pictorial Lens.” n.d. [2 copies]


**Scope and Content Note:** This series contains loan agreements, press releases, correspondence, and other assorted articles from the Stephen White Gallery of Photography. Most of the material is Struss related.

**Series VIII: Oversized**

**Scope and Content Note:** These materials are oversized items from other series.

Box 6, Folder 1: Personal Correspondence, 1918
1. Manuscript letter from Karl Struss to [?], while at Fort Leavenworth. December 20, 1918.

Box 6, Folder 2: Exhibition Catalogues, 1925
1. *XX Salon International de Photographie, 1925.*

Box 6, Folder 3: Exhibition Catalogues, 1926

Box 6, Folder 4: Exhibition Catalogues, 1927

Box 6, Folder 5: Exhibition Catalogues, 1929

Box 6, Folder 6: *Motion Picture Arts and Sciences,* 1927
1. *Motion Picture Arts and Sciences,* v 1, n 1, November 1927.

Box 6, Folder 7: Assorted Periodicals, 1915

Box 6, Folder 8: Clippings, 1913–1977, n.d.

Box 6, Folder 10: The Struss Lens Patent, 1914–1916