



The New York Public Library
Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the

Thomas Bohlen papers regarding Motley

1931-2001

*T-Mss 2008-008

Processed by Elisabeth Elkind.

Summary

Creator: Bohlen, Thomas

Title: Thomas Bohlen papers regarding Motley

Date: 1931-2001

Size: .25 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Gift of Thomas Bohlen, May 2008.

Abstract: A small collection of correspondence of Thomas Bohlen with Motley members, Percy Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery, Motley designs (mainly copies), and printed material about Motley offers a glimpse of the work of the theatrical design firm.

Access: Some collections held by the Dance, Music, Recorded Sound, and Theatre Divisions at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts are held off-site and must be requested in advance. Please check the collection records in **the NYPL's online catalog** for detailed location information. For general guidance about requesting offsite materials, please consult:
<https://www.nypl.org/about/locations/lpa/requesting-archival-materials>

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Preferred citation: Thomas Bohlen Papers Regarding Motley, *T-Mss 2008-008. Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

Processing note: Processed by Elisabeth Elkind; Machine-readable finding aid created by Elisabeth Elkind.

Creator History

Motley, a theatrical design team consisting of Margaret (Percy) Harris, her sister Sophia, and their friend, Elizabeth Montgomery, designed sets and costumes in England and the United States from 1932-1976. Beginning with their design work for John Gielgud in 1932, Motley came to dominate theatrical design in London in the 1930s. During the Second World War, Margaret Harris and Elizabeth

Montgomery worked in New York. Montgomery stayed on after the war working on Broadway musicals and for the Metropolitan Opera and the American Shakespeare Festival as well as painting commissioned portraits of opera stars. She returned to London in 1965. Harris had returned years earlier continuing her design work at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the English National Opera and the avant-garde Royal Court among others. In all, Motley designed sets and costumes for over three hundred productions across the spectrum of drama and including film. The women also established a theatrical design school in England. Thomas Bohen was a design assistant and friend.

Scope and Content Note

Collection consists of correspondence of Thomas Bohen with Percy Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery of Motley, primarily from their later years, his correspondence with Chris Rodgers who administered Harris' Motley Theatre Design Course in the 1990s, copies of some Motley costume and set designs and portraits, mostly by Montgomery, miscellaneous material pertaining to Motley including receipts written by Bohen when he worked with Motley in the 1950s, programs, clippings and obituaries, a draft memorial tribute to Harris by Alec Guinness, Harris' posthumously published "An Illustrated Dictionary of Traditional Theatre Terms," and a framed self-portrait by Montgomery.

Arrangement: Series I. Thomas Bohen correspondence and other papers Series II. Designs and other work by Motley Series III. Printed material about Motley Series IV. Clippings and obituaries on Motley

Key Terms

Subjects

Costume designers
Set designers
Women designers

Names

Bohen, Thomas
Devine, Sophie, 1901-
Gielgud, John, 1904-2000
Guinness, Alec, 1914-2000
Harris, Margaret, 1904-
Montgomery, Elizabeth, 1902-
Motley, pseud

Container List

Series I. Thomas Bohem correspondence and other papers 1954-2001 (5 folders)

Mostly correspondence of Thomas Bohem with Percy Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery in their later years and with the woman, Chris Rodgers, who administered Harris's course to teach theater design. Also two financial documents from Bohem's time as a design assistant to Montgomery in 1954.

- b. 1 f. 1 Bohem's correspondence with Percy Harris 1986-1999
- b. 1 f. 2 Letters from Liz Montgomery to Thomas Bohem 1987, n.d
Includes a fragment and one written on a notecard designed by Montgomery.
- b. 1 f. 3 Bohem's correspondence with Chris Rodgers of the Motley Theatre Design Course 1991-2001
Mostly letters by Rodgers.
- b. 1 f. 4 Thomas Bohem's letters to others about Motley 1982-2000
- b. 1 f. 5 Financial account and receipt of Bohem for his work with Motley 1954
Two documents, one signed by Elizabeth Montgomery.

Series II. Designs and other work by Motley 1946-2001 (6 folders)

Mostly copies of design work by Motley, but does include original fabric swatch, notecard and self-portrait by Montgomery and Harris's book on theater terms.

- b. 1 f. 6 *Fabric swatches for Oklahoma* 1954 June
Arrangement of colored fabrics by Elizabeth Montgomery as guide to costuming for the film, *Oklahoma*.
- b. 1 f. 7 Copies of costume designs by Motley 1946-1952
- b. 1 f. 8 Photocopies of portraits and set designs by Elizabeth Montgomery 1954-1959, n.d
Also one photograph of a portrait painted by Montgomery.
- b. 1 f. 9 Framed self-portrait sketch by Elizabeth Montgomery 1954
In chalk and graphite.
- b. 1 f. 10 Notecard designed by Elizabeth Montgomery 1970s
Printed and distributed in England in the 1970s.
- b. 1 f. 11 *An Illustrated Dictionary of Traditional Theatre Terms written and illustrated by Margaret Pecy Harris of Motley* 2001
Published posthumously.

Series III. Printed material about Motley 1939-1990 (2 folders)

Mainly programs for an exhibition on Motley and a benefit for its Design Course.

- b. 1 f. 12 Motley miscellany 1939-1988
Photocopied photo of Montgomery, Harris and Gielgud in Venice, program for a Theatre Design Course benefit performance and photocopy of a mention of Motley in a work of fiction, a book by P. D. James.
- b. 1 f. 13 Programs for exhibition, Design by Motley 1986-1990

Series IV. Clippings and obituaries on Motley 1931-2000 (2 folders)

Includes a couple of early clippings with photos and a memorial tribute to Percy Harris by Alec Guinness.

- b. 1 f. 14 Clippings and obituaries on Motley 1931-2000
Obituaries on Montgomery, Harris and Gielgud. Other Montgomery obits are attached to a letter Harris wrote to Bohem in folder 1.
- b. 1 f. 15 Draft memorial tribute to Percy Harris by Alec Guinness 2000 May 22
Also a program for the service.