

Esta Nesbitt fashion illustrations, 1944-1964

KA.0086

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Kellen Design Archives

December 7, 2011

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Collection Overview

Repository	Kellen Design Archives
Creator	Nesbitt, Esta
Title	Esta Nesbitt fashion illustrations
Date [inclusive]	1944-1964

Extent 45.3 linear ft: 2 boxes, 12 oversize boxes, 4 map case drawers (271 illustrations)

Summary Esta Nesbitt (1918-1975), an instructor at Parsons School of Design from 1964 to 1974, created fashion illustrations for such publications as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, and the *New York Times Magazine*. Later in her career, Nesbitt employed innovative printing techniques as a children's book illustrator, created performance art pieces, and was one of the earliest to experiment with fine art Xerography. Nesbitt's work in the New School Archives primarily consists of 271 original fashion illustrations, as well as pre-publication layouts, mechanicals, proofs, and tear sheets.

Preferred Citation note

[Identification of item], [date (if known)], Esta Nesbitt fashion illustrations, KA.0086, box __, folder __, New School Archives and Special Collections, The New School, New York, New York.

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Biographical note

Born in New York, Esta Nesbitt (1918-1975) studied at the Traphagen School of Design, Columbia University, and New York University. From the 1940s through the 1960s, Nesbitt led a successful career as a fashion illustrator for leading magazines and newspapers. Her work was often entered in the annual juried competition of the Society of Illustrators, at least once receiving a Certificate of Merit. She held an especially long and creative association with *Mademoiselle* magazine.

Around 1960, Nesbitt began taking painting and printmaking courses, and studied brush calligraphy at the China Institute of America, one of a number of styles and techniques she experimented with in a burgeoning new career as a children's book illustrator (another was the sugar-lift aquatint print). In the 1960s Nesbitt also became a pioneer in the use of reprographic technology to make fine art. Xerox Corporation sponsored her experimentation, providing access to the latest-model copiers in their showroom and holding an exhibit of her work, "Xerography--Extensions in Art," at their New York headquarters. In the late 1960s, Nesbitt pursued yet another form of aesthetic expression as a performance and conceptual artist in New York City, sometimes incorporating her reprographic prints into these works. (Kelvin Mason, "CCP Acquisitions: Esta Nesbitt--Xerox Art Pioneer." SubtopiaStudios.com. Accessed 19 Sept. 2011. <http://www.subtopiastudios.com/writing>). Nesbitt exhibited widely during her

lifetime. She died in New York in 1975. Parsons School of Design--where Nesbitt had taught from 1964 to 1975--held an exhibition of her work in October 1977.

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Scope and Contents of Collection

The Esta Nesbitt fashion illustration collection in the New School Archives represents Nesbitt's work predominantly as a fashion illustrator over the course of two decades. The collection includes original fashion illustrations, pre-publication work, clippings, and tear sheets of illustrations Nesbitt executed for *Mademoiselle* magazine, the *New York Times Magazine*, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, and Franklin Simon & Co., among others. Nesbitt's original work is rendered in charcoal, ink, pastels, and gouache. Some of the tear sheets (i.e., printed pages of illustrations as they appear in published form) for *Mademoiselle* bear the stamp of Fritzie Miller Associates. Miller, an agent for commercial illustrators, presumably represented Nesbitt, and these works may have been used in a promotional portfolio.

Many of Nesbitt's illustrations in this collection provide evidence of the various stages of the publication process, frequently displaying lines to revise the underlying illustration, and extensively annotated with printer's instructions regarding print size, scale and color. Many have tissue or acetate overlays for the purposes of color separation or to present alternate positions and styles. Some layouts have cut-out sections of figures affixed to the illustrations, replacing or correcting gestures, facial expressions, and garment patterns. A number of the works here, such as the mechanicals for Macy's and Bamberger's, display extreme stylistic differences from the bulk of Nesbitt's work, suggesting that they may not have been executed by Nesbitt (they are identified in the inventory below).

A very few of the original works here reflect Nesbitt's work outside of fashion illustration, although it is not known whether they were produced for book projects, as fine art, or for other purposes.

Dates without parentheses following titles pertain to the date of creation; those inside parentheses indicate publication date.

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Organization and Arrangement

Organized in 5 series, arranged alphabetically within series. Titled by commissioning publication and advertising campaign, when identified. Otherwise titled by department store or manufacturer; or by description of garment depicted and/or format.

- I [Unidentified](#)
- II [General](#)
- III [Mademoiselle magazine](#)
- IV [New York Times Magazine](#)
- V [Saks Fifth Avenue](#)

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Administrative Information

Publication Information

Kellen Design Archives December 7, 2011

Revision Description

Extent and component locations altered after re-housing. August 28, 2017

Conditions Governing Access note

Collection is open for research use. Please contact archivist@newschool.edu for appointment.

Use Restrictions

To publish images of material from this collection, permission must be obtained in writing from the New School Archives. Please contact: archivist@newschool.edu.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Donated to Parsons School of Design by Saul Nesbitt, Esta Nesbitt's husband, in 1979; later transferred to the New School Archives.

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Related Materials

Collections of Esta Nesbitt's papers and/or her work in book illustration and Xerography, and recordings of her performance and conceptual works are found variously in the permanent collections of the Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; the Smithsonian Archives of American Art; the Brooklyn Museum; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art; among others.

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Keywords for Searching Related Subjects

Corporate Name(s)

- Macy's (Firm).
- Saks Fifth Avenue (New York, N.Y.).

Genre(s)

- Fashion illustrations (layout features).
- Periodical illustrations.

- Tear sheets.

Occupation(s)

- Fashion illustrators.

Subject(s)

- Advertising layout and typography.
- Commercial art -- United States -- 20th century.
- Department stores -- United States -- 20th century.
- Fashion drawing.
- Women artists -- New York (State) -- New York.
- Women's clothing -- United States -- 20th century -- Pictorial works.

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Other Finding Aids note

For selected item-level description and images from the Esta Nesbitt fashion illustrations, see The New School Archives Digital Collections at <http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086>.

Collection Inventory

Series I. Unidentified 1940s-1960s

Includes original work, stats (reproductions), and tear sheets by Nesbitt that bear no indication of the commissioning publication, manufacturer, or department store. Titles are descriptions of garment depicted or format.

Link to selected images from this series., 1940s-1960s

[\[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.01\]](http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.01)

	Box	Folder
Original work		
Bathing suit, probably 1950s	OSxxx-1	1
Black dress, probably 1950s	OSxxx-1	2
Blouse and skirt, circa 1960	1	1
Blouse, skirt and coat ensemble, probably designed by James Galanos, 1959	OSx-1	1
Cape and shoes, probably 1960s	OSxx-1	1
Diptych (red), probably 1960s	MC B 1	1

Diptychs (yellow), probably 1960s	MC B 1	2
Evening dress, probably 1950s	MC B 2	7
Foot, probably 1950s	1	2
Gown, coat, and suit, probably 1960s	OSxxx-1	3
Gown and pants outfit, probably 1960s	OSxxx-1	4
Gowns, probably 1950s	OSxxx-1	5
Heads and facial elements, circa 1958	OSxxx-2	1
Hosiery, probably 1950s	OSxx-1	2
Nightdress, circa 1955	MC B 1	3
Overlays, undated	MC B 1	4
Paisley outfits, circa 1956	MC B 1	5
Shoe, probably 1950s	OSxxx-2	2
Suit, circa 1960	OSxxx-2	3
Suit, probably 1950s	OSxxx-2	4-5
Stats, probably 1950s-1960s	OSx-1	2
Tear sheets, 1940s-1960s	1	3

Series II. General circa 1941-1962

Includes work produced by Nesbitt for a range of publications, manufacturers and department stores. The work is arranged alphabetically by publication, when it has been clearly identified; otherwise by department store, or by garment or textile manufacturer or merchandiser.

Link to selected images from this series., circa 1941-1962

[\[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.02\]](http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.02)

	Box	Folder
Ameritex Fabrics, 1948	1	4
Avisco acetate lingerie, circa 1955	OSx-1	3
Advertisement includes the "Avisco Integrity Tag" logo.	OSxxx-3	8
Bamberger's New Jersey: Menswear and other layouts, probably 1950s	OSxx-1	3
<i>Bride's Magazine</i> (Spring 1962)	1	5
<i>Business Magazine</i> (possibly): Fur coats, 1956-1957	1	6
	MC B 1	6
<i>The Celanese Hour</i> (catalog of the Celanese Corporation of America): Knitted lingerie (Fall 1944)	OSx-1	4

Franklin Simon & Co. department store: Dress, bathing suit, junior wear, probably 1950s May not be by Nesbitt.	OSxxx-3	1
Franklin Simon & Co. department store: Summer outfit, probably 1950s	OSxx-1	4
Humming Bird Hosiery, between 1941 and 1945 (tear sheets)	1	7
"Illustrators '59": Editorial Illustration competition entry	MC B 1	7
"Illustrators 1960": Editorial Illustration competition entry Nesbitt won an Award of Merit for this entry into the Society of Illustrators annual competition--the illustration appeared in the publication, "Illustrators 1960."	OSxxx-3	2
Jane Engel designs, 1944	1	8
<i>Junior Bazaar</i> magazine (1945 Dec and 1947 May)	OSx-1	5
Kayser designs, 1946	1	9
<i>McCall's Magazine</i> , probably 1949	OSx-1	6
Macy's: Menswear, probably 1960s May not be by Nesbitt.	OSxx-1 OSxxx-3	5 3
Macy's: Womenswear, probably 1960s	OSxx-1	6
Macy's and Bamberger's: Plaids, probably 1950s May not be by Nesbitt.	OSxx-2	1
Macy's and Bamberger's: Men's outfit and women's coat, probably 1950s May not be by Nesbitt.	OSxxx-3	4
S. Naitove & Co.: "Sports-suited" fabrics, probably 1940s	2	20
Simplicity Pattern Company, probably 1957	OSx-1	7
<i>Sunday Bulletin</i> (Philadelphia): "Women Today" (1962 Jul 15)	OSxx-2	2
Talmack Design Room, 1960 Jan 27 Sketch depicting the design studio of Matty Talmack, who ran a prominent design business in the 1950s and '60s.	MC B 4	4
<i>Today's Living</i> (the <i>New York Herald Tribune</i> magazine): "Fashions Revive the '30s" (1957 Jan 6)	MC B 4 OSxx-2	5 3

Vogue magazine: "Something Borrowed...Something Blue...Something New" (1943 Oct 15)

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Series III. Mademoiselle magazine 1944-circa 1964

The breadth and variety of work here provides evidence of Nesbitt's long and creative association with *Mademoiselle* magazine, dating from World War II--when the magazine was printed on "Mlle Victory Paper"--to the early 1960s. Nesbitt's style appears to become increasingly fluid, playful and expressive as time progresses. Many of the tear sheets feature photographs credited to Carmen Schiavone, others to Herman Landshoff. Certain illustrations do not bear clear identification of having been executed for *Mademoiselle*, but are included here because strong stylistic similarities or other indicators suggest that they are likely to have been produced for this publication.

Link to selected images from this series., 1944-circa 1964

[\[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.03\]](http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.03)

	Box	Folder
General, circa 1944 Some pages printed on "Mlle Victory Paper."	1	10
"Bare Shoulders and Stripes," circa 1946	1	11
Bathing suit, April 1959 Entered into the Society of Illustrators' "Illustrators '59" competition.	MC B 2	1
Bathing suit and summer wear, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxxx-3	5
"Beautiful Dreamers": Peignoirs and nightgowns, 1962, Feb (5 pastel and charcoal; tear sheet and stat)	1 OSxxx-3	12 6-7
"Bridal suite," 1959 Feb Two of these illustrations were entered into the "Illustrators '59" competition.	1 MC B 2	13 2
Coats, circa 1959 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxx-2	4
"Color...All the Way": Dresses and lingerie, 1956 Feb	1	14
"Covered by Night...the Silk Alpacas": Dresses, between 1961 and 1964	1 MC B 2	15 3
"Dancing attendance: the bridesmaids' dresses," circa 1959	1 OSxxx-4	16 1
Dress, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSx-1	8
Dress designed by Claire McCardell, probably 1940s	1 OSxx-2	17 5
Dresses, probably 1950s (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	MC B 2	4
Dresses, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxxx-4	2
"Get into Black": Dresses, 1956	1 MC B 2	18 5

"Getaway Clothes," 1961 Jan	1	19
	MC B 2	6
	OSxxx-4	3
"The Gold Rush": Gold outfits, 1958 Dec One of these was entered into the "Illustrators" competition in 1958.	1	20
	MC B 3	1
Hattie Carnegie perfume, probably 1950s	1	21
Heads and hats, circa 1944 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSx-1	9
Lingerie, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxxx-4	4
Lingerie, 1960 Mar	1	22-23
	OSx-1	10
	OSxx-2	6
Lingerie, probably 1961 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	2	1
	OSxx-2	7-8
"Lingerie harmony: keyed for red," probably late 1940s	2	2
	MC B 3	2
Make-up and beauty editorial, probably 1958 Jun	OSx-1	11
	OSxx-3	1
	OSxxx-4	5
Nightdresses, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSx-1	12
Nightdresses, 1961 May (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxxx-5	1
"Now and again": Dresses, coats and hats, circa 1950	OSx-1	13
"Nylon's the ticket": Lingerie, 1949	2	3
Pants outfit, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxx-3	2
"Pink champagne for Christmas," between 1954 and 1959	2	4
"Questions of Form: 12 Mlle answers": Lingerie, circa 1960	2	5-9
	OSx-1	14
	OSxx-3	3
"Scoops: Playable now": Summer clothes, circa 1960	2	10
	OSx-1	15
	OSxxx-5	2-6

	OSxxx-6	1
"Scoops of the month: Traveling Light": Nightgowns, probably 1946	2	11
"Season's Greetings...Esta": Silk pajamas, probably 1950s	2	12
"The Sirens": Dresses, circa 1960	2	13
	MC B 3	3
"Skirts go pouf!," probably 1950s	2	14
"South into Summer," probably 1950s	2	15
Suit and dress, circa 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	MC B 4	4
	OSxxx-6	2
Summer dresses, probably 1960 (probably <i>Mademoiselle</i>)	OSxxx-6	3-4
"What Are Your Chances of Marrying?": Bridal wear, circa 1944	OSx-1	16

On "Mlle Victory Paper."

Series IV. *New York Times Magazine* 1955-1958

Link to selected images from this series., 1955-1958

[\[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.04\]](http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.04)

"Campus Cheers" (1955 Jul 31)	2	16
	MC B 3	4
"Fashions of the Times" special issue: "Evening Sheaths Plus" (1956 Feb 12)	2	17
	MC B 3	5
"Fashions of the Times" special issue: "Ski Report," (1956 Jan 1)	MC B 3	6
	OSxx-3	4
"Fashions of the Times" special issue: Mohair outfits, suit and black dress (1958 Aug 24)	2	18
	MC B 4	1
"Free and Easy Casuals," circa 1955	2	19
	MC B 4	2
Travel outfit, probably 1950s (probably <i>New York Times Magazine</i>)	MC B 4	3

Series V. *Saks Fifth Avenue*

Link to selected images from this series.

[\[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.05\]](http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu.libproxy.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/KA0086.05)

	Box	Folder
Dress, circa 1960	OSxx-3	5
Fur coats, circa 1960	OSxxx-6	5
Givenchy perfumes, probably 1957	OSx-1	17

Menswear, circa 1959	OSx-1	18
	OSxx-3	6
"New York is a Summer Festival--and so is S.F.A." and "S.F.A.'s Reproductions of Paris-Designed Originals," probably 1950s Two posters illustrated by Nesbitt.	OSx-1	19
Scenes (possibly for Saks), 1960	OSxxx-7	1
Travel, leisure, and beach wear, circa 1960	OSx-1	20-21
	OSx-2	1-6
	OSxxx-7	2-5
Travel wear, 1962 Jun 1	OSxx-3	7