A Finding Aid to the
Nathan Hilu Papers

Manuscript Collection No. 799
Collection Summary

Title
Nathan Hilu Papers

Dates
1945-1957

Collection Number
MS-799

Repository
The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives

Creator
Hilu, Nathan, 1926-2019

Extent
7 linear feet (7 record cartons)

Language of the Material
English

Administrative Information

Biographical Sketch
Nathan Hilu was born in New York City in 1926 and raised in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He served in the U.S. Army from 1945-1957. In Germany he served as a prison guard at Nuremberg, attached to the 6850th Internal Security Detachment where he guarded high ranking Nazis Party members, German military servicemen, and German government officials on trial for war crimes. Following the end of World War II, he continued his military service in Japan and various bases in the United States before being honorably discharged in 1957.

After his return to civilian life, Hilu settled in New York and achieved renown as an artist reflecting his life and times. The phrase art brut, coined by Jean Dubuffet in 1922, best describes Hilu's style — naïf, or outsider art that does not adhere to the mainstream. His 2008 series of drawings of the Nuremberg prison and its occupants are currently held at the Holocaust Resource Center Archives at Queensborough Community College, and a showcase of his work, “Nathan Hilu's Journal: Word, Image, Memory” is currently on display at the museum of the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. Hilu continues to draw daily.


Scope and Content
This collection consists of Nathan Hilu's artistic 'memoir' of his service in the U.S. Army during World War II and the Korean War (1945-1957). The 'memoir' consists of nineteen binders created by Hilu containing his handwritten reminiscences, together with his drawings of persons and events described therein. In this sense, this memoir is both an autobiography and a work of art. Of particular interest are the binders concerning Hilu's time as a guard at the Nuremberg prison during the time of the Nuremberg trials in which he describes and sketches persons he encountered there such as Hermann Goering, Rudolf Hess, and other Nazi leaders.

Arrangement
This collection is arranged in one (1) series: A. General.

Terms of Access
The collection is open for use; no restrictions apply.

Preferred Citation
Footnotes and bibliographic references should refer to the Nathan Hilu Papers and the American Jewish Archives. A suggestion for at least the first citation is as follows:

[Description], [Date], Box #, Folder #. MS-799. Nathan Hilu Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Provenance
Received from Nathan Hilu, New York, N.Y., 2003.

Processing Information
Processed by Kevin Proffitt, August 2011.

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Index Terms

Subjects
Jewish artists / Korean War, 1950-1953 / Nuremberg Trial of Major German War Criminals, Nuremberg, Germany, 1945-1946 / World War, 1939-1945

Personal Names
Hilu, Nathan, 1926-2019

Media
Personal narratives

Series A. General, 1945-1957
Box and Folder Listing

Box 5. Folder 1-2. My Memoirs as a Guard in the Nuremberg Prison (vol. 5 and 6).
Box 6. Folder 1-3. My Memoirs as a Guard in the Nuremberg Prison (vol. 7 and 8 and miscellaneous).
Box 7. Folder 1-3. Korean War memoirs (3 vols.).