

LEO YENI PAPERS, approximately 1910-2010
2012.483.1

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
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Descriptive summary

Title: Leo Yeni papers

Dates: approximately 1910-2010

Accession number: 2012.483.1

Creators: Yeni, Leo, 1920-2011

Extent: 1.2 linear foot (1 box, 7 book enclosures)

Repository: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place SW,
Washington, DC 20024-2126.

Abstract: The Leo Yeni papers consist of artwork, biographical materials, correspondence, diaries, writings, photographs, and printed materials documenting Leo Yeni from Milan, his escape into Switzerland during the Holocaust, his detention in refugee labor camps, his artistic training in Switzerland at the end of the war, and the death of his parents at Auschwitz.

Language: Italian, French, English

Administrative Information

Access: Collection is open for use, but is stored offsite. Please contact the Reference Desk more than seven days prior to visit in order to request access.

Reproduction and use: Collection is available for use. Material may be protected by copyright. Please contact reference staff for further information.

Preferred citation: (Identification of item), Leo Yeni papers (2012.483.1) United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, DC.

Acquisition information: Lillian Spiegel, executor of the Estate of Leo Yeni, donated the Leo Yeni papers to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2012.

Related archival materials: Leo Yeni also donated 66 pieces of original artwork to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2012.483.2- 2012.483.66).

Accruals: Accruals may have been received since this collection was first processed, see archives catalog at collections.ushmm.org for further information.

Processing history: Julie Schweitzer, February 2018

Biographical note

Leo Yeni (1920-2011) was born in Milan, Italy, to Jewish parents, Isak (1869-1944) and Pia Della Torre Yeni (1889-1944). Isak was born in Saloniki, Greece to Juda Samuele and Miriam Guadalia Yeni; Pia was born in Livorno, Italy to Egisto and Palmira Bondi Della Torre. In October 1938, Leo had to leave high school at the Institute Israelites after Mussolini instituted anti-Jewish racial laws in Italy. His father lost his job as an office worker and his mother supported the family by cooking meals for friends. In 1942, they had to leave their home and move, with only a few belongings, to an apartment. In fall 1943, following the Nazi occupation of central and northern Italy and the beginning of round-ups of Jews in Milan and other major cities, Leo and his family fled north to the mountains near Varese, close to the Swiss border. His family decided that Leo should escape into Switzerland, but he was apprehended and interrogated by the Swiss Police at the border and denied entry. With the aid of smugglers, he tried again and was arrested. He was detained in a military cell in Lugano as an illegal alien until he was accepted as a refugee and interned in detention camps in Unterwalden (Bellinzona), Plenterplatz in Zurich, and Lajoux in the Jura Bernois. Through HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and the Red Cross, Leo was able to contact a maternal relative, Rene Della Torre in the United States. Leo's parents were arrested by Italian Fascist police on December 6, 1943, jailed in Varese, deported from Milan to Auschwitz on January 30, 1944, and killed on February 6. After the war, Leo resumed his education at L'Ecole d'Art in Switzerland. In July 1946, Leo immigrated from Le Chaux-de-Fonds, Neuchatel, Switzerland, to America aboard the *Marine Flasher*. He settled in New York and had a successful career as a textile designer. He was active in local artists' organizations, his artwork was frequently exhibited, and he taught painting. He married Rose Baumuel (1917-1992) in 1947, had two children, and became a naturalized citizen in 1949.

Scope and content of collection

The Leo Yeni papers consist of artwork, biographical materials, correspondence, diaries, writings, photographs, and printed materials documenting Leo Yeni from Milan, his escape into Switzerland during the Holocaust, his detention in refugee labor camps, his artistic training in Switzerland at the end of the war, and the death of his parents at Auschwitz.

The artwork and notes series comprises original sketches, sketchbooks, and notebooks by Leo Yeni. Most of the works were created while Yeni was an art student in Le Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland right after the war, and the notebooks and sketchbooks combine original artwork with lessons and notes about art, history, and language in French and Italian. Additional sketches represent architectural and advertising studies. The original artwork dates from approximately 1943-1946, and undated reproductions were created after the period.

Biographical materials consist of Italian, Swiss, and Greek identification papers, certificates, and other records documenting Yeni's status before, during, and after World War II, and particularly his refugee

status in Switzerland during the war, his immigration to America aboard the *Marine Flasher*, his naturalization, and his work as an artist. This series also includes Claims Conference forms Yeni completed describing his Holocaust-era experiences, photocopies and certificates documenting the marriage and deaths of Isak and Pia Yeni, a photocopy of a birth certificate for Michele Della Torre, family trees documenting the Della Torre and other families, two pocket calendars that belonged to Yeni during and after the war, and ration coupons for textiles and shoes.

The correspondence series documents Yeni's art education and aid he received in Switzerland, his immigration to the United States, his unsuccessful efforts to pursue restitution claims, and his reconnection in 2005 with the Robert family whom he had known while he was a refugee. This series also includes a few family letters.

Diaries and writings comprise diaries, personal narratives, poems, and stories documenting the war years. Leo Yeni's diaries, written in Italian between 1943 and 1945, describe his escape into Switzerland and his life as a refugee in detention camps and as an art student. Personal narratives include partial English translations of Yeni's diaries, additional recollections by Yeni, and recollections by his relative Mario Migdalj (Della Torre). Poems include a notebook composed by Yeni in 1945 entitled "Poesie" and loose poems with little or no attribution. This series also includes two notebooks containing stories and two loose stories by Yeni.

The photographs series includes original photographs dating from approximately 1910 to 1940 and copy prints from approximately 1980-2000. The images depict Leo Yeni and his family and friend before World War II.

Printed materials include information about Fine Arts and English courses Yeni received in Switzerland, a welcome booklet for Jewish refugees in Switzerland, two 1944 issues of the Lajoux detention camp newsletter *La Talpa* including artwork and stories by Yeni, a 1945 publication by a sports organization in La Chaux-de-Fonds, and clippings about the Holocaust in Italy and refugees in Switzerland.

System of arrangement

The Leo Yeni papers are arranged as 6 series:

- Series 1: Artwork and notes, approximately 1943-2010
- Series 2: Biographical materials, 1938-2010
- Series 3: Correspondence, approximately 1940-2009
- Series 4: Diaries and writings, approximately 1943-2004
- Series 5: Photographs, approximately 1910-2000
- Series 6: Printed materials, 1929-2010

Indexing terms

Yeni, Leo (1920-2011)

Jews--Italy--Milan.

Jewish refugees--Switzerland.

Jews, Italian--Switzerland.

Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)--Personal narratives.
Refugee camps--Switzerland.
Jewish artists--Switzerland.

Italy.
Switzerland.

Photographs.

CONTAINER LIST

Series 1: Artwork and notes, approximately 1943-2010

Folder	Title
1.1	Architectural drawings and notes, approximately 1943-1946
BE 1	Notebook ("Egitto, Il culto; gli Dei," etc.), 1945
1.2	Notebook with sketches ("Composition decorative"), 1945
BE 2	Notebook with sketches ("Histoire de l'art"), 1945
BE 3	Notebook with sketches ("Les architects, Les sculpteurs, Les peintres"), approximately 1945
BE 4	Notebook with sketches ("Persée Cellini," etc.), approximately 1945
BE 5	Notebook with sketches (swordsman and demon, etc.), approximately 1945
1.3	Notes, approximately 1945
1.4	Reproductions, approximately 1945-2010
BE 6	Sketchbook (architecture and profiles), 1944
BE 7	Sketchbook ("d'après Leonardo," etc.), approximately 1945
1.5	Sketches, approximately 1943-1946

Series 2: Biographical materials, 1938-2010

Folder	Title
1.6	Claims Conference forms, approximately 2004
1.7	Della Torre, Michele, 1987
1.8	Family trees, approximately 1980-2010
1.9	Pocket calendars, 1943-1946
1.10	Yeni, Isak and Pia, approximately 2010
1.11-1.13	Yeni, Leo, 1938-2010 (3 folders)

Series 3: Correspondence, approximately 1940-2009

Folder	Title
1.14	Correspondence, 1940-1944
1.15	Correspondence, 1945

1.16	Correspondence, 1946
1.17	Correspondence, 1947-1950
1.18	Correspondence, 1952-1989
1.19	Correspondence, 2001-2009
1.20	Correspondence, undated

Series 4: Diaries and writings, approximately 1943-2004

Folder	Title
1.21	Diary I, <i>Memorie</i> , 1934-1944-1945 ("La note del 4 dicembre 1943. . ."), 1943-1944
1.22	Diary II, <i>Memorie d'internato</i> , ("Aria di temporale. . ."), 1944
1.23	Diary III, <i>Memorie</i> , 1934-1944-1945 ("Natale 1944 si arricine. . ."), 1944-1945
1.24	Personal narrative, "Erano giunti la sera innanzi. . .," undated
1.25	Personal narrative, "It was the night of the fourth of December. . .," undated
1.26	Personal narrative, Leo Yeni, approximately 2004
1.27	Personal narrative, Mario Migdalj (Della Torre), 1999
1.28	Personal narrative and diary ("Book One: A few words yelled in the street. . ."), undated
1.29	Poems, approximately 1943-1945
1.30	Poems, <i>Poesie</i> , 1945
1.31	Stories, <i>Novelle</i> , 1944
1.32	Stories, <i>Novelle II</i> , 1945
1.33	Stories, <i>Pippo</i> , 1945
1.34	Stories, <i>Il Raffreddore</i> , 1944

Series 5: Photographs, approximately 1910-2000

Folder	Title
1.35	Photographs, approximately 1910-2000

Series 6: Printed materials, 1929-2010

Folder	Title
1.36	<i>Brevet spéciale pour l'enseignement du dessin artistique et decoratif</i> , 1929
1.37	Clippings, approximately 1945-2010
1.38	<i>Corso di lingua ingelese diretto da NOT ONIT edito per gli internati italiani in Svizzera</i> , approximately 1944
1.39	<i>L'Olympic</i> , official publication of the physical education organization in La Chaux-de-Fonds, August 1945
1.40	<i>Règlement concernant les examens pour obtenir les brevets spéciaux institués par la loi sur l'enseignement secondaire</i> , 1940
1.41	<i>La Talpa</i> , newsletter published at detentions camp in Lajoux, June 20, 1944 and May 10, 1944

1.42	<i>Vademecum del Rifugiatio Civile</i> , Verband Schweizerischer Judischer Fluchtlingshilfen, approximately 1944
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