A Finding Aid to the Magda Polivanov Collection

Record Unit 420

Finding aid prepared by Joyce Cooper in March 2014 with assistance from Insley Julier and Lara J. Ullman.
Edgartown, Massachusetts
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Descriptive Summary

Repository: Martha's Vineyard Museum
Gale Huntington Research Library
59 School Street
P.O. Box 1310
Edgartown, MA 02539
508-627-4441

Call Number: RU 420

Creator: Polivanov, Madga (1899-1985)
Title: Magda Polivanov collection
Dates: 1918-1985

Physical Description: 1 box (0.504 cubic feet)

Language(s): The materials are in English.

Abstract: Magda Polivanov, 1899-1985, was an artist who immigrated to the United States in 1934 from Russia. This collection holds some of her legal papers, a Certificate of Citizenship, passports, and a will, as well as photographs of her work and family.

Administrative Information
Access Restrictions
There are no restrictions, with the exception of documents containing Social Security numbers.

Use and Reproduction Restrictions
Requests to reproduce material from this collection should be directed to museum staff. Reproduction fees may apply.

Preferred Citation
Martha's Vineyard Museum, RU 420, Magda Polivanov Collection.

Acquisition Information

Related Materials
For pieces of artwork by Magda Polivanov, see accession number 2003.040.

Index Terms

Subjects - Names
Kay, Michael V.
Polivanov, Magda

Subjects - Places
Martha's Vineyard (Mass.)
Oak Bluffs (Mass.)
Russia

Form/Genre Terms
Paper money
Photographs

Biography/Historical Note
Born Magdalina Agafonoff Polivanoff on February 15, 1899 in Russia, the artist is best known as Magda Polivanov. She is the daughter of Constantine Polivanoff, a staff general in Tzar Nicholas II’s Russian Army. Her mother was a lady in waiting to the Dowager Empress. During the Russian Revolution of 1917 her family was killed by the Bolsheviks. Magda and a sister managed to escape to Siberia. Her sister died of influenza before they could get out of the country. Magda found her way to England via Constantinople in 1919 where family friends took her in. While in London, she
started studying art at the Royal Academy and the Slade Arts School. Later studies brought her to Florence and Paris. In 1931 she married an American, William Edwin Ziegler, while in England. The two traveled around France and Italy before returning to the United States in 1934. Magda received her United States citizenship and US passport in 1936 showing her as Magdalina Polivanov Ziegler. She found her uncle, Michael V. Kay (formerly Koudriavzeff), in New York City. Kay had immigrated to the United States in 1916 while he was on business. He helped her find an apartment in Greenwich Village. Magda referred to Kay as Uncle Mischa and the two remained close until his death in January 1969.

In 1938, Magda started going to Providence, Rhode Island. She found it was a good area to do her artwork so she took an apartment there and split her time between New York and Rhode Island. Through friends Magda made frequent visits to Martha's Vineyard. On one visit in 1943 a friend told her of a house for sale in the Oak Bluffs Campgrounds and she bought it immediately. She maintained her three residences through the 1960s when she gave up her Providence apartment. Magda's artwork consisted of several mediums. In the 1940s Edwin Ziegler and his brother Carl put on elaborate marionette shows, for which Magda did the costuming and scenery. Magda's block print textiles were used by such designers as Halston and items are held at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum. Her interest in various religions led her to create icons not only of her native Russia but of Celtic and Jewish faiths as well. Magda also worked with oils on canvas, her favorite subjects being her dogs. Magda Polivanov died in January 1985 in New York City, New York.

Scope and Content of Collection

The collection includes Magda's immigration and naturalization documents from the 1930s as well as documents from later in her life. Magda wrote a short story about the history of her Oak Bluffs cottage and, with the help of I.A.R. Wylie, had it published in the June 1944 issue of Cosmopolitan. A large portion of the collection consists of photographs that are mostly undated but clearly cover a wide range of her life. Photographs of Magda's artwork include her textiles, religious icons, and oil painting. There are also photographs of her work with marionettes. Also included in this collection are resumes of Michael Kay as well as a diary he kept while traveling throughout Russia by railroad. There are seven paper bills of Russian currency from 1918 and 1919 that Magda probably took with her when she left the country. The newspaper articles are from various interviews meant to capture her personal story.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged chronologically.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Russian Currency</td>
<td>1918-1919</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>State Department Documents</td>
<td>1931,1936</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Temporary Passport</td>
<td>1931</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Short Story</td>
<td>1944</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Resumes of Michael V. Kay</td>
<td>1950, 1960</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Newspaper Articles, Preservation Copies</td>
<td>1954-1985</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Newspaper Articles</td>
<td>1954-1985</td>
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<td>Legal Papers</td>
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<td>Gift to Rhode Island School of Design paperwork</td>
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<td>Photos of Marionettes</td>
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<td>Photos of Magda</td>
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<td>Photos of Family and home</td>
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<td>16</td>
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