

# **Guide to the Alessandra Comini Diaries and Letters BC20.41**

**Finding aid prepared by Shannon O'Neill**

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Barnard Archives and Special Collections
<b>Creator</b>	Comini, Alessandra
<b>Title</b>	Alessandra Comini Diaries and Letters
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1948-1955
<b>Extent</b>	1.0 Linear feet ; 2 document boxes
<b>Physical Location</b>	This collection is stored offsite and advance notice is required for access. To use this collection, please contact the Barnard Archives and Special Collections at 212.854.4079 or <a href="mailto:archives@barnard.edu">archives@barnard.edu</a> .
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	This collection of letters and diaries provides a lens into the teenage and college years of American art historian, Alessandra Comini. The bulk of the letters are from her mother, writing to Comini at Barnard College. The diaries chronicle Comini's travels abroad.

### Preferred Citation

Alessandra Comini Letters and Diaries, 1948-1955; Box and Folder; Barnard Archives and Special Collections, Barnard Library, Barnard College.

## Biography

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Alessandra Comini, born November 24, 1934 in Winona Minnesota, is an American art historian and curator. She graduated from Barnard College in 1956, received her MA from the University of California at Berkeley in 1964, and her PhD from Columbia University in 1969. She is the University Distinguished Professor of Art History Emerita at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

Comini is the author of reviews, essays, articles, and books. Her text *Egon Schiele's Portraits* (1974, reissued in paperback in 1990 and 2014) was nominated for the National Book Award and received the College Art Association's Charles Rufus Morey Book Award. In addition to this book, Comini has authored five additional art historical books including *Schiele in Prison*, *Gustav Klimt*, *Egon Schiele*, *The Fantastic Art of Vienna*, and *Egon Schiele Nudes*. She is also the author of *Beethoven: A Study in Mythmaking*, she contributed a chapter to *World Impressionism*, and she is responsible for the text in several exhibition catalogues including the exhibition of Kathe Kollwitz and a travelling exhibition of the works of Egon Schiele. Comini also writes fiction in a genre she calls art history murder mysteries. She has written three murder mysteries, *Killing for Klimt*, *The Schiele Slaughters*, and *The Kokoschka Capers*, all of which are part of a series called *The Megan Crespi Series*.

Beyond writing, Comini is an amateur flutist. She curated the Neue Galerie Museum's exhibition of Egon Schiele's portraits which opened in the fall of 2014 and ran until April, 2015. For her work surfacing the history of women artists, Comini was acknowledged in 1995 by the Women's Caucus for Art with the organization's Lifetime Achievement Award. She lives in Dallas, Texas.

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## Collection Scope and Content Summary

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51 letters from Comini's family detail Comini's college experience from the family's perspective. Letters are written to Comini from her mother, her father, and her younger siblings. The bulk of the letters are written by Comini's mother, Megan, who is also a Barnard graduate. Topics and subjects in the letters are primarily focused on the family's concern for Comini's well being with regards to her adjustment to college life, budgeting her expenses, and inquiries of and comments upon Comini's scholastic endeavors including her coursework. The letters also provide dispatches from the family's life in Dallas while Comini is in college in New York City.

Two of the travel diaries are accessible to researchers. Comini's diary from the summer of 1953 chronicles her international voyage by sea, on the ship "Saturnia," from New York to Italy, where she studies at the University of Perugia. It additionally highlights Comini's travels in Milan, Assisi, Todi, Rome, Orvieto, Umbertide, Urbino, Siena, San Marino, Rimini, Umbria, Napoli, and Florence. The 1953 diary includes many small sketches in ink by Comini, photographs, and small pieces of ephemera like postcards, maps,

and ticket stubs. These pieces are all pasted into the diary making it something of a diary-sketchbook-scrapbook hybrid.

The 1955 diary is written the summer before Comini's senior year at Barnard. In this diary, Comini again travels primarily to Italy including stops in Genoa, Milan, Riccione, Perugia, Rimini, San Marino, Ravenna, Assisi, Florence, Milan, Bolzano, and Stresa. Comini travels elsewhere including Istanbul, Athens, the Dardanelles, Corinth, Innsbruck, Munich, Ulm, Heidelberg, and Lucern. Many, but not all entries are accompanied by a small watercolor painting depicting an aspect of Comini's experience at each of these sites.

Comini's 1948 diary is currently restricted from use as it is water damaged, fragile, and will necessitate significant conservation. Its contents depict Comini's teenage, post-war travels to Italy, Switzerland, and France. Comini is a life-long diarist, and it is anticipated that there will be additions of diaries to this collection.

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## Collection Arrangement

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The letters in this collection are arranged chronologically by sender. The diaries are also arranged chronologically, though the 1948 diary is housed separately due to its conservation needs.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

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### Access

The 1948 travel diary is restricted from use due to its fragility and its conservation needs. Upon being conserved, it will be made accessible to researchers. At the writing of this finding aid, there is not yet an anticipated date for when the diary will be conserved.

### Publication Rights

Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Barnard Archives and Special Collections. The Barnard Archives and Special Collections approves permission to publish that which it physically owns; the responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

## **Reproduction Restrictions**

Photocopies or scans may be made for research purposes.

## **Accruals**

Additions are expected.

## **Acquisition Information**

Gift of Alessandra Comini, 2015.

## **Processing History**

This collection was processed and the finding aid written by Shannon O'Neill in March, 2017.

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **Genre(s)**

- Diaries
- Letters

### **Subject(s)**

- Barnard College--Alumni and alumnae
- College students' writings
- International travel

## Collection Inventory

	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>
Letters from Mother, 1952-1953; undated	1	1
Letters from Father, 1952-1953; undated	1	2
Letters from Siblings, Paolo and Sandra, undated	1	3
Letters to Family, Friends, and Members of the Community from the Comini's, 1952-1953	1	4
1948 Travel Diary	2	1
<b>Access Note</b>		
This diary is currently restricted from use due to its fragility and conservation needs.		
1953 Travel Diary	1	5
1955 Travel Diary	1	6