

Finding aid for the William Hill images of Alexander Calder's La Grande Vitesse Collection 346

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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2004
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Table of Contents

<u>Summary Information</u>	3
<u>Biographical/Historical note</u>	4
<u>Scope and Contents note</u>	5
<u>Administrative Information</u>	5
<u>Related Materials</u>	6
<u>Controlled Access Headings</u>	6
<u>Collection Inventory</u>	7
<u>Series I. Biographical and General</u>	7
<u>Series II. Slides</u>	7
<u>Series III. Photographic prints made from the slides</u>	9
<u>Series IV. Miscellaneous</u>	11

Summary Information

Repository	Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department
Creator - Photographer	Hill, William
Title	William Hill images of Alexander Calder's La Grande Vitesse
Date	circa June 1969
Extent	0.8 Linear feet Two boxes
Language	English
Abstract	William Hill is a photographer in Grand Rapids, Michigan who documented the installation of Alexander Calder's La Grande Vitesse. The collection includes color slides showing the construction of the sculpture on the plaza at Vandenberg Center and the dedication ceremony. Also included is information relating to the Big Red Thing project at Grand Valley State University (circa 2007) and some biographical information on Hill.

Biographical/Historical note

After returning to Grand Rapids from the military around 1947, Bill Hill attended courses at the Art Center in St. Cecilia's, and briefly at Kendall College. Without yet completing the degree, he interviewed for a job at the Oliver Machinery Company, and was hired on the spot. He stayed for 41 years, retiring at the beginning of the 1990s. Bill married Betty Jane Konwinski Hill in 1947? and they had three children, Jodi, Scott and Craig. She died in March 2007.

Bill Hill's art interests include photography. He has participated in three camera clubs over the years, and while his work is of professional quality, he has not practiced photography as a profession.

As with many others, he became interested in the Vandenberg Center Sculpture Project, which awarded internationally known artist Alexander Calder the project to create a monumental stabile, for the plaza in front of the new City and County Buildings. As the May 1969 time approached for the actual construction of the sculpture, Bill Hill was one of those interested in documenting the experience visually, using his photography skills. Before or after his work schedule for Oliver Machinery, or during his work breaks, he took pictures of the progress of the construction of the sculpture. The physical layout and attachment of the metal pieces was done by Haven Busch, and Bill became acquainted with their foreman, Don Cronkite. As the pieces went together, Bill documented the work of the welders, and then the painters from Kooi, becoming acquainted with all of these crews during the process. He documented the placement of the building permit sign and the copyright sign temporarily on the sculpture. He learned that the bolts were all designed by Calder with his mark, and that they were all inserted in the same direction. He learned that Calder himself had mixed the paints, shipped over from France, for the initial painting of the sculpture.

Given access to spaces above the sculpture, in the new City Building just being constructed, and in the Union Bank building across the street, he took bird's eye views. He spent time at the Art Museum, looking at the exhibit of Calder's work there, and taking some photographs. He came to know some of the various officials involved in the project, such as Nancy Mulnix, who was instrumental in starting the project and keeping it going.

As the plane carrying Alexander Calder and his family came to Grand Rapids in June 1969, Bill Hill was standing near the La Grande Vitesse sculpture, capturing a picture of the plane in the sky overhead. During the visit to the site, following the formal motorcade, Bill Hill was one of several photographers who took pictures of Calder with the old City Hall in the background, as well as those with the new City Hall. He also captured an image of Calder with other officials, such as the Mayor, Christian Sonneveld, giving the key to the City to Calder. Bill had the foresight to have one of the painters paint the top of a Calder bolt, which he then had Calder sign his "CA" initials on top. That bolt is now in the collections of the Public Museum of Grand Rapids.

During the Celebration events, Bill Hill again captured pictures of the officials on the stand, the surrounding views, and the many individuals involved in and attending the events.

Bill Hill's views of La Grande Vitesse are both informative and artistic. His night view of the sculpture with the brightly lit grid of the City Building behind, provide the red on white view, in contrast to the

usual red on black of the daytime City Building. Views show the colorful sparks of the welders torch as these masked men did their precision work. They show the acrobatics of the painters on the scaffolding and ladders as they balance to work on the object with cans and brushes. Another view of the sculpture captures it, through multiple grids of windows, with grids of support wires, with grids of other building windows behind, as a vibrant abstract.

Bill Hill was not an official photographer of the Calder project, but due to the high quality and information in his images, his photographs have become an important part of the historical records of this internationally significant art event.

A photograph of the photographer, Bill Hill, shown with a maquette of the La Grande Vitesse, ca. 1969, is included in this collection.

Scope and Contents note

The core of the William Hill collection is his photographs of the process of the construction and the celebration of the Alexander Calder monumental stable, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, La Grande Vitesse.

Some additional images and information relate to Hill's work with the "Big Red Thing" project at Grand Valley State University. Also, a few biographical items related to Hill have been added.

The native form of the images in the collection are the slides given by Hill. Copy prints made from these slides, by Corporate Color photo studio or using in house digital capabilities at the Library, provide larger views. Several of these were made for use in the 30th anniversary exhibit of the sculpture "Celebrating La Grande Vitesse : 35 Years on the Plaza."

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department 2004

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

William Hill, accession numbers 1994.031 and 2007.041A/B.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

Coll. 001, Nancy Mulnix Collection.

Controlled Access Headings

Genre(s)

- photographs

Geographic Name(s)

- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

Subject(s)

- Grande Vitesse -- Calder, Alexander, 1898-1976

Series I. Biographical and General.

Collection Inventory

Series I. Biographical and General.	
	Box
Obituary. Betty Jane Hill. GR Press, Mar. 25, 2007. copy.	1
Photos (2) 2007.041A: Bill Hill with La Grande Vitesse maquette.	2
Series II. Slides	
Scope and Contents note	
Notes: Slide Numbers 1-24 are those selected for use during the Calder 30th Anniversary exhibit, and have a corresponding color photographic print in Box 2. Other slides may be different, unique images or variants of those below. See also the Bill Hill Lecture at GVSU, which includes some of these images. Slides are not yet physically processed.	
	Box
#1 Interpreter newspaper pages with Calder La Grande Vitesse illustration	1
#2 Packing crate piece, with Mayor's address.	1
#3 Footings	1
#4 Building Permit	1

Series II. Slides

#5 "C A" Bolts	1
#6 Welders. Near view of welder in mash, with his hands holding the torch up near his face.	1
#7 Welders. Welder in reddish brown shirt welding seam of red sculpture.	1
#8 Welders. Welder in blue on a ladder.	1
#9 Kooi Painters on scaffolding.	1
#10 Copyright notice	1
#11 Factual Highlights	1
#12 Painter crouching with brush	1
#13 La Grande Vitesse w. scaffolding, Union Bank behind, Old City Hall.	1
#14 Kooi Painters on top. Calder Red.	1
#15 Alexander Calder in red shirt, La Grande Vitesse behind.	1
#16 Rendering, La Grande Vitesse, artist unknown	1
#17 La Grande Vitesse at night with City Building behind	1

Series III. Photographic prints made from the slides.

#18 Grand Rapids symphony, Dedication of La Grande Vitesse, June 14, 2004.	1
#19 Museum Exhibit Poster	1
#20 Detail	1
#21 Detail	1
#22 Detail	1
#23 Detail	1
#24 Grids. View of La Grande Vitesse through black lines with the Union Bank behind.	1

Series III. Photographic prints made from the slides.

Scope and Contents note

Copy prints of slide nos. 1-24 were made in 2004, for possible reproduction in the “Celebrating La Grande Vitesse : 35 Years on the Plaza” exhibit. Most of these printed images were used in that exhibit, and some were also used in the digital version of the exhibit on the Grand Rapids Public Library website. Other prints will gradually be added as necessary for use.

	Box	Folder
#1 Interpreter newspaper pages with Calder La Grande Vitesse illustration	2	1
#2 Packing crate piece, with Mayor's address.	2	2

Series III. Photographic prints made from the slides.

#3 Footings	2	3
#4 Building Permit	2	4
#5 "C A" Bolts	2	5
#6 Welders. Near view of welder in mash, with his hands holding the torch up near his face.	2	6
#7 Welders. Welder in reddish brown shirt welding seam of red sculpture.	2	6
#8 Welders. Welder in blue on a ladder.	2	6
#9 Kooi Painters on scaffolding.	2	7
#10 Copyright notice	2	8
#11 Factual Highlights	2	9
#12 Painter crouching with brush	2	10
#13 La Grande Vitesse w. scaffolding, Union Bank behind, Old City Hall.	2	11
#14 Kooi Painters on top. Calder Red.	2	12
#15 Alexander Calder in red shirt, La Grande Vitesse behind.	2	13

Series IV. Miscellaneous

#16 Rendering, La Grande Vitesse, artist unknown	2	14
#17 La Grande Vitesse at night with City Building behind (2, one small without borders, one 8x10 with borders.	2	15
#18 Grand Rapids symphony, Dedication of La Grande Vitesse, June 14, 2004.	2	16
#19 Museum Exhibit Poster	2	17
#20 Detail	2	18
#21 Detail	2	18
#22 Detail	2	18
#23 Detail	2	18
#24 Grids. View of La Grande Vitesse through black lines with the Union Bank behind.	2	19

Series IV. Miscellaneous

	Collection	Box
Bill Hill documents the Big Red Thing. [poster]. From his presentation March 14, [2007] at Grand Valley State University.	224	33
		Box

Series IV. Miscellaneous

Bill Hill Lecture, GVSU, March 13, 2007. CD. 2007.041B

2