

# Agnes Allen photographs

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Finding Aid prepared by Hoang Tran

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PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY  
OF THE FINE ARTS

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## Summary Information

<b>Repository</b>	The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Dorothy and Kenneth Woodcock Archives
<b>Creator</b>	Agnes Allen (1897-1988)
<b>Title</b>	Agnes Allen photographs
<b>Date [bulk]</b>	
<b>Date [inclusive]</b>	1971-1973
<b>Extent</b>	12 photographs
<b>Location note</b>	The Dorothy and Kenneth Woodcock Archives
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Language of Materials note</b>	English
<b>Abstract</b>	Agnes Allen (1897-1988) was a well-known Philadelphia portrait painter. From the 1920s to the 1970s, she created hundreds of paintings of famous Philadelphia figures, including Philadelphia Orchestra conductor Eugene Ormandy and Orphans Court Judge Charles Sinkler. The collection consists of 5 color photographs of Agnes Allen in her studio at 1714 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA in 1971 and 7 black and white photographs taken in February 1973 in her apartment.

### **Preferred Citation note**

[identification of item], Title of Collection, Collection ID#, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Archives, Philadelphia, PA.

## **Historical note**

Agnes Allen, 90, a portrait artist who painted prominent Philadelphians for more than five decades, died Tuesday at Saunders House, a retirement home in Overbrook.

In an era when there were few female artists, Miss Allen became well-known as one of the city's premier portrait painters. From the 1920s to the 1970s, she created hundreds of paintings of famous Philadelphia figures, including Philadelphia Orchestra conductor Eugene Ormandy and Orphans Court Judge Charles Sinkler.

At a studio in the 1700 block of Walnut Street, Philadelphia's prominent would sit beneath the northern light that poured through a rooftop skylight as Miss Allen, her dress covered with a smock, took her brush from a palette of oils to large blank canvasses.

"She probably painted more important business leaders and civic leaders than anyone in city history," said Frank McGlinn, former chairman of the Walnut Street Theater, whose arts committee honored Miss Allen in the late 1970s with its first award.

Miss Allen, who supported herself throughout her life on commissions from her artwork, was painting even as a child, her sister recalled. As a young woman, she took classes with Frank B.A. Linton and then courses at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

She began working on a commission basis after someone asked her to paint a portrait of a dog. Always a great lover of animals, Miss Allen was happy to paint the animal, and later painted several more.

In her earliest days, Miss Allen kept a studio on the top floor of a building in the 1700 block of Cherry Street, where she could hear the bells toll from the nearby Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter and Paul.

Over the years, Miss Allen's paintings were hung in a variety of places - from the Merion Cricket Club and the University of Pennsylvania to the offices of the Insurance Co. of North America and City Hall.

Perhaps one of her most remembered works was the portrait of Ormandy, which was commissioned by the Women's Committees of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The painting, done in the late 1960s, still hangs in the reception room to the left of the stage at the Academy of Music, where Ormandy had greeted visitors.

"The painting turned out very good," said Margaret "Gretel" Ormandy, the late conductor's wife. "That was the only time he let anyone paint him."

Her subjects were sometimes people outside the city as well, not all of them famous. Miss Allen painted Pope Pius XII and a Kentucky doctor. During World War II, she painted 69 pastel portraits for the Victory Bond Drive, one for each person who bought a \$1,000 bond.

A woman who had blond hair in her younger years and wore stylish clothes throughout her life, Miss Allen went back to school in the early 1940s, graduating cum laude from University of Pennsylvania's School of Fine Arts. In the early '50s, she attended Hobson Pittman's studio criticism class.

Miss Allen received a number of awards and honors, including the 1947 Mary Smith Prize from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and an endowment was created in her honor in 1974 by the Philadelphia branch of the National League of American Pen Women.

Miss Allen, described as a warm, friendly woman who enjoyed dancing, parties and classical music and had a manner that made those who sat in her studio feel at ease, retired after a hip operation in 1981.

"She was highly regarded by artists and the people who were in the portraits she painted. She was a very thoughtful person, very interested in people," said Esther Klein, a longtime friend.

Miss Allen was a resident of Center City nearly all her life. In later years, she would walk to the Reading Terminal Market three times a week to get fresh carrot juice, saying it "helped her eyes" and would ensure she would be able to paint as long as possible.

One of her evenings of recognition came when the Walnut Street Theater arts committee recognized her - not only with an evening in her honor but with a portrait of the portrait artist.

Miss Allen showed up in the same attire she had been painted in - a black dress and peaked black hat, with her trademark pearls and a gray-and-black scarf.

Frank McGlenn remembered pointing out that the rewards of Miss Allen's talents had been spending time knowing an abundance of illustrious people. "But I also said, on the other hand," he recalled, "that the people she painted were lucky because they had the opportunity to spend time with her."

**Donna St. George, Inquirer Staff Writer. June 18, 1988**

From: [http://articles.philly.com/1988-06-18/news/26267676\\_1\\_miss-allen-philadelphia-orchestra-portrait](http://articles.philly.com/1988-06-18/news/26267676_1_miss-allen-philadelphia-orchestra-portrait)

## **Scope and Contents note**

Consist of 5 color photographs of Agnes Allen in her studio at 1714 Walnut Street Philadelphia, PA in 1971 and 7 black and white photographs taken in February 1973 in her apartment.

### **Arrangement note**

No particular arrangement.

### **Administrative Information**

#### **Conditions Governing Access note**

Collection is open for research.

The archives reserves the right to restrict access to materials of sensitive nature. Please contact the department for further information.

#### **Conditions Governing Use note**

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#### **Immediate Source of Acquisition note**

#### **Provenance note**

Gift of Bill Scott, 2001.

#### **Processing Information note**

Processed by Cheryl Leibold. Updated by Hoang Tran December 2015.

### **Controlled Access Headings**

**Person(s)**

**Corporate Name(s)**

**Genre(s)**

**Geographic Name(s)**

**Subject(s)**

**Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements note**

**Collection Inventory**

Item	Date	Folder
Color photographs of Agnes Allen in her studio (5)	1971	1
Black and white photographs of Agnes Allen in her apartment (12)	1973	1