

Finding Aid to the Michael and Muffy Berlyn Papers, 1978-2015

Summary Information

Title: Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers

Creator: Michael Berlyn, Muffy McClung Berlyn (primary)

ID: 119.2588

Date: 1978-2015 (inclusive); 1983-2011 (bulk)

Extent: 6.5 linear feet

Language: The materials in this collection are in English.

Abstract: The Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers contain game design documentation, notes, sketches, memos, and other materials related to video games and other creative pursuits. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1983 and 2011.

Repository:

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donors have not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, they have given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Conditions Governing Access: Audiovisual materials in Series II requires advance notice per library staff.

Custodial History: The Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers were donated to The Strong in April 2020 as a gift of Michael and Muffy Berlyn. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 119.2588 and were received from the Berlyns along with dozens of video games, books, and other ephemera.

Preferred citation for publication: Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

Processed by: Julia Novakovic, November 2020-January 2021

Revision Note: This finding aid was updated in April 2023 to reflect the passing of Michael Berlyn.

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Berlyn, Michael (1949-2023)
- Berlyn, Muffy McClung
- Blank, Marc
- Wetmore, Russ

Corporate Names

- Accolade, Inc.
- Bend Studio
- Blank, Berlyn and Co.
- Brainwave Creations
- Eidetic, Inc.
- Flexible Tales
- Infocom, Inc.
- Penguin Software
- Polarware
- Sentient Software, Inc.

Subjects

- A Taste for Murder (Video game)
- Bubsy (Video game series)
- Bubsy (Video game)
- Bubsy 3D (Video game)
- Computer adventure games
- Computer games
- Electronic games industry
- Game design and development
- Grok the Monkey (Video game)
- Ogg! (Video game)
- Reconstructing Remy (Video game)
- The Art of Murder (Video game)
- Video game industry
- Video games
- Video games -- Design
- Women in Games

Biographical Note

Michael and Muffy Berlyn were an American husband-wife duo of game designers with more than 30 years of experience in the computer and video game industries.

Michael (“Mike”) Berlyn began his career in games in 1979 after playing *Colossal Cave Adventure*. This led him and his wife Muffy, a writer and artist, to create games themselves. They established Sentient Software, releasing their first computer adventure games *Oo-Topos* and *Cyborg* in 1981. Michael joined Infocom in 1983, where he worked on a number of games including *Infidel* (1983), *Cutthroats* (1984), and the computer-board game mash-up *Fooblitzky* (1985). Infocom’s no-spouse policy precluded Muffy from also working there, so in 1985 the couple founded Brainwave Productions, producing *Tass Times in Tonetown* (1986) whose quirky sensibilities influenced many graphic adventures of the 1980s and 1990s. Muffy also co-wrote *Dr. Dumont’s Wild P.A.R.T.I.* (1988, 1999) with Michael.

Michael and Infocom founder Marc Blank started Berlyn, Blank & Co. (later renamed to Eidetic, Inc. and then Bend Studio) and created adventure games and games for the Newton handheld. Michael designed 1993's *Bubsy in: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* (often shortened to *Bubsy*) and the fourth game in the series, *Bubsy 3D* (1996). After a brief detour to e-publishing, Michael and Muffy Berlyn returned to the games industry in the early 2010s with Flexible Tales, interactive story games for mobile devices. Their particularly creative partnership was a thread running through the history of the games industry.

Michael Berlyn passed away in March 2023 at the age of 73.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers are a compilation of game design documentation, text drafts, notes, photographs, audiovisual materials, publicity clippings, and other documentation relating to the careers of Michael and Muffy Berlyn. Published video game titles represented within these materials include *Bubsy*, *Bubsy 3D*, *Altered Destiny*, *The Art of Murder*, *Reconstructing Remy*, *A Taste for Murder*, and many others. Along with original documentation by the Berlyns are reference materials, such as publicity clippings and articles about related video game projects. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1983 and 2011. Additional scope and content information can be found in the Contents List section of this finding aid.

The Michael and Muffy Berlyn papers are arranged into three series. The materials are housed in nine archival document boxes, two oversized flat boxes, and one rolled storage box.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Game design documentation and creative works, 1978-2015 and n.d.

Series II: Photographs and audiovisual materials, 1982-1999 and n.d.

Series III: Publicity, 1982-2012 and n.d.

Contents List

Series I: Game design documentation and creative works, 1978-2015 and n.d.

Scope and Content Note: This series contains notebooks, game design documentation, outlines, proposals, story drafts, sketches, testing documentation, and other materials related to games, stories, and other creative endeavors by Michael and/or Muffy Berlyn. This series begins with chronologically ordered folders of game design documentation (with unspecified dates marked in brackets), with undated materials in Boxes 6 and 7 ordered alphabetically. Remaining note or reference folders in Box 7 are also ordered alphabetically.

Original titles on folders or notebooks are noted in quotation marks. When possible, per original annotations, the primary creator has been indicated in brackets [e.g., Michael Berlyn, Muffy Berlyn].

Box 1

- Folder 1 Untitled notebook – notes, 1978 and n.d. [c. 1978-1981?] [Michael Berlyn]
- Folder 2 “Stars are for Sharing” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 1978-1981?] [Michael Berlyn]
- Folder 3 “After the Change, The Eternal Enemy” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 1978-1981?] [Michael Berlyn]
- Folder 4 Untitled notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 1978-1981?] [Michael Berlyn]
- Folder 5 “Sentient Software, Michael Berlyn, Adventure Editor Info., Cyborg” notebook – notes, 1980-1981 and n.d.
- Folder 6 “Suspended” – game description, notes, reviews; 1983 and n.d.
- Folder 7 “Marathon” – notes and game description, 1985
- Folder 8 “Robotek/ Robotech” – notes and game description, 1985
- Folder 9 “Flux/ Cartographer’s Ink” – game design documentation, proposal, and notes; 1985 and n.d.
- Folder 10 “Coleman Mystery – Text/graphics adv.” – outline and game description, n.d. [c. 1985-1986]
- Folder 11 “M&M Designs/Ideas” – notes for Brainwave Creations, 1985-1986 and n.d.
- Folder 12 “Checkout Time” – game design documentation and notes; 1986 and n.d.
- Folder 13 “Peace” – game proposal, design documentation, and notes; 1986 and n.d. [Michael and Muffy Berlyn]

Box 2

- Folder 1 “Ennio: The Legend” – design overview, game design documentation, and notes; 1986 [Michael and Muffy Berlyn]
- Folder 2 “Rager” – notes, game design documentation, test documentation; 1986-1987 and n.d. [Michael and Muffy Berlyn]
- Folder 3 “Rager” – test documentation, correspondence, and notes; 1987 and n.d.
- Folder 4 “Confetti” – notes and game design documentation, 1987-1999 and n.d.
- Folder 5 “Altered Destiny/ Mistaken Warrior” – game design documentation, notes, sketches, published flier; c. 1988-1990 and n.d.
- Folder 6 “Alive!” – proposal and notes, 1989 and n.d.

Box 3

- Folder 1 “Bubsy” – game proposal, tech specs, cost documents, notes; 1991 and n.d.
Folder 2 “Bubsy” – game design documentation, bug lists, notes, memos; 1991-1992 and n.d.
Folder 3 “Bubsy” – marketing folder with photographs, 1991
Folder 4 “Bubsy” – memo and drawings, 1992 and n.d.
Folder 5 “Bubsy (1)” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [c. 1991-1992]
Folder 6 “Sparky and Bolt” – game proposal document, notes, sketches; 1993
Folder 7 Untitled notebook – games notes and comments, 1993 and n.d. [includes “Spenser,” “Melthran,” “Ofee”]
Folder 8 “Bubsy 3D” notebook – notes, 1995-1996
Folder 9 “Bubsy” [*Bubsy 3D*] – game design documentation and notes; 1996 and n.d.
Folder 10 Untitled game [*Bubsy 3D*] – photocopied artwork and schedules, 1996 and n.d.
Folder 11 “Bubsy 3D” – *PS Extreme* Vol. 1, Issue 11, October 1996 [2 copies]
Folder 12 “Bubsy 3D” – stickers, design transfers, fliers; 1996
Folder 13 *Dr. Dumont’s Wild P.A.R.T.I* – IBM executable and source 3.5” floppy disk, 1999 [Note: disk imaged in 2019]
Folder 14 “Triblettes” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [c. 2005]
Folder 15 “Triblettes” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 2005]
Folder 16 *Tass Times in Tonetown* memorabilia draft chapter and correspondence, 2006

RS Box 1

- Object 1 “Bubsy” oversized level map sketches, n.d. [c. 1991-1992?]

Box 4

- Folder 1 Quick Click Games – press releases, contracts, and notes; 2005 and n.d.
Folder 2 “Jet Tubes/ Zen Ball” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [c. 2005-2008?]
Folder 3 “Epidemic/ Undercover/ Hot Mustard” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 2009?]
Folder 4 “StoryTap” – game design notes, 2010 and n.d.
Folder 5 “Story Tap” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 6 StoryTap Media – notes, game design documentation, and notebook; 2010 and n.d.
Folder 7 “Tappable Tales/ Flexible Tales” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 8 “Tappable Tales/ Flexible Tales” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 2010]

Box 5

- Folder 1 “General development for StoryTap/ Flexible Tales” notebook – notes, n.d. [c. 2010]
Folder 2 StoryTap Media – Technical Review Document, 2011
Folder 3 “The Art of Murder/ Imitates Life” notebooks – notes and sketches, 2009-2010 and n.d.
Folder 4 “The Art of Murder/ Imitates Life” – game design notes and draft text, 2009-2010 and n.d.
Folder 5 “The Art of Murder/ Imitates Life” – notes and design documentation, 2009-2010 and n.d.

Folder 6 “The Art of Murder/ Imitates Life” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [c. 2010-2011]

Folder 7 “The Art of Murder/ Imitates Life” notebook – notes, 2012

Box 6

Folder 1 “Grok the Monkey” notebook – notes, 2005 and n.d. [c. 2010-2012?]

Folder 2 “Grok the Monkey” notebooks – notes, n.d. [c. 2010-2012?]

Folder 3 “Grok, the Monkey” – notes, n.d. [c. 2005-2012]

Folder 4 “The Hunted Russian” – notes, notebook, and design documents; 2010

Folder 5 “Reconstructing Remy” – game design notes, checklists, and text drafts; n.d. [c. 2011-2013]

Folder 6 “Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride” notebook – notes and sketches, 2010-2011 and n.d.

Folder 7 “A Taste for Murder” – game design notes, n.d.

Folder 8 “Ogg!” notebook – notes, 2015 and n.d.

Folder 9 Unidentified mystery game [A Taste for Murder/ The Art of Murder?] notebook – notes, n.d.

Folder 10 “Alien Adventure” – text and notes, n.d.

Folder 11 “Android – Text adv. as a decision novel with dice” – draft text, game design documentation; n.d. [c. 1986?]

Folder 12 “Fools Ahoy” notebook – notes, n.d.

Folder 13 “Land of the Freebers” – notes, n.d.

Folder 14 “Language of Love” – game design notes, n.d. [Muffy Berlyn]

Folder 15 “Libros” – outline and notes, n.d.

Folder 16 “The Magic Elixir/ The Hunter” – game design notes, n.d.

Box 7

Folder 1 “The Secretary” – program proposal, n.d.

Folder 2 “Shogun” – notes, n.d.

Folder 3 “The Snarl” – sketches, n.d. [Muffy Berlyn]

Folder 4 “Solo Game” – notes, n.d. [c. 1985-1986?]

Folder 5 “True Hearts/ Romance Game” – game design notes, 2010 and n.d. [Muffy Berlyn]

Folder 6 “Game design, Muffy McClung Berlyn” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d. [Muffy Berlyn]

Folder 7 “Dingo Dan (2)” notebook – notes and sketches, n.d.

Folder 8 “(3)” [various game ideas] notebook – notes and sketches, n.d.

Folder 9 “(5)” [various game ideas] notebook – notes and sketches, n.d.

Folder 10 “Adventure game as a book” – notes and design documentation, n.d.

Folder 11 “Analysis of word and pencil puzzles” – notes and research, 1985 and n.d.

Folder 12 “CD Story System” – outline and notes, n.d.

Folder 13 “Computer/ board transition between rings” – notes, n.d.

Folder 14 “Computer designs” – notes and sketches, n.d.

Folder 15 “Console data analysis” – notes and correspondence, 1991-1993 and n.d.

Folder 16 “Design forms” – templates for game designs, n.d.

Folder 17 “Game ideas” – notes, 2010

Folder 18 “Graphics: action games” – notes, n.d.

- Folder 19 “Idea file” – notes and sketches, 1986 and n.d.
- Folder 20 “Moving POV Picture Puzzle Book idea” – notes, 1985 and n.d.
- Folder 21 “Puzzle ideas” – notes, n.d.
- Folder 22 “Watercolor nail polish” – notes, 1985
- Folder 23 Loose note pages [unidentified story/game], n.d.
- Folder 24 “Correspondence” – Michael Berlyn, 1983-2006 and n.d.
- Folder 25 “Clarionoid Comix” hand-drawn ‘zine/comic book, n.d. [c. 1980s]

Box 8

- Folder 1 “Suspended” – level map sketches, n.d. [c. 1982-1983]
- Folder 2 “Ennio: The Legend” – total map, 1986
- Folder 3 “Bubsy” – photocopied sketches, 1991-1996
- Folder 4 *Bubsy 3D* poster, 1996
- Folder 5 “Computer designs” – level map sketch [unidentified game], n.d.
- Folder 6 Untitled character [Dingo Dan?] sketches, n.d.

Series II: Photographs and audiovisual materials, 1982-1999 and n.d.

Scope and Content Note: This series holds photographs [of Michael Berlyn, Muffy Berlyn, and staff members from Blank, Berlyn & Co. and Eidetic, Inc.] and audiovisual materials. Videos include television promos for Michael Berlyn’s games *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* (1993) and *Bubsy 3D* (1996).

Access to audiovisual formats, including VHS, Beta, and U-matic, requires advanced notice.

Box 9

- Folder 1 Photographs – Michael and Muffy Berlyn, 1982-1999 and n.d.
- Folder 2 Photographs – Blank, Berlyn & Co. and Eidetic, Inc. staff, 1994-1996 and n.d.

Box 10

- Object 1 U-matic – “Mike Berlyn on TV Family Computing,” n.d. [Sony KCS-10K U-matic S cassette]
- Object 2 VHS – “Darien & Kilburg, Accolade ‘Bubsy’ CES Video, TRT: 3:17, 12/31/92,” 1992 [3M VHS cassette]
- Object 3 VHS – “Bubsy,” n.d. [TDK HiFi VHS cassette]
- Object 4 Betamax – “Bubsy,” n.d. [Sony HG Betamax cassette]

Box 11

- Object 1 *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters of the Furred Kind* press kit with VHS tape “Bubsy National Television, 8/17/93, Accolade, Inc.,” 1993 [VHS cassette]
- Object 2 *Bubsy 3D* mailer box with VHS tape “Accolade presents Bubsy 3D,” 1996 [VHS cassette]

Series III: Publicity, 1982-2012 and n.d.

Scope and Content Note: This series houses newspaper, magazine, and other clippings featuring Michael Berlyn or games on which he worked. Also in this series are copies of undated curriculum vitae for Berlyn.

Box 9

- Folder 3 Press clippings – Michael Berlyn, 1982-1993 and n.d.
- Folder 4 Game review clippings, 1983-1999 and n.d.
- Folder 5 Michael Berlyn c.v., n.d. [c. 2011-2012?]