

Searching For Bettie Page Collections

Esther ZenZeLe

Moving Image Archiving and Preservation Program

Department of Cinema Studies

New York University

### Abstract

Bettie Page was a pin-up model in the 1950s. She walked away and disappeared from modeling and the public eye after seven years of working. Selling pornography was illegal; many striptease/burlesque was confiscated or destroyed so companies would not get prosecuted. Surviving collections during this time should be found and analyzed for preservation use. Action needs to be taken to find materials on pin-up legend Bettie Page since the remaining material is scarce. The collections that appear should undergo a preservation plan to restore the memory of a legend who was the first to set the stage of pop-culture today. Sadly, the collections that are mentioned are currently unavailable to public knowledge.

This is not a history lesson of Bettie Page but a way to keep her memory alive as a pin-up and a way to preserve her images. Not a lot has been published to the public. This particular writing is just the beginning and I personally encourage more research on the investigation of Bettie Page collections. This writing will help future searches to continue on the dead ends that I came across. The plan was to find the collections of Bettie Page and assess the conditions of them. What was supposed to happen was to research the whereabouts of each collection and look at the care and storage of the collections. Not much information was saved of the works of the cult classic pin-up girl Bettie Page. Now, research was done to find collectors. The methodology of this research was to follow Bettie's work life and to research the people behind the camera, then see what they have done to their items, and see if their accessible. The hard to find collections are photos by Jerry Tibbs and Art Amsie; Irving Klaw productions and paintings by Robert Blue are known collections, but had some difficulties proving where the collection is currently located. During the search for Bettie Page collections, I stumbled upon the mass production of comics by Dave Stevens, paintings by Olivia, published photos by Bunny Yeager, with the help of historians Greg Theakston and Richard Bann, and authors Karen Essex and James Swanson.

**“I used to take air baths because air baths are very good for you. To take a 15 or 20 minute air bath and I have done that since I was a teenager so I didn’t feel squeamish about posing in the nude” -Bettie Page<sup>1</sup>**

Before the recognizable Bettie bangs, Bettie Page was approached by Jerry Tibbs, a police officer who offered to help Bettie start her modeling career. Many autobiographical books claim that Tibbs advised her to cut bangs because she had a high forehead. He helped her start up her modeling portfolio. Jim Linderman, author and creator of *Vintage Sleaze Art Daily History Blog* has found a picture of early day Bettie in the magazine book “Buxie”.<sup>2</sup> Linderman does mention that this magazine is acutely rare. A side project that should be considered is to find these rare magazines. Who knows what treasures are hiding in the pages of the magazine? Once the early photographs of Bettie’s portfolio are located (that Tibbs created); they should be inspected and undergo restoration if there are any damages found.

Tibbs took the early pictures to help with Bettie’s portfolio. The camera club is known for Bettie’s first modeling jobs. Cass Carr was in charge of a few different photography clubs. Bettie Page was a secretary in New York City, and on weekends she would attend the photo sessions. The club photos were non-commercial, and for personal use. Many early photographs of Bettie are probably in your grandpa’s attic. Authors of the book *Bettie Page: The Life of a Pin-Up Legend* requests, “The authors solicit your help for a second volume of this book.” Essex and Swanson ask questions like if they have any unpublished work of her, unusual collectables, tapes, posters,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mari, M. (2012). *Bettie Page Reveals All*. USA: Music Box Films

<sup>2</sup> Linderman, J. (unknown). *Vintage Sleaze*. retrieved from <http://vintagesleaze.blogspot.com/2012/08/rare-bette-page-of-week-early-portrait.html#.VHkKtYs0yS1>

anything of her.<sup>3</sup> If the authors do receive photography from the members of the camera club, the items might have to undergo a preservation plan immediately. A theory is that the photos are damaged or just forgotten in a shoebox is because the club was for amateurs. These photos are known because of photographer interviews.

A member who attended many of the club sessions was Art Amsie. He is mentioned in many different biographies when it mentions early modeling of Bettie Page. A local newspaper interviewed Art Amsie about his 200,000 pictures of pin-up girls.<sup>4</sup> The newspaper mentioned the grand-opening of his shop in Alexandria, Virginia. His collection is maintained in the National Glamour Archives. The most recent interview was by Jeff Bagato, author of *Last Year's Models* in the Washington City Paper.

Amsie defines the archives as "a museum of classical pinup and glamour illustrations holding the embodiment of feminine attraction. And a little bit of really innocent voyeurism, along with some humor." But there's really no museum. And it's not "national" at all, as far as public viewing goes, because you need an appointment to get in, although Amsie does get orders from all over the world through his Web site. By his own admission, the National Glamour Archives exists to do justice to his collection: "This is for the glorification of Art Amsie," he says impishly. "This is a self-fulfilling effort."<sup>5</sup>

Besides the four newspaper articles and the sentence in the book *Real Bettie Page: The Truth About the Queen of Pinups*, there is no other documentation on the National

---

<sup>3</sup> Essex, K. Swanson, J.L.(1996). *Bettie Page:The Life of a Pin-Up Legend*, California: General publishing group, inc.

<sup>4</sup> Author Unknown.(1976). *Art Amsie:King of the Pin-Ups*. Tucson Daily Citizen. October 13, 1976. retrieved at <http://www.newspapers.com/image/24112905/?terms=Art+amsie>

<sup>5</sup> Bagato, J. (2001). *Last Year's Models*. Washing City Paper. retrieved from <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/21254/last-years-models>

Glamour Archives. The website that was given to make appointments is not functioning. The next person to research should try to find the Art Amsie pinup collection.

As Bettie became popular and one of the main models in the Cass Carr's concords Photography clubs, she moved onto Robert Harrison's magazines. Robert Harrison was a publisher and published the men's magazines: *Wink, Titter, Beauty Parade, Eyeful, Flirt, and Whisper*.<sup>6</sup> Bettie Page would comment in interviews that Harrison was known to have an obsession in taping all of the models breasts. Many pictures of Bettie in Harrison's magazines were spoofs like "Gal and a Gorilla" in *Beauty Parade* magazine. Sadly, Harrison's men's magazines did not survive after the 1960's like Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*. Today, People are able to buy Harrison's magazines on Amazon.com. Blog writer Richard Perez noted in his entry "How Robert Harrison helped shape Irving Klaw: part 1" that Irving Klaw got the idea to send fetish pictures from Harrison. Harrison would have themed photos like long-haired women in handcuffs and his own models. Many models who worked with Robert Harrison worked with Irving Klaw.<sup>7</sup>

Irving Klaw worked with his sister Paulette Klaw. They had a mail service that patrons would write in their requests, and the Klaws would fulfill their needs by sending them through a mail order service. They started off by sending head shots of Hollywood stars; then, business grew when clients demanded different types of photos. Bettie Page's most recognizable work is when she modeled for Irving Klaw. Paula Klaw was

---

<sup>6</sup> Essex, K. Swanson, J.L.(1996). *Bettie Page: The Life of a Pin-Up Legend*, California: General publishing group, inc.

<sup>7</sup> Perez, R. (2014). Fethistory. blogspot. retrieved from <http://fethistory.blogspot.com/2014/07/how-robert-harrison-helped-shape-irving.html>

interviewed by Gloria Leonard in 1980 and said that a high-profile client that financed the models fees, costumes, ropes, and bought the photographs was named John. Paula would not disclose any more information than the name John. The Klaws were allowed to keep the negatives and the rights to reprint and sell to other customers.<sup>8</sup> Paula Klaw explained that the business took off by posting ads in Harrison's girlie magazines. The ads would give options for the movie or just stills from the film. The brother and sister business started in the 40's until Irving's death in 1966. They had to stop the business in 1963 for being convicted of selling pornography in a federal court. In the interview:

GL: You fought it and you won.

PK: We won, but we made some stupid mistakes in the winning. We agreed with the judge to destroy all the material. I am now sorry we did.

GL: How have you been able to revive your still rather extensive collection?

PK: Well, I had one set that I kept and some of it I had recopied. I did destroy the negatives but I have duplicated a lot of it. I think about it all the time and I can hear our lawyer say, "You know, your freedom is at stake. "

GL: What I don't understand is, if you won, and were at liberty, theoretically, to resume your business why did you have to destroy all the material?

PK: This happened before we won. The judge said and he would tell the jury and if we agreed to destroy the material, things would be on our side ... this was in his quarters in the back room. Before the judge talked to the jury about deciding the case you know – before they went and to make the judgment, the judge told our lawyer, "Look, suppose he agrees to destroy everything and if he's convicted, I will see there will be no sentence."<sup>9</sup>

Paula still has the collection that she saved and added to since she kept going with the business. Paula has a cataloging system that involves numbers. She did not get into detail about the metadata but assured that she can pull anything up in her collection.

Paula Klaw's negatives of Bettie Page are rare since most of them have been destroyed to avoid prosecution. Bettie walked away from modeling before the 60's, and

---

<sup>8</sup> Leonard, G. (1980). *High Society*. retrieved from <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2013/05/interview-about-irving-klaw-interview-with-paula-klaw.html>

<sup>9</sup> Leonard, G. (1980). *High Society*. retrieved from <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2013/05/interview-about-irving-klaw-interview-with-paula-klaw.html>

was not seen or heard of until a few decades later. Ben Marks, author of *The Woman Behind Bettie Page* an article in the Collectors Weekly, found Chuck Keefe who has a one of a kind collection on Bettie Page prints. Chuck Keefe developed an interest in Bettie in the late seventies when he purchased many magazines from an estate sale. Keefe started to recognize Bettie since she was popping up in the eighties in cartoons, paintings, and other art mediums. As he researched on the mystery pin-up girl, he stumbled upon the Klaw's business. The business was still operating when Keefe called and he directly spoke to Paula. Keefe offered to pay double to have Paula sign the prints of the Bettie Page negatives, so it shows it came from the originals. Paula's son, Ira Klaw, made the prints as she signed under a condition. The condition was not to sell the photos until she passed away. Paula passed away, and during that time, Bettie Page was found alive. Keefe read that Bettie Page was in California autographing art that Olivia had done. Keefe wanted her signature next to Paula Klaw's signature. Mark Roesler, the CEO of the company CMG Worldwide that represents the living and the deceased celebrities' intellectual-property rights, questioned the authenticity of Keefe's photographic collection. Keefe proved that his collection was accurately rare with signatures with the help of Ira Klaw. In 2006, Bettie Page signed as many photos as she could with Roesler only charging \$50 per signature. Chuck Keefe has a rare collection with Paula and Bettie's signature on prints from the original negatives. The process took him almost three decades for this collection.<sup>10</sup> Keefe had a website that supposedly showcased his collection, so that anybody can view it. The website no longer works. During the search to find him, 73 exact matches and 27 possible matches came up in the

---

<sup>10</sup> Marks, B. (2011). *The Woman Behind Bettie Page*. Collectors Weekly. retrieved from <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/the-woman-behind-bettie-page/>



white pages. Besides the article in *Collectors Weekly*, there is no evidence that this collection exists. On the way back machine, I found a post on his personal blog on wanting to exhibit his collection dating on 5/10/2011, but none of the comments or external links work.<sup>11</sup> This collection would be fascinating to experience once it is found.

Some collections of Bettie Page art are known to the public. Robert Blue, an artist from the seventies liked to paint women from his dad's fetish magazines. Blue's 25 paintings are replicas of the photos of Irving Klaw's stills of Page's bondage days. Essex and Swanson mentioned in their book that Blue did a one-time Betty Page exhibit in 1997 of his life's fetish obsession.<sup>12</sup> In the recent 2012 film "*Bettie Page Reveals All*," a recording of Robert Blue was found with him saying, "I was thinking I was doing something that was part of the modernist movement of painting by taking a taboo photograph, blow it up bigger than life-size, and put it in a high end gallery."<sup>13</sup> Blue died in 1998 at the age of 52 and his Bettie Page painting collection has been sold in auctions, to private collectors, and to museums. This particular collection was split up and auctioned privately.

The issues of finding Bettie Page are that she left the public eye and was not represented. Bettie was revived to a new generation fan club by comic man Dave Stevens. Stevens is the creator of the comic book *Rocketeer*. Stevens's cartoons reintroduced Bettie Page, and she became popular with a new fan club. Stevens was a friend of Bettie and knew she was 1955 "Miss January" in *Playboy*, and it was his idea to introduce Hugh Hefner to Bettie. Parties at the *Playboy Mansion* are usually recorded

---

<sup>11</sup> Keefe, C. (2011). Unknown. retrieved from:  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20120428121844/http://word2chuck.wordpress.com/>

<sup>12</sup> Essex, K. Swanson, J.L.(1996). *Bettie Page:The Life of a Pin-Up Legend*, California: General publishing group, inc.

<sup>13</sup> Mari, M. (2012). *Bettie Page Reveals All*. USA: Music Box Films

with many photographers, but due to Bettie's private life, it was a closed event. It was Hugh Hefner who had Bettie represented by agent Mark Roesler.<sup>14</sup> The playboy picture was taken by Bunny Yeager. Bunny Yeager published and exhibited all her photos. Yeager has a working website that was last updated and copyrighted in 2012. Sadly, she also passed away in May of 2014.<sup>15</sup> Yeager's photos of Bettie are most published and recognized by the public.

The theory that was developed when trying to search for the collections was that Bettie Page was not supposed to be archived due to the type of modeling. Her modeling started for personal and non-commercial use. During the high-paying peak of her modeling in the fifties, she was working for Klaw. Klaw was under many investigations by Senator Estes Kefauver for selling of pornography. Eric Schaefer, author of *Plain Brown Wrapper: Adult Films for the Home Market, 1930-1969*, mentioned that the Kefauver hearings were about juvenile delinquency that linked pornography to trafficking narcotics.<sup>16</sup> Klaw did not sell porn because all the models were clothed in underwear or lingerie. Klaw produced pin-up photos, bondage, spanking, 8mm films, but absolutely no pornography imagery.

The material would have been difficult, if not impossible, to classify as obscene. But during the hearing the material was linked to sex crimes perpetuated by teenagers. One result of the hearings was the passage of a law that made it illegal to transport pornography over state lines - thus bringing the FBI, which had been largely on the sidelines, more fully into the porn wars.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> <sup>14</sup> Mari, M. (2012). *Bettie Page Reveals All*. USA: Music Box Films

<sup>15</sup> Author unknown. (2012). *Bunny Yeager Photography*. Retrieved from <http://www.bunnyyeager.net>

<sup>16</sup> Schaefer, E. (2007). *Looking Past the Screen*. USA: Duke University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Schaefer, E. (2007). *Looking Past the Screen*. USA: Duke University Press.

The theory is if items were not destroyed or confiscated, then the items were hidden to prevent prosecution. Now, many of the owners of the collections have passed on so further investigation needs to take action to first find the collection and its owner. Secondly, the collection can be assessed to determine the future of it. Lastly, a plan can be thought up and brought into action of a short term and long term plan for preservation.

## Bibliography

- Bagato, J. (2001). *Last Year's Models*. Washing City Paper. retrieved from <http://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/articles/21254/last-years-models>
- Essex, K. Swanson, J.L.(1996). *Bettie Page:The Life of a Pin-Up Legend*, California: General publishing group, inc.
- Foster, R.(1999). *The Real Bettie Page: The Truth About the Queen of the Pin-Ups*. New York: Citadel Press, Kensington Pub.
- Keefe, C. (2011). Unknown. retrieved from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120428121844/http://word2chuck.wordpress.com/>
- Leonard, G. (1980). *High Society*. retrieved from <http://www.americansuburbx.com/2013/05/interview-about-irving-klaw-interview-with-paula-klaw.html>
- Linderman, J. (unknown). *Vintage Sleaze*. retrieved from <http://vintagesleaze.blogspot.com/2012/08/rare-bette-page-of-week-early-portrait.html#.VHkKtYs0yS1>
- Mari, M. (2012). *Bettie Page Reveals All*. USA: Music Box Films
- Marks, B. (2011). *The Woman Behind Bettie Page*. Collectors Weekly. retrieved from <http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/the-woman-behind-bettie-page/>
- Perez, R. (2014). Fethistory. blogspot. retrieved from <http://fethistory.blogspot.com/2014/07/how-robert-harrison-helped-shape-irving.html>
- Schaefer, E. (2007). *Looking Past the Screen*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Author Unknown.(1976). *Art Amsie:King of the Pin-Ups*. Tucson Daily Citizen. October 13, 1976. retrieved at <http://www.newspapers.com/image/24112905/?terms=Art+amsie>
- Author unknown. (2012). *Bunny Yeager Photography*. Retrieved from <http://www.bunnyyeager.net>