

Title: Fritz Spiess fonds

Accession No. 2006.011

Dates of creation: 1941 - 1987

Physical description: 12.5 m of textual records

7,835 photographs

- 3,288 prints
- 500 composite/retouched packages
- 2,889 (2,795 acetate/polyester negatives, 94 glass negatives)
- 1,158 slides/transparencies

64 audio recordings

- 49 – ¼ in. tapes
- 15 audiocassettes

337 video recordings

- 12 – 1 in. reels (ca. 33 min.)
- 217 – ¾ in. cassettes (ca. 44.8 hrs.)
- 74 VHS cassettes (ca. 42.8 hrs.)
- 6 Betacam SP cassettes (ca. 2.3 hrs.)
- 26 Digital Betacam cassettes (ca. 26.5 hrs.)
- 2 CVC videocassettes (ca. 20 min.)

153 cinefilms

- 10 reels 8 mm col. production elements (ca. 5 min.)
- 9 reels 16mm b&w release print (ca. 79 min.)
- 1 reel 16mm b&w duplicate negative (ca. 30 min.)
- 2 reels 16mm col. negative (ca. 27 min.)
- 1 reel 16mm col. duplicate negative (ca. 27 min.)
- 3 reels 16mm col. interpositive (ca. 75 min.)
- 1 reel 16mm col. workprint (ca. 22 min.)
- 84 reels 16mm col. release print (ca. 32.73 hrs.)
- 3 reels 16mm magnetic soundtrack (ca. 100 min.)
- 1 reel 35mm col. interpositive (ca. 11 min.)
- 38 reel 35mm col. release print (ca. 44 min.)

1,945 sets of cinex strips

- 865 sets of 35mm b&w Cinex strips
- 400 sets of 35mm col. Cinex strips
- 680 strips 16mm Cinex (col., b&w)

115 graphic materials

- 102 unframed items
- 13 framed items

artifacts

books (266 titles)

periodicals (38 titles)

Administrative history/biographical sketch: Fritz Spiess is best known for his work as a cinematographer and television commercial director. Born into a family of photographers in Germany in 1925, Spiess received his own box camera at the age of 6. He apprenticed for his father, Karl, prior to WWII and later studied with renowned photographer Tita Binz in Heidelberg. After earning a Master's in Photography from the Munich Photo School in 1949, Spiess ran his own studio specializing in portrait and industrial photography. He and his wife, Gunild, emigrated to Canada in 1951, and went on to have two daughters and one son.

The family settled in Toronto, and Spiess began working for Panda Photography. His photos appeared in such major publications as *Life* and *Mayfair*, but in 1956 he was given an opportunity to shoot a film about children with cerebral palsy; his work garnered positive attention, and he was offered a job as a cameraman. During his long career, Spiess worked with five production companies: S.W. Caldwell Ltd. (1954 – 1958); Robert Lawrence Productions Ltd. (1958 – 1967); TDF Film Productions Ltd. (1967 – 1976), Schulz Productions (1976 to 1987) and Rawi-Sherman Films Inc. (1987 – 1991).

Spiess recognized the need for an organization to promote and foster Canadian cinematographers and their craft, and he became a charter member and early President of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC), providing its membership with technical information and professional expertise. Over his career, Spiess was instrumental in assisting younger people in the business through his affiliations with the CSC, International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 644, and the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE). Spiess also taught courses and gave lectures at Ryerson Polytechnic University and Sheridan College.

Spiess shot over 3,000 commercials for more than 300 advertisers, and he earned a number of national and international awards. The Canadian commercial film industry recognized his achievements with the Fritz Spiess Award in 1979, and Spiess was the only cinematographer to receive all three of the CSC's non-competitive awards (the Fuji award, the Kodak New Century award, and the Bill Hilson award). He also won international awards at Cannes and Venice. Spiess' artistry and generosity earned him the nickname "the dean of Canadian cinematography".

Fritz Spiess died in Toronto in 1998.

Sources:

- Steven Bulger Gallery—Estate of Fritz Spiess Portfolio
http://www.bulgergallery.com/dynamic/fr_artist_cv.asp?ArtistID=109

- Dillon, Mark. "Celebrating the art of Fritz Spiess." *Playback* (December 17, 1999).
<http://www.playbackonline.ca/articles/magazine/19991217/27584.html?word=fritz&word=spiess>
- Staff. "Fritz Spiess: Canada's 'dean of cinematography' remembered." *Playback* (March 23, 1998).
<http://www.playbackonline.ca/articles/magazine/19980323/21045.html?word=fritz&word=spiess>
- Thorvaldson, Patricia. "Commercials as fine art." *Cinema Canada* (Summer 1977): 50 -53.
- Withrow, Pat. "A giant with a camera." *Creativity* (March 1977): 7, 25.
- Chamberlain, Art. "Cameraman Fritz Spiess, 73." *The Toronto Star*, March 16 1998, B7.

Scope and content: This fonds includes six series, divided by format. These are: Textual Material, Photographic Material, Audio Material, Video Material, Cinefilm/Cinex, and Artifacts.

The first series, Textual Material, is chiefly made up of scripts, storyboards, production files, research files, correspondence, meeting notes, equipment files, technical drawings, bylaws, cast/crew lists, contracts and proposals.

The second series, Photographic Material, represents all periods of Spiess' career, from his early portraiture and fine art images to his industrial/commercial work to production stills documenting his cinematographic work. This series is divided into two subseries: PH.1-239 & PH.610-977 and PH.240-609.

The third series, Audio Material, includes soundtrack production elements and music.

The fourth series, Video Material, includes high quality dubs of the various versions of the finished commercial productions, as well as production elements for those commercials shot on video.

The fifth series, Cinefilms/Cinex, includes finished release prints of the various commercials as well as a number of short films by Spiess.

The sixth series, Artifacts, consists of examples of the tools that Spiess used to teach his students, as well as mementos of his involvement with the CSC.

This fonds includes 1,635 examples of Spiess' commercials with most of the major local and national clients represented. Clients/Products advertised include:

7-Up
AT&T
Avon

Bank of Montreal
The Bay
Black Magic Chocolates

Black and Decker Tools
Buick
Canada Post
Canada Savings Bonds
Canadian Tire
Carling Brewery
Coca-Cola
Continental Bank
Dairy Queen
Dial Soap
Canada Homes
Chrysler
CIBC
CNCP
Dare Cookies
Eastern Sound
Eaton Centre
Ford Motor Co.
General Motors Canada/GMC
Great West Life
Gulf Oil
GWG Jeans
Hitachi
HIV/AIDS prevention PSA
Imperial Oil/Esso
International Nickel
Jello
Kelloggs

Kotex
Lipton Teas
Maclean's
Mattel Toys
McDonalds Restaurants
Micron Skates
Miracle Food Mart
Molson Breweries
Monarch Cakes
Oldsmobile
Ontario Hydro
Ontario Lottery
Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
Oscar Myer Wieners
Panasonic
Pontiac
Rustoleum
Sears
Sherwin Williams paint
Timex
Uniroyal
Xerox

As well there are AV materials relating to his full length film

Die Thomaner (1941)
Don't Hurry Past: Cerebral Palsy

Rights and access:

- A) There are no access restrictions.
- B) Material is subject to copyright restrictions; please consult the archivist.

Language:

English

Finding aids:

Finding aid is available
Link:

Last modified:

Subject headings:

