



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the American Watercolor
Society Records, 1867-1977, bulk
1950-1970, in the Archives of American Art

Erin Corley

Funding for the processing of this collection was
provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

May 09, 2007

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	American Watercolor Society records
Identifier:	AAA.amerwate
Date:	1867-1977 (bulk 1950-1970)
Extent:	3.8 Linear feet
Creator:	American Watercolor Society
Language:	English
Summary:	The records of the American Watercolor Society measure 3.8 linear feet and date from 1867 to 1977, with the bulk of the material dating from 1950 to 1970. The collection provides scattered documentation of the operations and activities of one of the oldest continuously operating artists' organizations in the United States and includes records of its administration and history, membership, and exhibitions, as well as printed material and photographs.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The American Watercolor Society loaned material for microfilming in 1968, and, in 1978, donated some of this material. The bound volume of the record of works shown in annual exhibitions, 1897-1904, was microfilmed in 1972 and subsequently donated in 1978 by the American Antiquarian Society.

Separated Material

Originals of loaned material, including additional exhibition materials, correspondence, photographs, and administrative records were returned to the American Watercolor Society after microfilming. Loaned material is available on reels N68-8 through N68-10, but is not described in the container listing of this finding aid.

Related Material

Additional records may be available by contacting the American Watercolor Society.

Alternative Forms Available

The bound volume of the record of works shown in annual exhibitions, 1897-1904, is available on 35 mm microfilm reel 497 at Archives of American Art offices, and through interlibrary loan. Material lent for microfilming is available on 35mm microfilm reels N68-8 through N68-10 at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

The collection was initially received as a loan and microfilmed on reels N68-8 through N68-10. Portions of the loan were later donated and received preliminary processing. The bound volume of the record of works shown in annual exhibitions was loaned and microfilmed on reel 497, and also later donated. The entire collection was fully merged, processed, arranged, and described by Erin Corley in 2007 with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

American Watercolor Society records, 1867-1977, bulk 1950-1970. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The American Watercolor Society records are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Historical Note

The American Watercolor Society still functions as an active artists' organization that was founded in New York City on December 5, 1866 as the American Society of Painters in Water Colors. The first president was Samuel Colman. Initially, election to membership was very selective, consisting of active members and honorary members (those living outside of New York City). From the beginning, the most important activity of the organization was its annual exhibition, open to both members and non-members, the first being held in the winter of 1867-1868.

The Society's first six annual exhibitions were held jointly with the National Academy of Design at the Academy's galleries. Beginning with the seventh exhibition, the society initiated independent annual exhibitions until 1899. The early exhibitions were very successful, and the society showed work from many prominent American and European artists such as Thomas Eakins, Abbott Thayer, Eugene Delacroix, and John Ruskin. 1888 marked the first year that the society awarded prizes to the best works. By the early 1900s the society had developed a program for exhibitions that included a jury of selection and jury of awards.

In 1903 the society was officially incorporated as the American Water Color Society, to "advance the art of water color painting in this country." Membership classifications changed slightly and artists were either classified as active (professional artists) or associate members. By 1904 the society was struggling financially, and annual exhibitions were held at various spaces around New York City. In 1905 the society established annual rotary (traveling) exhibitions. From 1922 to 1931, the society combined exhibition venues with the New York Water Color Club (founded in 1890), and in January 1941 these two organizations merged under the name of the American Watercolor Society and created a new constitution. This merger brought many female artists who were active in the New York Water Color Club to the society which had previously not recognized many women painters. In 1941 the society established their headquarters in one room at the National Academy of Design's new building where they also held annual exhibitions in the galleries.

Frederic Whitaker, a painter and businessman, became president in 1949 and brought a renewed vigor to the society. He reinstated traveling exhibitions, created new committees, and increased the number of exhibition awards. He also established an office in the Flatiron building and hired an Executive Secretary. After he resigned in 1956, the society experienced a period of financial troubles that were immediately addressed when Mario Cooper became president in 1959. Offices were moved back to the National Academy, several new officers were appointed, and after a period of fiscal austerity, a scholarship program and central awards fund were established. In 1967 the society had its 100th annual exhibition and also had an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, entitled, "Two Hundred Years of Watercolor Painting In America, An Exhibition Commemorating The Centennial of the American Watercolor Society." Over the next few years the society organized and exchanged exhibitions with other countries, including Canada, Mexico, England, and Australia. Mario Cooper remained president until 1986, and the American Watercolor Society remains an active artists' organization today.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the American Watercolor Society measure 3.8 linear feet and date from 1867 to 1977, with the bulk of the material dating from 1950 to 1970. The collection provides scattered documentation of the operations and activities of one of the oldest continuously operating artists' organizations in the United States and includes records of its administration and history, membership, and exhibitions

Records documenting the founding, history, and operations of the society are found in the administration and history series. Included are written histories and material on the 1941 merger with the New York Water Color Club, including an updated Constitution and By-Laws. Also found here are reports, committee documents, administrative correspondence, records of participation in national art events, and financial records.

The membership records include a membership roster notebook, dating from 1953-1961, lists of members, member biographies, and correspondence regarding membership. The society's exhibition files include a bound volume of the record of works shown in the annual exhibition from 1897 to 1904, as well as files on a few other annual exhibitions and exchange exhibitions with other countries. These files contain scattered correspondence, price lists, exhibition checklists and printed material.

A small amount of printed material in the collection includes a booklet entitled, *Water-Color Painting: Some Facts and Authorities in Relation to Its Durability*, distributed by the society in 1868, as well as news clipping about events and exhibitions, newsletters, and other published items. Photographs are of members, jurors, events, painting demonstrations, and artwork.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 5 series:

- Series 1: Administration and History, 1891-1970 (Box 1-2; 1.1 linear feet)
- Series 2: Membership, 1941, 1951-1960s (Box 2; 0.7 linear feet)
- Series 3: Exhibition Files, 1867-1910, 1955-1975 (Box 2-3, BV02; 1.2 linear feet)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1868, 1943-1972 (Box 3; 6 folders)
- Series 5: Photographs, circa 1940-1977 (Box 3-4; 0.5 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Art -- Societies, etc. -- New York (State) -- New York
Watercolor painting -- 19th century -- United States
Watercolor painting -- 20th century -- United States
Watercolor painting, American
Watercolorists

Types of Materials:

Photographs

Names:

American Society of Painters in Water Colors
American Water Color Society
New York Water Color Club

Container Listing

Series 1: Administration and History, 1891-1970

1.1 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

This series consists of records documenting the administration and history of the American Watercolor Society. Included is a draft of "A History of the American Watercolor Society: 1866-1950" and related notes, written by Frank Gervasi. Gervasi was appointed the first Historian of the society in 1949. Also found are documents about the American Watercolor Society Information Center which was established in the early 1950s to provide information about art and artists to the general public. Other documents include leases for offices and exhibition space at the National Academy of Design, as well as legal documents, voting ballots, and recollections by J. Scott Williams regarding the society's merger with the New York Water Color Club.

Additional records include the reports of Presidents Frederic Whitaker and Mario Cooper; records of the Gifts and Bequest Committee and Regional Committees; correspondence regarding publicity and other general administrative correspondence relating to board activities, events, the society's participation in national arts events, and other issues. Also included are specific files on the society's participation in the Fine Arts Federation of New York and Artists for Victory, Inc., and a file of several lists of awards given by the American Watercolor Society.

Scattered financial records in this series include account books and three general ledgers, monthly treasurer's reports, annual financial statements, other financial reports on matters such as catalog sales and exhibition expenses. Also found are tax documents, records of paid bills, payments, and bank deposits, and correspondence regarding financial issues. During the period covered by this documentation, Edgar A. Whitney and Cathy Altwater served as treasurer.

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 1, Folder 1	History of the American Watercolor Society, 1950-1952
Box 1, Folder 2	American Watercolor Society Information Center, circa 1954
Box 1, Folder 3	Certificate of Incorporation (photocopy), 1902-1903
Box 1, Folder 4	Constitution & By-Laws, 1940
Box 1, Folder 5	Lease Agreements with National Academy of Design, 1950-1967
Box 1, Folder 6	New York Water Color Club Merger Documents, 1929-1942
Box 1, Folder 7	"Comments on Water Color Club Merger", by J. Scott Williams, 1952
Box 1, Folder 8	Voting Ballots for New York Water Color Club Merger, 1940
Box 1, Folder 9	President's Reports to A. W. S. Members, circa 1950-1963

Box 1, Folder 10	Administrative Notebook (disbound), 1950s
Box 1, Folder 11	Gifts and Bequests Committee, 1954-1956
Box 1, Folder 12	Regional Committees, 1954-1956
Box 1, Folder 13-14	Publicity Correspondence, 1955-1967 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 15	General Administrative Correspondence, 1937-1970
Box 1, Folder 16	Press Releases, 1955-1959
Box 1, Folder 17	Annual Meeting and Dinner, 1954-1956
Box 1, Folder 18	Fine Arts Federation of New York, 1962-1963
Box 1, Folder 19	Artists for Victory, Inc., 1943
Box 1, Folder 20	Lists of Awards given by American Watercolor Society, 1952-1960, 1966
Box 1, Folder 21	Corporate Resolutions, circa 1955-1963
Box 1, Folder 22	Ballots (blank), 1954, 1963-1967
	Financial Files
Box 1, Folder 23	Record & Account Book, 1891-1898
Box 1, Folder 24	General Ledger, 1960-1964
Box 1, Folder 25	General Ledger (disbound), 1966-1967
Box 1, Folder 26	General Ledger (disbound), 1967-1968
Box 1, Folder 27-28	Treasurer's Reports, 1957-1966 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 29	Annual Financial Statements, 1960-1966
Box 1, Folder 30	Various Financial Reports, 1957-1966
Box 1, Folder 31-32	Tax Information, 1958-1966

(2 folders)

Box 1, Folder 33-34	Paid Bills, 1961-1963, 1966 <i>(2 folders)</i>
Box 1, Folder 35-36	Records of Payments, 1957-1960 <i>(2 folders)</i>
Box 2, Folder 1	Bank Deposit Lists, 1956-1960
Box 2, Folder 2	Correspondence, 1943, 1954-1966
Box 2, Folder 3	Notes, circa 1959-1960

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Series 2: Membership, 1941, 1951-1960s

0.7 Linear feet (Box 2)

Included in this series is a membership roster notebook (disbound) for the period of 1953 to 1961 which includes a notebook page for each artist, arranged alphabetically. The information on each artist includes name, address, years that they paid membership dues, and the amount paid. The notebook is arranged with active members listed first, followed by categories for artist's whose status had changed, including life members (who no longer had to pay dues), deceased members, dropped members, and resigned members. Also found is a separate list of former members as of 1951 also listing the years that they were active, and lists of membership issues that had to be addressed by the board, such as new members and inactive or dropped members. This series also contains many member biographies; questionnaires that members filled out for the American Watercolor Society Information Center. Information on these forms includes name, address, family background, education, memberships, awards, etc. Some artists also attached additional biographical materials such as news clippings and resumes. Also found in this series are signed membership agreements after the merger with the New York Water Color Club in 1941, and correspondence regarding membership questions and status, payment of dues, and membership resignations.

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 2, Folder	Membership Roster (disbound)
Box 2, Folder 4-7	Active Members, A-Z, 1953-1961 <i>(4 folders)</i>
Box 2, Folder 8	Life Members, 1953-1961
Box 2, Folder 9	Deceased Members, 1953-1961
Box 2, Folder 10	Dropped Members, 1953-1961
Box 2, Folder 11	Resigned Members, 1953-1961
Box 2, Folder 12	Lists of Former Members, 1951
Box 2, Folder 13	Membership Lists for Board Action, 1960s
Box 2, Folder 14-20	Membership Biographies, A-Z, 1950s <i>(7 folders)</i>
Box 2, Folder 21	Signed Membership Agreements, 1941
Box 2, Folder 22	Correspondence Regarding Membership and Dues, 1954-1963

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Series 3: Exhibition Files, 1867-1910, 1955-1975

1.2 Linear feet (Box 2-3, BV 02)

This series consists of files relating to exhibitions organized by the American Watercolor Society. Included is a large bound volume containing the record of works shown in the annual exhibitions from 1897 to 1904. This record lists the registry and catalog number, title of work, name and address of the artist, the owner and price, agent, and shipping company. A few loose letters, notes, and lists were also found within the pages of this book and have been placed in a separate folder. Exhibition catalogs found here are for the society's annual exhibitions prior to 1910, including the catalog for the first exhibition, held in 1867-1868 as a joint exhibition with the National Academy of Design. A few catalogs from this run are missing, and found here are catalogs from 1867-1869, 1875, 1878-1881, 1883-1897, 1899-1902, 1904, and 1907-1910.

Other files in this series are for various exhibitions held between 1955 and 1975, but do not document every exhibition held during this period. Files are for both annual exhibitions and exchange exhibitions held with the Canadian Water Color Society, the Art Institute of Mexico, and others. Files may contain correspondence about the exhibition, exhibition checklists, price lists, lists of award recipients and donors, receipts, exhibition announcements, clippings, and other printed material. Traveling exhibitions are also covered here. This series also contains exchange exhibition ballots (probably for the Australian exchange exhibition), jury selection records, and miscellaneous items from other exhibitions.

Items are arranged chronologically.

Box 2, Folder 23	Record of Works Shown in Annual Exhibitions (bound volume), 1897-1904 (See BV02)
Box 2, Folder 24	Loose Items from Record of Works Shown in Annual Exhibitions, 1897-1904
Box 2, Folder 25-28	Exhibition Catalogs, Annual Exhibition, 1867-1889 (5 folders)
Box 3, Folder 1-6	Exhibition Catalogs, Annual Exhibition, 1890-1910 (6 folders)
Box 3, Folder 7	88th Annual Exhibition, 1955
Box 3, Folder 8	91st Annual Exhibition, 1958
Box 3, Folder 9	Royal Society Painters in Water-Colours and American Watercolor Society Exchange Exhibition, 1961-1962
Box 3, Folder 10	92nd & 93rd Annual Exhibitions, 1958-1961
Box 3, Folder 11	94th Annual Exhibition, 1961-1962
Box 3, Folder 12	95th Annual Exhibition, 1962-1963
Box 3, Folder 13	96th Annual Exhibition, 1963

Box 3, Folder 14	97th Annual Exhibition, 1963-1964
Box 3, Folder 15	100th Annual Exhibition, "200 Years of Watercolor Painting in America", 1964-1967
Box 3, Folder 16-17	Art Institute of Mexico and American Watercolor Society Exchange Exhibitions, 1968-1970 (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 18	Canadian and American Water Colors Societies Exhibition, 1971-1972
Box 3, Folder 19	Australian Exchange Exhibition, 1974-1975
Box 3, Folder 20	Exchange Exhibition Ballots, 1974
Box 3, Folder 21	Exhibition Jury Selection, 1965-1966
Box 3, Folder 22	Miscellaneous Exhibition Documents, 1956-1970
Box BV02, Folder	Record of Works Shown in Annual Exhibitions (bound volume), 1897-1904 (See also Box 2, F23)

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1868, 1943-1972

6 Folders (Box 3)

Scattered printed material includes a booklet entitled *Water-Color Painting: Some Facts and Authorities in Relation to Its Durability*, printed by the American Society of Painters in Water-Colors in New York in 1868. This publication was co-edited by A. F. Bellows, William Hart, C. P. Cranch, John M. Falconer, and Gilbert Burling. Also found in this series are news clippings about events, exhibitions, and featured members of the society, newsletters distributed to members, and two issues of *American Artist* which include several articles about watercolor painting. There are also a few reproductions of artwork from an unidentified publication.

Items are arranged chronologically within each folder.

Box 3, Folder 23	Publication, <i>Water-Color Painting</i> , 1868
Box 3, Folder 24-25	News Clippings, 1943-1962 (2 folders)
Box 3, Folder 26	Newsletters, 1962-1965
Box 3, Folder 27	<i>American Artist</i> Magazine, 1970, 1972
Box 3, Folder 28	Reproductions of Artwork, circa 1950s

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Series 5: Photographs, circa 1940-1977

0.5 Linear feet (Box 3-4)

Photographs are of events, members, exhibitions, and artwork. Photographs of events include dinners, award presentations, and exhibition openings. None of the photographs of juries or events are labeled. There are group photographs of jury members and photographs of members, both professional portraits and photographs of artists in their studio, arranged alphabetically by artist's last name. Of note are photographs of Don Stone, Charles Hawes, and Tom Nicholas giving painting demonstrations at the annual exhibition in 1966. This series also contains numerous photographs of watercolors exhibited in shows; almost all are labeled with the artist's name and any awards that were received for the painting on the back of the photograph. Photographs of watercolors are arranged alphabetically by the artist's last name.

Box 3, Folder 29-30	Photographs of Members, A-Z, circa 1940-1960 <i>(2 folders)</i>
Box 4, Folder 1	Photographs of Juries, 1950s
Box 4, Folder 2	Photographs of Painting Demonstrations, 1966
Box 4, Folder 3	Photographs of Events, circa 1950s
Box 4, Folder 4-9	Photographs of Watercolors, circa 1955-1977 <i>(6 folders)</i>
Box 4, Folder 10	Negatives of Photographs of Events, circa 1950s
Box 4, Folder 11	Slides of Unidentified Exhibition, circa 1960

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