



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the William Merritt Chase Papers, circa 1890-1964, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie L. Ashley

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

2014 May 3

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	William Merritt Chase papers
Date:	circa 1890-1964
Identifier:	AAA.chaswill
Creator:	Chase, William Merritt, 1849-1916
Extent:	0.3 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English.
Summary:	The papers of New York painter and art instructor, William Merritt Chase, measure 0.3 linear feet and date from circa 1890 to 1964. Papers include a resolution of the Art Club of Philadelphia on Chase's death, letters, writings by Chase consisting of typescripts of lectures and lecture notes, blank postcards primarily depicting reproductions of artwork, a scrapbook, and photographs of Chase, his family, homes, and studios, and photographs of works of art.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were received in a series of accessions between 1969 and 2010. A portion was loaned for microfilming by Robert S. Chase and Chapellier Galleries in 1969. Roger Storm, the widower of Chase's daughter Helen, donated lectures and speeches, a 1912 letter, and photocopies of a dinner menu and photos of artwork in 1969. Art collector Fred D. Bentley gave photographic copy prints of Chase's summer home, studio and art school. D. Frederick Baker, the author of the Chase catalogue raisonné, gave two letters, two postcards, the Chase family scrapbook, vintage photographs, and blank postcards in 2010. Baker received the material from Chase's estate via Chase's grandson, Jackson Case Storm.

Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming. Reel N69-115 includes an additional family scrapbook, undated, containing photographs of Chase, his wife and children, a notice of sale of the Chase house in Shinnecock Hills, N.Y. designed by Stanford White, and photographs of the house. Found on reel N69-119 are circa two hundred photographs of Chase at work, his wife, his studios in Philadelphia and on 5th Avenue and 10th Street New York City, and numerous snapshots of characters in a tableau vivant that include his family, friends, Mary S. Moore Cross, and others. Reel N69-137 contains letters from Chase to his wife during his travels abroad, one note from John Singer Sargent requesting the use of Chase's studio for the famous party Sargent gave for Isabella Stewart Gardner in 1890, and a six-page typescript, "Reminiscences of a Student," by F. Usher De Voll, and photographs of Chase's studio. Loaned materials were returned to the lenders and are not described in the collection container inventory.

Available Formats

The collection was digitized in 2014 and is available via the Archives of American Art's website.

Material lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels N69-115, N69-119, N69-137 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The William Merritt Chase papers were donated in a series of accessions between 1969 and 2010, and some of the material was microfilmed at some point after receipt. All previously filmed and unfiled accessions were merged, fully processed, arranged and described by Stephanie L. Ashley in 2014, and the collection was digitized in 2014, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

William Merritt Chase papers, circa 1890-1964. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical / Historical

William Merritt Chase (1849-1916) was one of America's most prominent painters and art instructors in New York, New York and Shinnecock, Long Island, during the late 19th century. One of the first Impressionist landscape painters in the U. S, Chase was also a highly accomplished portrait and still life painter.

Born in Indiana, Chase lived in New York and St. Louis, Missouri, before traveling to Europe and studying at the Royal Academy in Munich. After returning to New York in 1878, he taught at the Art Students League until 1896. His studio in the Tenth Street Studio building became an important gathering place for artists, students and patrons. Chase was also a member of the Tile Club whose members shared an interest in the decorative arts and sought to have their designs translated into ceramic tiles, from 1877-1887.

Chase became one of the most important teachers of American artists around the turn of the century. He opened the Shinnecock Hills Summer Art School in 1891 and taught there until 1902, living in a house at Shinnecock designed by Stanford White. In 1896 he opened the Chase School of Art and also taught at the Brooklyn Art Association in 1887, and 1891-1896, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts from 1896-1909.

Chase was a member of the National Academy of Design, and was president of the Society of American Artists from 1885 to 1895.

Scope and Contents

The papers of New York painter and art instructor, William Merritt Chase, measure 0.3 linear feet and date from circa 1890 to 1964. Papers include a resolution of the Art Club of Philadelphia on Chase's death, letters, writings by Chase consisting of typescripts of lectures and lecture notes, blank postcards primarily depicting reproductions of artwork, a scrapbook, and photographs of Chase, his family, homes, and studios, and photographs of works of art.

Letters include a photocopy of a 1901 letter signed by 28 students of the Shinnecock Summer School thanking Chase for a painting; a 1903 postcard to Mr. Harold R. Shiffer from his aunt; a 1912 letter to Chase signed by 32 pupils of the Art Students League thanking him for his efforts on their behalf and acknowledging his "qualities of sympathy, interest, and an understanding of our individual needs;" a 1915 note from an unidentified writer; a 1920 letter to Chase's wife Alice, from Gertrude Abbey, wife of Edwin Austin Abbey, referencing a tile possibly created by Edwin Abbey that Mrs. Chase owns; a 1935 postcard to Chase's daughter Helen from an unidentified writer; and a 1964 letter to Helen Storm from Ala Story in which Story describes a Chase exhibition that he is organizing and apologizes for having given a sketchbook of drawings owned by Helen to the Morgan Library.

Writings include 4 sets of lecture notes (one labeled as being notes for a lecture at Shinnecock), which are a combination of annotated typescripts and handwritten pages, and a typescript of a 1906 "Talk on the Old Masters by Mr. Chase" for the New York School of Art. Also found is a notebook with handwritten notes on a talk Chase gave to students in Philadelphia, presumably at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Writings by others consist of a six-page typescript entitled "Reminiscences of a Student," by F. Usher De Voll, describing his experiences of Chase as a teacher.

Postcards (blank) include 3 reproductions of works of art by Chase, 8 reproductions of works of art by other artists, and 2 scenic views.

A Chase family scrapbook consists of mounted prints, primarily cyanotypes, that document Chase's travels to Rome, Milan, Gibraltar and the Loire Valley, and visits to major monuments, and also includes images of Chase and his family at leisure during their travels, as well as five family portraits.

Photographs of the Chase family include one of Chase with his son, Dana, and one of Chase with his wife, Alice, both undated. Other family members and friends are generally unidentified but do include Virginia Gerson and possibly Alice Gerson. Also found are four portraits of Chase, four photographs of Chase in his studio, a copy print of students at the Shinnecock Art School in circa 1895, and a copy print of an 1880 Tile Club trip up the Hudson River. In addition to circa 1960 copy prints, photographs include a variety of vintage prints such as albumen cabinet cards, silver gelatin prints, and a tintype.

Arrangement

Due to the small size of the collection, the papers are arranged as 1 series.

- Series 1: William Merritt Chase Papers, circa 1890-1964 (0.3 linear feet.; Box 1, OV 2)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Study and teaching
Art, American
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Art Club of Philadelphia
Art Students League (New York, N.Y.) -- Faculty
De Voll, F. Usher, 1873-1941
Shinnecock Summer School of Art -- Faculty

Occupations:

Art teachers -- New York (State) -- New York

Functions:

Artists' studios -- New York (State)

Container Listing

Series 1: William Merritt Chase Papers, circa 1890-1964

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 2)

Arrangement: Papers are arranged by type and in chronological order (when known) thereafter. Circa 1960 dates indicate the estimated date of photocopies and copy prints.

Available Series is scanned in entirety.

Formats:

Box 1, Folder 1	Art Club of Philadelphia Resolution on Death of Chase, 1916
Box 1, Folder 2	Dinner Menu and Guest List (1897) Photocopy, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 3	Letters, 1901-1964
Box 1, Folder 4	Writings and Notes by Chase, circa 1890-circa 1911
Box 1, Folder 5	Writings and Notes by Chase, 1906
Box 1, Folder 6	Writings and Notes by Chase, Notebook, circa 1896-circa 1909
Box 1, Folder 7	Writings by Others, circa 1900
Box 1, Folder 8	Postcards (Blank), circa 1890-circa 1910
Box 1, Folder 9	Scrapbook, Chase Family, circa 1900 Notes: Oversized material housed in OV 2
Box 1	Photographs
Box 1, Folder 10-11	Chase Family, circa 1890-circa 1910 Image(s) Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 12	Chase Home, Interior circa 1895, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 13	Chase Portraits, circa 1900
Box 1, Folder 14	Chase Studio, circa 1895, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 15	Chase in Studio circa 1895, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 16	Students at Shinnecock Art School circa 1895, circa 1960

Box 1, Folder 17 [Tile Club Trip up the Hudson River in 1880, circa 1960](#)

Box 1, Folder 18 [Works of Art by Chase, circa 1960](#)

Box 1, Folder 19 [Works of Art \(Photocopies\), circa 1960](#)

Oversize 2 [Scrapbook, Chase Family \(Oversized material scanned with Box 1, Folder 9\)](#)

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