



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Leon Dabo Papers, circa 1888-1969, in the Archives of American Art

Jayna M. Josefson

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provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Leon Dabo papers
Date:	circa 1888-1969
Identifier:	AAA.daboleon
Creator:	Dabo, Leon, 1868-1960
Extent:	1.2 Linear feet
Language:	The collection is in English, French, and German
Summary:	The papers of painter Leon Dabo date from circa 1888 to 1969 and measure 1.2 linear feet. The collection consists of biographical materials, scattered correspondence, research files relating to the paintings of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, printed materials, photographs, and works of art. Also found is a paint palette and brushes reportedly owned by Whistler and a walking stick.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Leon Dabo papers were donated in several installments by his widow, Stephanie Ofenthal Dabo from 1969 to 1972. A photograph of Dabo taken by Peter Juley was a gift from an unknown donor in 1963.

Available Formats

Portions of this collection are available on 35 mm microfilm reels 677, 692, D388, and 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 Leon Dabo papers were partially microfilmed in several increments onto reels 677, 692, D388, and N69-137. In 2013, the papers were merged and described by Jayna Josefson with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Preferred Citation

Leon Dabo papers, circa 1888-1969. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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Biographical / Historical

French-born Leon Dabo (1868-1960) was a tonalist painter active in New York. He is known for his landscapes of the Hudson River Valley, influenced by James Abbott McNeill Whistler.

The eldest child of artist Ignace Scott Dabo and Madeleine Dabo, Leon Dabo was born in France around 1868. To avoid the Franco-Prussian War, the family left France and settled in Detroit, Michigan where Ignace worked as a decorative artist. Leon Dabo moved to New York City to work to support his family after the death of his father, with the goal of sending his brother Theodore Scott Dabo to study art. Ultimately, Dabo focused on his own painting and studied in Paris, Munich and London. In London, he became acquainted with James Abbott McNeill Whistler who became a strong influence on Dabo. After returning to New York City in 1890, he kept a studio in Brooklyn and exhibited throughout the city. During World War I, Dabo served in the British and French military detecting German accents. Later, he served as an interpreter for the United States. Dabo married Jennie Ford in 1889 and had two children, Madeleine and Leon. After Jennie's death, he married Stephanie Ofenthal. Leon Dabo died in 1960 in New York City.

Scope and Contents

The papers of painter Leon Dabo date from circa 1888 to 1969 and measure 1.2 linear feet. The collection consists of biographical materials, scattered correspondence, research files relating to the paintings of James Abbott McNeill Whistler, printed materials, photographs, and works of art. Also found is a paint palette and brushes reportedly owned by Whistler and a walking stick.

Biographical materials include biographical sketches and resumes, certificates, membership and military records. Also found is a poem written for Dabo by Helen Hays Whitney and material relating to Dabo's brother, Theodore Scott Dabo. Correspondence is scattered and includes letters written between Leon and T. Scott Dabo with the Detroit Museum of Art concerning their art. Research files contain printed material, a letter, and annotated photographs of works of art relating to Dabo's verification of forgeries of Whistler. Printed materials include clippings, a speech, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and English and German art publications including articles about Dabo and Whistler. Photographs include portraits and snapshots of Dabo and others, including one taken of Dabo by Peter Juley, and of works of art. Group photographs depict Dabo's wife, his military service during World War I, and an alumni dinner of the Académie Julian. The papers include fourteen oil studies, a sketch by Dabo, and an unsigned caricature of Dabo.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 6 series.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1905-circa 1967 (0.1 linear feet; Box 1-2, OV4)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1905-1935, 1969 (1 folder; Box 1)
- Series 3: Research Files, circa 1940-circa 1950 (0.1 linear feet; Box 1, OV5)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1903-1965 (0.3 linear feet; Box 1-2, OV4)
- Series 5: Photographs, 1910-1947 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1-2, OV4)
- Series 6: Artwork and Artifacts, circa 1888-circa 1920 (0.4 linear feet; Boxes 1-3, artifacts 6-7)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art, American -- New York (State) -- New York
Muralists

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Sketches

Names:

Académie Julian -- Photographs
Dabo, Theodore Scott, 1877-1928
Detroit Museum of Art
Whistler, James McNeill, 1834-1903

Occupations:

Landscape painters

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1905-circa 1967

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1-2, OV4)

Scope and Contents: Found are biographical sketches and resumes, certificates, gift acknowledgements, membership materials, copies of Dabo's military records, and a poem written for Dabo by Helen Hays Whitney. Also found are scattered records relating to T. Scott Dabo including clippings, a name plate, and an exhibition list.

Box 1, Folder 1	Biographical Sketches, Notes, and Resumes, circa 1960-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 2	Certificates and Awards, circa 1918-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 3	Gift Acknowledgement, circa 1960
Box 1, Folder 4	Membership Materials, 1959
Box 1, Folder 5	Military Records, 1919
Box 1, Folder 6	"Herbs and Apples," by Helen Hays Whitney, 1963
Box 1, Folder 7	Theodore Scott Dabo Materials, 1905-circa 1940
Box 2	Oversized Certificates and Awards, circa 1918-circa 1967
Oversize 4	Oversized Certificates and Awards, circa 1918-circa 1967

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1905-1935, 1969

1 Folder (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Found is scattered correspondence, most of which is between Leon Dabo, T. Scott Dabo, and the Detroit Museum of Art concerning art by both brothers. There is one letter from Emile Cordonnier to Leon Dabo written in French. One letter is from the Director of the Musuems of France to Mrs. Dabo concerning a recent gift of her husband's artwork, "Sainte Odile" (1898).

Box 1, Folder 8 Correspondence, 1905-1935, 1969

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Series 3: Research Files, circa 1940-circa 1950

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1, OV5)

Scope and Contents: Found are materials relating to the forgery of James Abbott McNeill Whistler works of art. Included are clippings and reproductions of works of art; a letter from Sam Codman requesting that Dabo verify a forgery of a Whistler painting; and photographs of works of art with annotations and notes.

Box 1, Folder 9	Printed Materials, circa 1940-circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 10	Correspondence, 1950
Box 1, Folder 11	Annotated Photographs, circa 1940-1950
Oversize 5	Oversized Annotated Photographs, circa 1940-circa 1950

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1903-1965

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1-2, OV4)

Scope and Contents: Found are clippings and full issues of art publications, exhibition announcements and catalogs, and a published speech about Dabo by Alexander Harvey. The art publications include articles about Dabo or Whistler and some are in German.

Box 1, Folder 12	Clippings, 1942
Box 1, Folder 13	Speech, circa 1930
Box 1, Folder 14	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs, 1906-1965
Box 1, Folder 15-17	Art Publications, English, 1903-1934
Box 1, Folder 18-19	Art Publications, German, 1903-1910
Box 2	Oversized Exhibition Announcement, 1906-1965
Oversize 4	Oversized Exhibition Announcement, 1906-1965

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Series 5: Photographs, 1910-1947

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1-2, OV4)

Scope and Contents: Found are portraits and snapshots of Leon Dabo; group photos including Leon Dabo; and photos of works of art by Dabo with annotations including exhibition information. Photos of Leon Dabo depict the artist painting in his studio, painting en plein air, in military uniform, posing with World War I airplanes, and with his wife. One photograph was taken by Peter Juley in circa 1910. Group photos include a photo of a dinner of alumni from the Académie Julian at the Beauvort Hotel around 1914. Other photos show Dabo and others with British World War I airplanes.

Box 1, Folder 20	Portraits of Leon Dabo, 1910-1938
Box 1, Folder 21	Snapshots and Group Photos of Leon Dabo, 1919-1947
Box 1, Folder 22	Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1920-1943
Box 2	Oversized World War I Photos, circa 1916
Oversize 4	Oversized Académie Julian Alumni Photo, circa 1914

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Series 6: Artwork and Artifacts, circa 1888-circa 1920

0.4 Linear feet (Box 1-3, artifacts 6-7)

Scope and Contents: Found are scattered artworks, including 14 oil studies on canvas, board, and wood--likely copies of classical figures copied from The Louvre; a sketch by Leon Dabo; and an unsigned caricature of Dabo depicting the artist painting en plein air in military uniform. Also found are artifacts including a paint palette and three paint brushes believed to have belonged to James Abbot McNeill Whistler and a walking stick.

Box 1, Folder 23	Caricature of Leon Dabo, by Unknown, 1918
Box 6	Palette and Paint Brushes, circa 1888
Box 7	Walking Stick, circa 1900
Box 2	Oversized Sketch by Leon Dabo, circa 1920
Box 3, Folder 1-4	Oil Studies by Leon Dabo, circa 1890

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