



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Arthur Wesley
Dow Papers, circa 1826-1978 (bulk
1879-1922), in the Archives of American Art

Kathleen Brown

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was provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Arthur Wesley Dow papers
Identifier:	AAA.dowarth
Date:	circa 1826-1978 (bulk 1879-1922)
Extent:	1.3 Linear feet
Creator:	Dow, Arthur W. (Arthur Wesley), 1857-1922
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of Arthur Wesley Dow measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1826-1978, with the bulk of the material dating from 1879-1922. The collection documents aspects of the life and work of the landscape painter, printmaker, photographer and educator. Papers include correspondence, diaries, writings, lecture notes, clippings, catalogs, ephemera, artwork, and photographs.

Administrative Information

Provenance

Material on reels 1027 and 1033-1034 were lent for microfilming by the Ipswich Historical Society, 1975. The diary on reel 1079 was lent by the Society for Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1976. Dow's grand-niece, Mrs. George N. Wright, donated material in 1976, and lent the photographs for microfilming in 1977. Additional material was received from Frederick Moffatt in 1989, who had obtained them in preparation for his book *Arthur Dow* (1977).

Separated Material

The Archives of American Art also holds microfilm of material lent for microfilming (reels 1027, 1033-1034, and 1079) including biographical material, correspondence, manuscripts, printed material, and one diary. Reel 1271 contains group photographs taken at the Académie Julian, Paris, as well as unidentified group photographs, some of the photographs and are available at the Ipswich Historical Society. All other loaned materials were returned to the lenders and are not described in the collection container inventory.

Location of Originals

Several photographs, including images of Dow, Dow family members, group photographs of classes, and landscapes, are copy prints. The original vintage prints for some of these copies, particularly group photographs of classes and landscapes, are available at the Ipswich Historical Society. The location of the other original vintage prints is unknown.

Related Material

Also found at the Archives of American Art are the William H. Elsner papers relating to Arthur Wesley Dow, which include color photographs of Dow's works of art and correspondence regarding Dow between Frederick Moffatt and Rudolph Schaeffer.

Alternative Forms Available

The papers of **Arthur W. (Arthur Wesley) Dow** in the Archives of American Art were digitized in 2008, and total 1,378 images.

Materials that generally have not been scanned include duplicates, negatives, and modern copy prints of vintage photographs as well as photographs of works of art. For some publications, such as catalogs, only the cover and title pages have been scanned.

Materials lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels 1027, 1033-1034, 1079, and 1271 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

The collection received preliminary processing after being donated in 1975 and 1989, and before portions of it were microfilmed on reels 1208-1209. The collection was fully processed, arranged, and described in accordance with archival standards by Kathleen Brown in 2008 as part of the Terra Foundation for American Art Digitization Grant.

Preferred Citation

Arthur Wesley Dow papers, circa 1826-1978 (bulk 1879-1922). Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The bulk of the collection has been digitized and is available online via the Archives of American Art's website. Use of material not digitized requires an appointment.

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Biographical Note

Arthur Wesley Dow, landscape painter, printmaker, photographer, and influential art educator, was born in Ipswich, Massachusetts on April 6, 1857, the eldest son of Mary Patch and David Dow. As a young man, he showed interest in the colonial history of Ipswich and together with Reverend Augustine Caldwell, he produced the serial *Antiquarian Papers* from 1875 to 1880, which featured Dow's drawings of local colonial architecture. It was Caldwell who advised him to pursue formal art instruction and in 1880 Dow began studying in the Boston studio of James M. Stone.

Like many aspiring American artists of his generation, Dow traveled to Paris for further art instruction. Between 1884 and 1889, the artist alternated between spending time in Paris, where he had enrolled in the Académie Julian, and in Brittany where he painted landscapes *en plein air*. During this period he produced landscape paintings that were accepted into the Paris Salon and exhibited to moderate success back in the United States.

Shortly after his return to Ipswich, Dow took a studio in Boston, where he hoped to attract students and began an extremely fertile and successful period as an art educator. He began studying Japanese art, particularly the compositional elements employed in Japanese prints, which he synthesized with Western art techniques and utilized in teaching composition and design. In addition to seeing students in his Boston studio, he began the Ipswich Summer School of Art, which continued into 1907. Pratt Institute hired Dow as an art instructor in 1895 and he remained there until 1904, when he was appointed the Director of Fine Arts of the Columbia University Teacher's College, a position he retained until his death in 1922. Between 1897 and 1903, he also taught at the Art Students League.

In 1899 his seminal book, *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers*, was published. *Composition* illustrated Dow's teaching method, which focused on the compositional elements of line, *notan* (a Japanese word for the balance of light and dark in a composition) and color. The book underwent several printings and art schools across the United States adopted the Dow method. Max Weber, Georgia O'Keeffe and the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn were among the artists who personally benefited from Dow's instruction. Through his teaching, publications, and public speeches, Arthur Wesley Dow played an important role in shaping modern American art.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Arthur Wesley Dow measure 1.3 linear feet and date from 1826 to 1978, with the bulk of the materials dating from 1879 to 1922. Correspondence consists of two folders, which contain a few letters from Dow to his family during his stints painting in Brittany and to and from Columbia University's Teachers College, as well as letters from his wife (then fiancée) Minnie Pearson Dow to her mother and friend while she, too, was studying painting abroad. There is also a folder of typescript and handwritten notes on Dow's correspondence, the majority of which is not in this collection, attributed to his biographer, Arthur Warren Johnson. Diaries include travel diaries kept by Dow and his brother Dana F. Dow during their "trip around the world" in 1903-1904. Publications, clippings, exhibition catalogs, announcements for Dow's Ipswich Summer School of Art and a new edition of his book *Composition: A Series of Exercises in Art Structure for the Use of Students and Teachers* are found within printed materials. Notes and writings include a substantial number of handwritten manuscripts and typescripts of Dow's lectures on art and art history during his tenure as the Dean of Fine Arts at the Teachers College of Columbia University. There are a few examples of works of art, including prints from the *Ipswich Prints* series, and a pencil sketch of a colonial home, similar to those that appeared in the serial *Antiquarian Papers*.

This collection is particularly rich in vintage prints of Dow portraits as well as family and group photographs, although it does not include any of the artist's landscape cyanotypes. Among the nineteen vintage prints are several platinum prints including a portrait by the renowned Pictorialist photographer Gertrude Käsebier and an atmospheric image of Dow taken at the Grand Canyon by Mrs. Fannie Coburn, the mother of another well-known Pictorialist photographer, Alvin Langdon Coburn. There are also three portraits by Herbert Hess and a photogravure of Dow by Kenneth Alexander that was used in the publication announcement for the second edition of *Composition*. Group photographs include an albumen print of fellow artist Henry R. Kenyon with Dow in his Ipswich studio, with classmates at the Académie Julian in Paris, and with his own students during a crafts class at his Ipswich Summer Art School. There are also several modern copy prints of vintage photographs from other collections as well as photographs of artworks by Dow and his contemporaries.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 6 series:

- Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1885-1934 (Box 1; 3 folders)
 - Series 2: Diaries, 1861-1904 (Box 1; 6 folders)
 - Series 3: Notes and Writings, circa 1904-1977 (Box 1; 0.4 linear feet)
 - Series 4: Printed Materials, circa 1826-1978 (Boxes 1-2; 5 folders)
 - Series 5: Photographs, circa 1880-1977 (Boxes 1-2; 0.6 linear feet)
 - Series 6: Artwork, circa 1879-1906 (Box 1; 3 folders)
-

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 -- Massachusetts
Art educators -- Massachusetts
Photographers -- Massachusetts
Printmakers -- Massachusetts
Works of art

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Photographs

Names:

Académie Julian -- Photographs
Hess, Herbert A. (Herbert Arthur)
Ipswich Summer Art School -- Photographs
Kenyon, Henry Rodman, 1861-1926 -- Photographs
Käsebier, Gertrude, 1852-1934

Occupations:

Landscape painters -- Massachusetts

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1885-1934

(Box 1; 3 folders)

Found in this series are two folders of letters sent to and from Arthur Wesley Dow and letters sent to Minnie Pearson, Dow's future wife. Arthur Wesley Dow's correspondence consists of letters from Dow to his family, primarily his younger brother Dana. Most of his letters were written during his stints painting in Pont Aven and they include references to his efforts to produce paintings for the Paris Salons. Four of these letters are photocopies and one is an original. Other letters include a letter from Dow to Dr. Russell, Dean of the Teacher's College at Columbia University. According to Dow's travel diary, he received a telegram from Russell, officially appointing him as the head of the Department of Fine Arts; this letter may be in response to this appointment. The correspondence of Minnie Pearson consists of a long letter from her mother and a friend named "Eva" that were sent to the future Mrs. Dow, while she was studying art in Brittany. Finally the file "Notes on Dow Letters" consists of an annotated chronology of Dow correspondence, which includes synopsis of letters that are no longer extant, compiled by the Dow biographer, Arthur Warren Johnson.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 1	Arthur Wesley Dow, circa 1885-1919 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 2	Minnie Pearson (Dow), circa 1888 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 3	Notes on Dow Letters (by Arthur Warren Johnson), circa 1925-1934 Image(s)

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Series 2: Diaries, 1861-1904

(Box 1; 6 folders)

This series is comprised of diaries by Dow and family members. The diary of Mary Patch Dow, Arthur Dow's mother, contains entries written between 1861 and 1865 noting visits and correspondence sent and received, particularly from her nephew Charles H. Dow, who died while fighting in the Civil War. There are few references to her son, although there are brief entries concerning his early education and childhood illnesses.

The remaining diaries record a world trip undertaken by Dow, accompanied by his wife and brother Dana Fitz Dow, among others. The party departed Boston in early September 1903 and headed westward through Canada to San Francisco where they sailed for Japan, which the party explored for three months before continuing on to China, India, Egypt, Greece and parts of Europe. Dow's travel diary provides an account of the early stages of the trip, most importantly the period spent in Japan, where he visited ancient temples, tea houses, museums, art schools, viewed private collections, and purchased prints. His brother's travel diaries, four in total, document the entire trip and record his impressions of the cities and sites that the party visited, paying particular interest to landscaped gardens and native plants. Sketches and plans of garden layouts can be found amidst his entries.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 4	Mary Patch Dow Diary, 1861-1865 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 5	Arthur W. Dow Travel Diary ("Trip Around the World"), 1903 September-December Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 6	Dana F. Dow Travel Diary, Volume I, 1903 September-December Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 7	Dana F. Dow Travel Diary, Volume II, 1904 January-February Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 8	Dana F. Dow Travel Diary, Volume III, 1904 February-April Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 9	Dana F. Dow Travel Diary, Volume IV, 1904 April-June Image(s)

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Series 3: Notes and Writings, circa 1900-1977

(Box 1; 0.4 linear feet)

Found in this series are manuscripts and typescripts of Dow's lectures and writings about art, lecture notes, syllabi, price lists, as well as a handwritten fragment of his last will and testament. Most of the notes in this series document Dow's lectures on art appreciation, composition and art historical topics ranging from prehistoric art to Japanese art that he delivered to his classes at Teacher's College Columbia University. A folder of miscellaneous lectures also includes class syllabi and suggested arts curriculum. Writings attributed to others include research notes by Dow biographer Dr. Frederick Moffatt and handwritten copies of papers attributed to a Mr. Heatois on "The Spirit of the Later Renaissance" and "The Monumental Arts."

The Notes and Writings series is arranged into 2 subseries:

- 3.1: Notes and Writings by Arthur Wesley Dow, circa 1900-1922
- 3.2: Notes and Writings by Others, circa 1918-1977

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

3.1: Notes and Writings by Arthur Wesley Dow, circa 1900-1922

Box 1, Folder 10	Last Will and Testament Fragment, circa 1900-1922 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 11	Lectures on Art in Gardens, 1904-1905 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 12	Lectures on The Art of the Cave Men, 1913-1916 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 13	Lecture on Buddhist Art, 1905 December 11 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 14	Lectures on Color, 1904-1906 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 15	Lecture on Willow Patterns, 1904 November 21 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 16	Lectures on Egyptian Art and Architecture, 1905-1915 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 17	Lectures on Italian Art: The Great Florentines, 1905-1908 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 18	Lecture series on Italian Art, circa 1905-1908 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 19	Lectures on Japanese Art, 1905-1917

[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 20 Lectures on Romanesque and Gothic Art and Architecture, circa 1907-1913
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 21 Lectures on Romanesque and Gothic Art and Architecture, circa 1907-1913
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 22 Writings on Teaching Art, circa 1908-1912
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 23 Notes on Composition and Principle of Fine Arts, circa 1905-1922
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 24 Miscellaneous Curricula, Syllabi and Lecture Notes, circa 1905-1922
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 25 Price Lists, 1915-1916
[Image\(s\)](#)

3.2: Notes and Writings by Others, circa 1918-1977

Box 1, Folder 26 Copy of Papers by Mr. Heatois, 1918-1919
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 1, Folder 27 Frederick Moffatt Research Notes on Dow, circa 1970-1977
[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 4: Printed Material, circa 1826-1978

(Boxes 1-2; 5 folders)

This series contains exhibition catalogs, clippings, ephemera, and publications, including 50 volumes of *Antiquarian Papers*, a four page monthly serial published from 1879-1886, that focused on the history of Ipswich, Massachusetts. Dow published this serial with his mentor Augustine Caldwell and produced woodcuts of the town's historical buildings that were used as illustrations. They represent some of his earliest artistic efforts.

The bulk of the exhibition catalogs pertain to exhibitions of Dow's paintings and prints in solo and group exhibitions. However there is also a catalog of objects from the Freer Collection that were exhibited at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 1913. The sections "Oriental Paintings" and "Miscellaneous Oriental Objects" are heavily annotated in pencil. Ephemera includes a postcard of Dow's summer studio in Ipswich, Massachusetts, announcements for the Ipswich Summer School of Art and publication of new editions of his book *Composition*, among other items.

This series has been scanned in its entirety. In most cases, only the cover and title page of exhibition catalogs have been scanned.

Box 1, Folder 28	<i>Antiquarian Papers</i> , 1879-1885 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 29	Clippings, circa 1880-1930 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 30	Ephemera, circa 1826-1977 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 31	Exhibition Catalogs, 1895-1917, 1975 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 32	Oversize Publication, <i>The Visitor</i> , 1890 May (Housed in box 2) Image(s)
Box 2	Oversize Publication, <i>The Visitor</i> , 1890 May (Scanned with box 1, folder 32)

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Series 5: Photographs, circa 1880-1977

(Boxes 1-2; 0.6 linear feet)

This series includes vintage photographs and copy prints of portraits and group shots, as well as color snapshots and photographs of works of art. Notable among the nineteen vintage photographs are a platinum print portrait by Gertrude Käsebier and another platinum print of Dow taken at the Grand Canyon by Mrs. Coburn (mother of the Pictorialist photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn). Additionally there are albumen prints of Dow in his Paris studio and with a class of students from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, a carte de visite of Dow and a cabinet card portrait of his wife Minnie Pearson Dow.

Copy prints include duplicate images of the vintage photographs of in this collection as well as additional photographs of landscapes, seascapes, Dow portraits and groups including family members and students. However the majority of the copy prints are reproductions of works of art. The copy prints originally were compiled by Frederick Moffatt as part of his research on Dow, which culminated in an exhibition and catalog, *Arthur Wesley Dow* (Smithsonian Press, 1977).

Copy prints have not been scanned.

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| Box 1, Folder 33 | Portraits of Arthur Wesley Dow, circa 1880-1900
(1 <i>carte de visite</i> and 2 <i>vintage platinum prints</i>)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 34 | Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow by Gertrude Käsebier, circa 1900
(1 <i>vintage platinum print</i> ; housed in box 2)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 35 | Portraits of Arthur Wesley Dow by Herbert Arthur Hess, circa 1900-1903
(3 <i>vintage platinum prints</i>)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 36 | Dow in Studio, circa 1900
(1 <i>vintage print</i> ; housed in box 2)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 37 | Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow by Kenneth Alexander used in announcement for the second edition of <i>Composition</i> , circa 1905
(1 <i>vintage photogravure</i> ; housed in box 2)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 38 | Dow at the Grand Canyon by Mrs. [Fannie] Coburn, 1911
(1 <i>vintage platinum print</i>)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 39 | Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow attributed to James S. Radcliffe, 1913
(1 <i>vintage platinum print</i> ; housed in box 2)
Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 40 | Portrait of Minnie Pearson Dow and Group Photographs with Dow and Others, circa 1894-1919 |

(4 vintage prints)

[Image\(s\)](#)

- Box 1, Folder 41 Académie Julian, Paris, France, circa 1886
(1 vintage print)
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 42 Dow and Henry R. Kenyon in Dow's Ipswich Studio, circa 1890
(1 vintage albumen print; housed in box 2)
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 43 Dow with Class, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, circa 1899
(1 vintage print)
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 44 Dow and Craft Class at Ipswich Summer School of Art, 1902
(1 vintage print)
[Image\(s\)](#)
- Box 1, Folder 45 Copy Prints of Vintage Photographs from Collection, circa 1977
- Box 1, Folder 46 Copy Prints of Dow Family Members, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 47 Copy Prints of Family Gatherings and Classes, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 48 Copy Prints of Landscapes and Seascapes, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 49 Copy Prints of Dow Publications, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 50 Color Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1970
- Box 1, Folder 51 Black and White Photographs of Works of Art, circa 1971
- Box 1, Folder 52-54 Copy Prints of Works of Art, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 55 Contact Sheets: Works of Art, circa 1970s
- Box 1, Folder 56 Negatives: Works of Art, circa 1970s
- Box 2 Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow by Gertrude Käsebier, circa 1900
(Scanned with box 1, folder 34)
- Box 2 Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow by Kenneth Alexander used in announcement for the second edition of *Composition*, circa 1905
(Scanned with box 1, folder 37)

Box 2 Portrait of Arthur Wesley Dow by Radcliffe, 1913
(Scanned with box 1, folder 39)

Box 2 Dow and Henry R. Kenyon in Dow's Ipswich Studio, circa 1890
(Scanned with box 1, folder 42)

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1879-1906

(Boxes 1; 3 folders)

Found in this series are prints from Dow's *Ipswich Prints* series, a set of engraved facsimiles of his woodcuts, ink drawings, and watercolors, that were meant to be used as examples of color and composition for art students. There is also an unsigned and undated pencil drawing of a colonial house.

This series has been scanned in its entirety.

Box 1, Folder 57	Unsigned Pencil Drawing of Colonial House, circa 1879-1885 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 58	<i>Ipswich Prints</i> (second set), 1902 Image(s)
Box 1, Folder 59	Loose Prints, circa 1901-1906 Image(s)

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