



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## A Finding Aid to the Olin Dows Letters, 1938-1949, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Olin Dows letters
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.dowsolin
<b>Date:</b>	1938-1949
<b>Creator:</b>	Dows, Olin, 1904-1981
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This small collection of letters to and from painter and arts administrator Olin Dows measures 0.2 linear feet and dates from 1938 to 1949. The letters primarily document his work as director of the Treasury Relief Art Project, as an administrator for the American Federation of Arts, and his work as a war artist. Much of the correspondence is with arts administrators Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson.

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## Administrative Information

### Provenance

Letters were donated in 1962 by Olin Dows; the provenance of one letter (on microfilm reel 2803) is unknown.

### Related Material

Also at the Archives of American Art is an interview of Olin Dows conducted on October 31, 1963, by Harlan Phillips.

### Alternative Forms Available

The collection is available on 35 mm microfilm reels NDA 14 and 2803 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 collection was microfilmed upon receipt on reel NDA 14. One additional letter was microfilmed on reel 2803. The collection was processed in 2011 by Erin Kinhart.

### Preferred Citation

Olin Dows letters, 1938-1949. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

### Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment.

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## Biographical Note

Olin Dows (1904-1981) was a painter and arts administrator; he primarily lived and worked in Rhinebeck, New York. Dows was born in Irvington-on-Hudson, NY. He graduated from Harvard University in 1926 and also studied at the Yale School of Fine Arts. In 1935 he was appointed director of the Treasury Relief Art Project, funded by the Works Progress Administration. In 1938 he painted a series of murals for the post office in Rhinebeck, NY, and in 1941 painted murals for the post office in Hyde Park, NY. From 1938 to 1941 Dows was on the Board of Directors of the American Federation of Arts. In 1942 he enlisted in the Army Engineers Corps and was commissioned as a war artist, covering the European Theater of Operations. An exhibit of works produced by this project was held in 1944, entitled "The Army at War." Dows was discharged from the army in 1945. A book of his watercolors, *Franklin Roosevelt at Hyde Park*, was published in 1949.

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## Scope and Content Note

This small collection of letters to and from painter and arts administrator Olin Dows measures 0.2 linear feet and dates from 1938 to 1949. The letters primarily document his work as director of the Treasury Relief Art Project, as an administrator for the American Federation of Arts, and his work as a war artist. Much of the correspondence is with arts administrators Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson.

Much of the correspondence is from 1941. Also of note is correspondence relating to the controversy over one of Maurice Sterne's murals for the Justice Department in 1940 and efforts to form a "Corps of Pictorial War Correspondents" in 1942. Some letters include attached documents including exhibition lists, announcements, news clippings, and reports.

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## Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 1 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Olin Dows Letters, 1938-1949 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art and state  
Federal aid to the arts  
Mural painting and decoration, American -- Washington (D.C.)

Names:

American Federation of Arts  
Bruce, Edward, 1879-1943  
Sterne, Maurice, 1878-1957  
Treasury Relief Art Project  
United States. Department of the Treasury  
Watson, Forbes, 1880-1960

Occupations:

Arts administrators

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Olin Dows Letters, 1938-1949

*(Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)*

**Scope and Contents:** Personal and official correspondence relating to such matters as the controversy over one of Maurice Sterne's murals for the Justice Department in 1940; financial problems of the American Federation of Arts; art exhibitions; efforts to form a "Corps of Pictorial War Correspondents" in 1942; activities of the Treasury Department Section for Fine Arts; artists in the war effort; mutual friends; and personal matters. Included are incoming letters as well as a few copies of outgoing letters written by Dows. One undated letter concerns criticism of the National Gallery of Art, particularly by Forbes Watson and Dean Hudnut. Correspondents include Edward Bruce, Forbes Watson, Thomas C. Parker, George Hewitt Myers, Robert Woods Bliss, Bartlett H. Hayes, Jr. and others. Some letters include attached documents including exhibition lists, announcements, news clippings, and reports.

**Arrangement:** Letters are arranged chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 1	Letters, 1938
Box 1, Folder 2-3	Letters, 1939-1940 (2 folders)
Box 1, Folder 4-10	Letters, 1941 (7 folders)
Box 1, Folder 11	Letters, 1942
Box 1, Folder 12	Letters, 1943-1944
Box 1, Folder 13	Letters, 1945-1949
Box 1, Folder 14	Undated Letters, circa 1938-1949

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