



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Stanton Macdonald-Wright
papers, 1907-1973, in the Archives of American Art

Rihoko Ueno

Funding for the processing of this collection was
provided by the Frederick Hammersley Foundation

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Stanton Macdonald-Wright papers
Identifier:	AAA.macdstan
Date:	1907-1973
Extent:	3.1 Linear feet
Creator:	Macdonald-Wright, Stanton, 1890-1973
Language:	Multiple languages The collection is in English, French, and Japanese. English; French; Japanese
Summary:	The papers of Southern California painter Stanton Macdonald-Wright measure 3.1 linear feet and date from 1907 to 1973. The collection contains correspondence with family, friends, and artists, including Morgan Russell, and his wife Suzanne Binon, Michel and Suzanne Seuplor, Ann and John Summerfield, and Bethany Wilson. Also found are writings, six diaries, travel journals, printed materials, and artwork.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Stanton Macdonald-Wright first loaned materials to the Archives of American Art for microfilming in 1964. David Nellis, a gallery owner, gave the Archives the artist's unpublished autobiography in 1978. His widow, Jean Macdonald-Wright, donated additional papers in 1995 in two separate installments.

Separated Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds material lent for microfilming (reels LA 1 and LA 5) including a brochure on the Santa Monica Library murals and six photographs of the panels while in Macdonald-Wright's studio. There is also a 1939 exhibition catalog for "Southern California Art Project" a master's thesis on Macdonald-Wright by Dori Jean Watson (1957), and one scrapbook of photographs, clippings, and other printed materials dating from circa 1910-1964. Lent materials were returned to the lender and are not described in the collection container inventory.

Related Materials

The Archives of American Art holds several collections related to the Stanton Macdonald-Wright papers. There is an oral interview of Stanton Macdonald-Wright conducted 1964 Apr. 13-Sept. 16, by Betty Hoag. There are also Stanton Macdonald-Wright Letters to Alan and Fanny Leslie, the Stanton Macdonald-Wright Collection of photographs, Stanton Macdonald-

Wright Letters to Morgan Russell, Walter Houk Letters from Stanton Macdonald-Wright, and an Oral History of Stanton Macdonald-Wright by Jeanne M. Marshall for the Voice of America Conducted in 1967.

Available Formats

Materials lent for microfilming are available on 35 mm microfilm reels LA1 and LA5 at Archives of American Art offices, and through interlibrary loan.

Processing Information

This collection was processed by Rihoko Ueno in 2014 with funding from the Frederick Hammersley Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Stanton Macdonald-Wright papers, 1907-1973. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

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Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

Stanton Macdonald-Wright (1890-1973) was the creator of a modernist style of painting based on pure spectral color known as chromatic abstraction or "Synchromism." He worked in New York and later primarily in Los Angeles.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright was born in 1890 in Charlottesville, Virginia. In 1900 the family moved to Santa Monica, California where they ran a seaside hotel. A few years later he took courses at the Art Students League in Los Angeles, studying under Warren T. Huges. His older brother was Willard Huntington Wright, a respected art critic who wrote *Modern Painting: Its Tendency and Meaning* (1915), upon which he collaborated with his younger brother Stanton, and *The Future of Painting* (1923), and later became a detective novelist under the name S. S. Van Dine.

At the age of seventeen, Stanton Macdonald-Wright married his first wife and moved to Paris where he immersed himself in European art and studied at the Sorbonne, the Académie Julian, the École des Beaux-Arts, and the Académie Colarossi. While in Europe he also befriended fellow American painter Morgan Russell and the two artists began working closely together. They studied with Canadian painter Percyval Tudor-Hart between 1911 and 1913 and were deeply influenced by their teacher's color theory, which connected the qualities of color to those of music. Together Macdonald-Wright and Russell developed a style of painting based on color and named it "Synchromism." They introduced their work in 1913 at the Der Neue Kuntsalon in Munich and in Paris at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune. These exhibitions helped to establish Synchromism as a major influence in modern art well into the 1920s.

Stanton Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell returned to the United States eager to promote their work and theory. It was not long before the two separated, but both continued to work in the Synchromist style. Together, they held one more Synchromist exhibition in New York in 1916 which received significant critical support. Macdonald-Wright also participated in the prestigious 1916 "Forum Exhibition of Modern American Painters" in New York and exhibited his work at Alfred Stieglitz's famed 291 gallery in New York in 1917. Yet, financial success evaded him.

Macdonald-Wright moved to Santa Monica in 1918, where he taught and served as director of the Los Angeles Art Students League. In 1924 he published his instructive *Treatise on Color*. In 1927 he organized another joint exhibition with Morgan Russell at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where he also exhibited five years later. He exhibited at the Oakland Art Gallery, the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco, Alfred Stieglitz's An American Place gallery in New York, and the Stendahl Galleries in Los Angeles. From 1935 to 1942 Macdonald-Wright served as director of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project for Southern California, followed by a faculty position at the University of Southern California at Los Angeles where he taught for sixteen years.

In the late 1950s, Macdonald-Wright completed the Synchome Kineidoscope, a color and light projecting machine first envisioned by Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell as early as 1913.

Macdonald-Wright traveled extensively throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, spending time in Hawaii, Italy, and Japan. Macdonald-Wright married three times and died in California in 1973, at the age of 83.

This biographical note draws heavily on the Archives of American Art's West Coast Regional Collector Paul Karlstrom's collection description written upon acquisition of the papers.

Scope and Contents

The papers of Southern California painter Stanton Macdonald-Wright measure 3.1 linear feet and date from 1907 to 1973. The collection contains correspondence with family, friends, and artists, including Morgan Russell, and his wife Suzanne Binon, Michel and Suzanne Seuphor, Ann and John Summerfield, and Bethany Wilson. Also found are writings, six diaries, travel diaries, printed materials, and artwork.

Writings consist of drafts of essays, plays, and book manuscripts. There are drafts of *A Treatise on Color* with palettes and color wheels, *The Basis of Culture*, and Macdonald-Wright's autobiography *Bittersweet: An Artist's Life*.

There are six diaries and numerous travel journals. One diary was written in Paris in 1909 in which Macdonald-Wright muses over the aesthetics of art and his color theories. Five additional disbound diaries cover his life from 1939-1973. Travel diaries date from 1959-1972 and cover trips to Italy, Japan, and Hawaii.

Printed material includes a copy of *Les Synchromistes* exhibition catalog, a newspaper clipping, and *The Future of Painting* by Willard Wright. Artwork consists of blueprints for Macdonald-Wright's Synchome Kineidoscope, a color and light projecting machine first envisioned by Macdonald-Wright and Morgan Russell as early as 1913 and finally completed in the late 1950s.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 5 series.

- Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1907-circa 1972 (0.5 linear feet; Box 1)

- Series 2: Writings, 1920-circa 1970 (0.9 linear feet; Box 1-2)
- Series 3: Diaries, 1909-1973 (1.3 linear feet; Box 2-3)
- Series 4: Printed Material, 1913-1967 (0.3 linear feet; Box 3, OV 4)
- Series 5: Artwork, 1969 (0.1 linear feet; Box 3, OV 4)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Color in art
Mural painting and decoration, American -- California -- Santa Monica
Painters -- California -- Los Angeles
Painting, Abstract
Synchromism (Art)

Types of Materials:

Blueprints
Diaries
Essays
Travel diaries

Names:

Russell, Morgan, 1886-1953
Seuphor, Michel, 1901-1999
Summerfield, Anne, 1917-
Summerfield, John, 1917-

Geographic Names:

Hawaii -- description and travel
Italy -- description and travel
Japan -- Description and Travel

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, circa 1907-circa 1972

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

This series consists of personal correspondence with family, friends, and fellow artists. Family correspondence is comprised of letters from Stanton Macdonald-Wright and his brother Willard to their parents describing their difficulties during wartime in London as they establish their careers. There is one folder of letters originally labeled "Willard 1913-1915" (now labelled "from Willard") among the early family correspondence to Macdonald-Wright's parents, but since the letters are signed under various pseudonyms, it is difficult to know for certain which brother is writing. Other correspondents include Morgan Russell and his wife Suzanne Binon, Michel and Suzanne Seuphor, Ann and John Summerfield, and Bethany Wilson. Unless otherwise noted, the bulk of the correspondence consists of outgoing letters written by Macdonald-Wright to various recipients.

Family letters to Macdonald-Wright's parents are at the start of the series. The rest of the correspondence is arranged alphabetically. Undated and miscellaneous correspondence is grouped together at the end of the series.

Box 1, Folder 1	Family Correspondence - Wright, Archibald and Annie, circa 1907-1914
Box 1, Folder 2	Family Correspondence - Wright, Archibald and Annie, 1909-1913
Box 1, Folder 3	Family Correspondence - Wright, Archibald and Annie (letters from Willard), 1913-1915
Box 1, Folder 4	Barthoux, Jules (letters from), 1958-circa 1963
Box 1, Folder 5	Russell, Morgan and Suzanne (Binon), circa 1953-circa 1955
Box 1, Folder 6	Seuphor, Michel and Suzanne (letters from), 1954-1957
Box 1, Folder 7	Seuphor, Michel and Suzanne (letters from), 1958-1966
Box 1, Folder 8	Summerfield, Anne and John, circa 1965-circa 1972
Box 1, Folder 9	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-1964
Box 1, Folder 10	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 11	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 12	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 13	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 14	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967
Box 1, Folder 15	Wilson, Bethany, circa 1963-circa 1967

Box 1, Folder 16

Miscellaneous Correspondence, circa 1942-1968

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Series 2: Writings, 1920-circa 1970

0.9 Linear feet (Box 1-2)

Writings consist of typescript and handwritten drafts of essays, plays, and manuscripts by Stanton Macdonald-Wright. This series includes an untitled manuscript for a novel loosely based on the lives of Stanton and his brother Willard, essays on art, and a notebook of haikus. There are also drafts of *A Treatise on Color* with palettes and color wheels; *The Basis of Culture*, a survey of art around the world; and *Bittersweet: An Artist's Life*, a copy of Macdonald-Wright's unpublished autobiography.

This series is organized chronologically.

Box 1, Folder 17	Handwritten Draft of Untitled Manuscript, circa 1920-circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 18	Typescript Draft of Untitled Manuscript, circa 1920-circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 19	"The Rebirth of the Classical Impulse", 1920
Box 1, Folder 20	"Four Fantastic Satires", circa 1922 Includes only 3 of the 4 plays.
Box 1, Folder 21	Essays on Art, circa 1922-circa 1925
Box 1, Folder 22	<i>A Treatise on Color</i> , 1924
Box 1, Folder 23	Color Wheels and Charts, circa 1924
Box 1, Folder 24	Color Wheels and Charts, circa 1924
Box 1, Folder 25	"The Structure of Art", circa 1930
Box 1, Folder 26	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Glossary and Notes, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 27	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Byzantine and Italy Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 28	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Modernist Art Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 29	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Persia Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 30	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Mesopotamian Races Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 31	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Etruscan, Greco-Roman, and Roman Art Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 32	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> The Italian Renaissance Chapter, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 33	<i>A Basis of Culture</i> Revision Notes, circa 1933
Box 1, Folder 34	Haiku Notebook, 1962-1963
Box 2, Folder 1	<i>Bittersweet: An Artist's Life</i> , circa 1970
Box 2, Folder 2	<i>Bittersweet: An Artist's Life</i> , circa 1970

Box 2, Folder 3

Bittersweet: An Artist's Life, circa 1970

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Series 3: Diaries, 1909-1973

1.3 Linear feet (Box 2-3)

This series includes Macdonald-Wright's extensive diaries. There is one small bound diary from his time in Paris. The disbound diaries, originally in 5 binders, span over three decades and document the artist's experiences in California, excluding his trips abroad. The travel diaries were written on hotel stationery and notebooks during Macdonald-Wright's numerous trips to Hawaii, Japan, and Europe. Prior to their arrival at the archives, portions of the diaries were edited and some pages have sections cut out and repasted on different pages.

The disbound diaries and travel diaries are grouped separately and arranged chronologically within each grouping. The disbound diaries were originally received in five large binders with pages numbered from 1-1502. These pages were removed from the binders and placed in folders arranged by date. The travel diaries come after the disbound diaries.

Box 2, Folder 4	Paris Diary, 1909
Box 2, Folder 5	Disbound Diary 1, 1939 January-March
Box 2, Folder 6	Disbound Diary 1, 1939 March-April
Box 2, Folder 7	Disbound Diary 1, 1939 April-December
Box 2, Folder 8	Disbound Diary 1, 1940
Box 2, Folder 9	Disbound Diary 1, 1941-1943
Box 2, Folder 10	Disbound Diary 1, 1955 December
Box 2, Folder 11	Disbound Diary 1, 1956
Box 2, Folder 12	Disbound Diary 1, 1957 January-April
Box 2, Folder 13	Disbound Diary 2, 1957 April-August
Box 2, Folder 14	Disbound Diary 2, 1957 August-December
Box 2, Folder 15	Disbound Diary 2, 1958 January-May
Box 2, Folder 16	Disbound Diary 2, 1958 August-December
Box 2, Folder 17	Disbound Diary 2, 1959 January-July
Box 2, Folder 18	Disbound Diary 2, 1959 January-July
Box 2, Folder 19	Disbound Diary 3, 1959 July-December
Box 2, Folder 20	Disbound Diary 3, 1960
Box 2, Folder 21	Disbound Diary 3, 1961 January-October
Box 2, Folder 22	Disbound Diary 3, 1961 October-1962 September

Box 2, Folder 23	Disbound Diary 4, 1963 April-October
Box 2, Folder 24	Disbound Diary 4, 1964 April-September
Box 2, Folder 25	Disbound Diary 4, 1965 September-1966 January
Box 2, Folder 26	Disbound Diary 4, 1966 June-October
Box 2, Folder 27	Disbound Diary 4, 1967 June-December
Box 2, Folder 28	Disbound Diary 4 Miscellaneous Writings, 1967-1968 Includes miscellaneous "observations" from 1967 and 1968 grouped together at the end of the disbound diary 4 entries.
Box 2, Folder 29	Disbound Diary 5, 1968 January-April
Box 2, Folder 30	Disbound Diary 5, 1968 May-August
Box 3, Folder 1	Disbound Diary 5, 1968 November-1969 March
Box 3, Folder 2	Disbound Diary 5, 1969 June-August
Box 3, Folder 3	Disbound Diary 5, 1969 November-1970 March
Box 3, Folder 4	Disbound Diary 5, 1970 June-August
Box 3, Folder 5	Disbound Diary 5, 1970 October-1971 April
Box 3, Folder 6	Disbound Diary 5, 1971 May-September
Box 3, Folder 7	Disbound Diary 5, 1971 October-1972 February
Box 3, Folder 8	Disbound Diary 5, 1972 April-July
Box 3, Folder 9	Disbound Diary 5, 1972 September-1973 August
Box 3, Folder 10	Hawaii and Japan Travel Diary, 1959 May-June
Box 3, Folder 11	Japan Travel Diary, 1960 March-August
Box 3, Folder 12	Japan Travel Diary, 1960 September-November
Box 3, Folder 13	Hawaii and Japan Travel Diary, 1961 April-July
Box 3, Folder 14	Japan Travel Diary, 1962 March-June
Box 3, Folder 15	Japan Travel Diary, 1962 October-1963 April
Box 3, Folder 16	Japan Travel Diary, 1963 October-1964 April
Box 3, Folder 17	Japan and Los Angeles Travel Diary, 1964 November-1965 August

Box 3, Folder 18	Hawaii and Japan Travel Diary, 1966 January-1967 June
Box 3, Folder 19	Japan Travel Diary, 1967 September-November
Box 3, Folder 20	Japan Travel Diary, 1968 May
Box 3, Folder 21	Italy Travel Diary, 1968 September-November
Box 3, Folder 22	Japan Travel Diary, 1969 March-May
Box 3, Folder 23	France, Italy, and England Travel Diary, 1969 August-November
Box 3, Folder 24	Italy and London Travel Diary, 1970 April-May
Box 3, Folder 25	Japan Travel Diary, 1970 September-October
Box 3, Folder 26	Japan Travel Diary, 1971 April-May Includes a personal essay titled "Summation at Eighty."
Box 3, Folder 27	France and Italy Travel Diary, 1971 September-October
Box 3, Folder 28	Hawaii Travel Diary, 1972 February-April
Box 3, Folder 29	Hawaii Travel Diary, 1972 July-September

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Series 4: Printed Material, 1913-1967

0.3 Linear feet (Box 3, OV 4)

Printed material consists of one complete copy and one partial copy of the exhibition catalog *Les Synchronistes: Morgan Russell et Stanton Macdonald-Wright Exposition, 1913*, a photocopy of a newspaper clipping, and a hardbound book *The Future of Painting* by Willard Wright.

This series is organized chronologically.

Box 3, Folder 30	<i>Les Synchronistes: Morgan Russell et S. Macdonald-Wright Exposition, 1913</i>
Box 3, Folder 31	<i>The Future of Painting</i> by Willard Huntington Wright, 1923
Box 3, Folder 32	"The Manifeste des Pintres du Groupe: Les Artistes Musicalistes", 1932 Oversized material housed in OV 4.
Box 3, Folder 33	Newspaper Clipping, 1967
Box OV 4	Oversized French Manifesto from Box 3, Folder 32

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Series 5: Artwork, 1969

0.1 Linear feet (Box 3, OV 4)

Artwork consists of blueprints for Macdonald-Wright's *Synchrome Kineidoscope*, a color and light projecting machine that involved multiple projectors and film.

Box 3, Folder 34 *Kineidoscope* Blueprints, 1969
Oversized material housed in OV 4.

Box OV 4 Oversized *Kineidoscope* Blueprints from Box 3, Folder 34, 1969

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