



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Henry Ward Ranger Estate Papers, 1888-circa 1999, bulk 1904-1954, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley

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

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Henry Ward Ranger Estate papers
Date:	1888-circa 1999 (bulk 1904-1954)
Identifier:	AAA.ranghenr
Creator:	Ranger, Henry Ward, 1858-1916
Extent:	1 Linear foot
Language:	English .
Summary:	The estate papers of New York tonalist painter Henry Ward Ranger, measure one linear foot and date from 1888-circa 1999, with the bulk of the material dating from 1904-1954. The collection primarily documents the settlement of Ranger's contested will and the administration of his estate, but also provides scattered biographical information on Ranger's life, provenance information about his work, and documentation of the significance of his estate gift to the National Academy of Design. Records include appraisal information including an estate ledger, correspondence and memoranda including two letters from Ranger, court documents, financial and real estate records, news clippings, and two photographs and eight negatives of Ranger.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by the National Academy of Design in 2018.

Available Formats

A portion of the collection was digitized in 2019 and is available on the Archives of American Art website. Materials which have been digitized include records which provide biographical information about Ranger and provenance information for his artwork, or document his estate gift to the National Academy of Design.

Records which have not been digitized include records documenting the contesting of the will by Edith Ranger and the litigation and criminal investigations which ensued; records documenting individual claims against the will; routine estate records, not related to the purchase and distribution of artwork; and duplicates.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Stephanie Ashley and portions of the collection were digitized in 2018, with funding provided by the Terra Foundation for American Art and The Walton Family Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Henry Ward Ranger estate papers, 1888-circa 1999, bulk 1904-1954. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C., Research Center.

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Biographical / Historical

Tonalist landscape and marine painter, Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916), became a full academician of the National Academy of Design in 1906 and bequeathed his entire residuary estate to the academy. The investment of this substantial gift of nearly \$400,000, known as the Ranger fund, would provide for the purchase of paintings by living American artists, which were distributed or accessioned by the Smithsonian Institution's then National Collection of Fine Arts.

Ranger was born in western New York State and attended Syracuse University for two years before opening a studio in New York City in the mid-1880s. He traveled to Europe and lived in the Netherlands for several years, where he was influenced by the Dutch watercolorists and the Barbizon masters. Ranger was known for his experiments with pigments and colors, his interiors of forests, and marine views of the shoreline in Connecticut, where he spent summers and helped to establish the artist colony in Old Lyme. He further divided his time between a country studio in Noank, Connecticut, his studio in the city, and trips to Puerto Rico and Jamaica in the winter months.

Following his death in 1916, Ranger's will was probated and involved in costly litigation for two years due to the presentation of another will asserting Ranger's sister, Edith, as the beneficiary. The second will was proven to be false and the Ranger fund went on to make a significant contribution to the Smithsonian's collection of American art, allowing the institution to ultimately claim sixty-six of the paintings purchased by the fund and amass a collection which represented popular academic tastes in American art over more than half a century.

Scope and Contents

The estate papers of New York tonalist painter Henry Ward Ranger, measure one linear foot and date from 1888-circa 1999, with the bulk of the material dating from 1904-1954. The collection primarily documents the settlement of Ranger's contested will and the administration of his estate, but also provides scattered biographical information on Ranger's life, provenance information about his work, and the significance of his estate gift to the National Academy of Design. Records include appraisal information including an estate ledger, correspondence and memoranda including two letters from Ranger, court documents, financial and real estate records, news clippings, and two photographs and six negatives of Ranger.

Series 1 documents the appraisal, administration, and distribution of Ranger's estate by the National Academy of Design. The bulk of the material comprises appraisal records, including an appraisal of Ranger's Noank studio by William Macbeth; correspondence and agreements with museums and other art institutions

that received artwork purchased by the Ranger fund, including the Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Des Moines Association of Fine Arts, Fine Arts Society of San Diego, Museum of Fine Arts , Houston, Oberlin College, and others; and financial records documenting assets and liabilities, including cancelled checks, receipts, investment and tax records, and records documenting real estate investments that contributed to the estate. Also found is a folder of personal papers, including two letters from Ranger, and a photograph and six negatives of Ranger, and a folder of nine letters from Ranger family members.

Series 2 primarily comprises court documents and legal counsel notes and correspondence related to the litigation of Ranger's will, and the process of proving the the legitimacy of Ranger's original will and the fraudulence of the will presented by Edith Ranger's lawyers.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as two series.

- Series 1: Henry Ward Ranger Estate, 1888-circa 1999 (0.95 linear feet; Boxes 1, 4)
- Series 2: Settlement of Will, 1907-1920 (1.05 linear feet; Boxes 1-3)

Container Listing

Series 1: Henry Ward Ranger Estate, 1888-circa 1999

0.95 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 4)

Scope and Contents: This series documents the appraisal, administration, and distribution of Ranger's estate by the National Academy of Design to various galleries, museums, and other art institutions including Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Des Moines Association of Fine Arts, Fine Arts Society of San Diego, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Oberlin College, and others. The bulk of the material comprises appraisal records, including an appraisal of Ranger's Noank studio conducted by William Macbeth, who was a co-executor of Ranger's estate with Charles Henry Phelps, prior to his death on August 10, 1917; an estate ledger listing all of the estate's contents including artwork by Ranger and others, and personal effects; correspondence and agreements with museums and other art institutions that received artwork purchased by the Ranger fund; and financial records documenting assets and liabilities, including cancelled checks, receipts, investment and tax records, and records documenting real estate investments that formed part of his estate.

One folder of Ranger personal papers includes a letter from Ranger to a judge with a transcript that was used during the litigation process to help prove the fraudulence of Edith Ranger's claims on the estate; one letter from attorney John B. Tuck to Ranger discussing the conveyance of Ranger's farm property in Fabius; and one letter to Ranger from Adolph G. shortly before Ranger's death. This folder also contains a one-page, handwritten family tree; a page of notes that could be Ranger's notes on his will; two of Ranger's business cards, and two of his studio invitation cards; an exhibition announcement of a Century Association loan exhibition (1916) with a list of Ranger's New York City addresses from 1881-1905; a magazine page showing a picture of Ranger at his easel in the outdoors; a photo postcard of Ranger; and six negatives of Ranger. There is one folder of Ranger family letters, including six letters from Edith Ranger to her sick father, two from Henry Ward Ranger's uncle; and one from Louise Ranger Whitmore.

Also found are legal documents recording claims against the estate and their settlement or rejection; news clippings about Ranger's bequest to the National Academy of Design; a catalog of a centennial memorial exhibition of Ranger's artwork in 1958; and a folder of correspondence and printed material which records the history of the Ranger fund up to 1993 with a copy of a curator's report on the fund's activity status.

Arrangement: Records are arranged by type and chronologically, where possible, thereafter.

Available Formats: A portion of this series has been digitized, including records which provide biographical information about Ranger and provenance information for his artwork, or document his estate gift to the National Academy of Design.

Records which have not been digitized include routine estate records not related to the purchase and distribution of artwork, including portions of the estate ledger.

Box 1, Folder 1 [Appraisal of Estate, 1916-1918](#)

Box 1, Folder 2 [Appraisal of Estate, Ranger's Noank Studio, by William Macbeth, 1917](#)

Box 1, Folder 3 [Assets and Liabilities, 1888-1911](#)

Box 1, Folder 4 [Assets and Liabilities, 1913-1916](#)

Box 1, Folder 5	Assets and Liabilities, 1917
Box 1, Folder 6	Assets and Liabilities, 1918-1919
Box 1, Folder 7	Assets and Liabilities, Apartment at 33 West 67th Street, 1916-1933
Box 1, Folder 8	Cancelled Checks and Receipts, 1894-1918
Box 1, Folder 9	Claim Against Estate by Loren L. Park for Frank G. Park, 1917-1918
Box 1, Folder 10	Claim Against Estate by Loren L. Park for Frank G. Park, 1917-1918
Box 1, Folder 11	Claim Against Estate by M. L. Rhein, 1915-1918
Box 1, Folder 12-15	Estate Administration, 1916-1919
Box 1, Folder 16	Estate Administration, 1917-1924
Box BV 4, Folder 1	Estate Ledger, 1916-1919
Box 1, Folder 17	News Clippings, 1916-1917
Box 1, Folder 18	News Clippings, 1925-1952
Box 1, Folder 19	News Clippings, 1958-1959
Box 1, Folder 20	Notes and Miscellany, circa 1916-circa 1918
Box 1, Folder 21	Ranger Centennial Memorial Exhibition (1958), 1929, 1958
Box 1, Folder 22	Ranger Family Letters, 1904-1916
Box 1, Folder 23-25	Ranger Fund Accounting, 1916-1918
Box 1, Folder 26	Ranger Fund Administration/History, circa 1914-circa 1999
Box 1, Folder 27	Ranger Fund Allocations, 1954, 1965
Box 1, Folder 28	Ranger Fund Bonds, Mortgages, Insurance, and Stock, 1910-1919
Box 1, Folder 29	Ranger Fund Correspondence, 1986
Box 1, Folder 30	Ranger Fund Distribution, 1919-1930
Box 1, Folder 31	Ranger Fund Distribution, 1919-1933
Box 1, Folder 32	Ranger Fund Distribution, 1919-1932

Box 1, Folder 33	Ranger Fund Distribution, 1919-1932
Box 1, Folder 34	Ranger Fund Distribution Agreements, 1925-1926
Box 1, Folder 35	Ranger Fund Form Letters and Lists of Recipient Institutions, 1920s-1946
Box 1, Folder 36	Ranger Fund Investments, 1919-1932
Box 1, Folder 37	Ranger Fund Taxes, 1919-1924
Box 1, Folder 38	Ranger Gravesite at Oakwood Cemetery, 1917-1918
Box 1, Folder 39	Ranger Personal Papers, circa 1910-1916
Box 1, Folder 40	Real Estate Statements, 1916-1918

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Series 2: Settlement of Will, 1907-1920

1.05 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Scope and Contents: This series documents the settlement of Ranger's will, which entered two years of litigation shortly after the artist's death, having been contested by Ranger's sister, Edith Ranger, whose lawyers presented a fraudulent will claiming her as an heir to Ranger's estate. The District Attorney papers include correspondence, memoranda, and legal documents related to the litigation. Court documents further record the legal proceedings. Of note are the court documents from 1916-1917 which include statements by various people who knew Ranger, some of whom were employed by him, as they provide limited biographical information about him and about his development as an artist. Also found are a photograph of Ranger, estimates of commissions due to William Macbeth from Ranger's estate, a copy of William Macbeth's will, and copies of Ranger's will and the fraudulent will.

Arrangement: Records are arranged by type.

Available Formats: A portion of this series has been digitized. Duplicates and records which relate primarily to the litigation of Ranger's will have not been digitized.

Court Documents	
Box 1, Folder 41	Bogus Will, 1916-1918
Box 1, Folder 42	Charles N. Wexler Resignation, 1918
Box 1, Folder 43	Judicial Settlement of the Account of Proceedings, 1918-1919
Box 1, Folder 44	Proving Ranger's Will, 1907-1918
Box 1, Folder 45	Proving Ranger's Will, 1907-1918
Box 2, Folder 1	Statements, 1916
Box 2, Folder 2	Court Documents, 1916
Box 2, Folder 3-9	Court Documents, 1916-1918
Box 2, Folder 10	Court Documents, 1917-1918
Box 2, Folder 11	Court Documents, 1917-1918
Box 2, Folder 12-14	Court Documents, 1917-1920
Box 2, Folder 15	District Attorney Papers, 1915-1918
Box 3, Folder 1	District Attorney Papers, 1915-1918
Box 3, Folder 2	District Attorney Papers, 1917-1919
Box 3, Folder 3-7	District Attorney Papers, 1918-1919

Box 3, Folder 8-9	Legal Counsel Correspondence, 1916-1918
Box 3, Folder 10	Legal Counsel Preparation, circa 1916-1919
Box 3, Folder 11	Legal Counsel Preparation, circa 1916-1919
Box 3, Folder 12	Memoranda Regarding Contesting of Will, 1916-1917
Box 3, Folder 13	Memoranda Regarding Contesting of Will, 1916-1917
Box 3, Folder 14-16	News Clippings, 1918
Box 3, Folder 17	Private Investigator Reports, 1917

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