



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Theodoros Stamos papers,
circa 1922-2008, in the Archives of American Art

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Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

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|--------------------|---|
| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Theodoros Stamos papers |
| Identifier: | AAA.stamtheo |
| Date: | circa 1922-2008 |
| Extent: | 3.3 Linear feet |
| Creator: | Stamos, Theodoros, 1922-1997 |
| Language: | Multiple languages Most of the collection is in English; some records are in Greek. English; Greek |
| Summary: | The papers of Theodoros Stamos measure 3.3 linear feet and date from circa 1922-2008. Stamos was a painter primarily associated with the first generation of Abstract Expressionists. Biographical materials, correspondence, writings, business and legal records, printed materials, and photographs document Stamos' career as a painter. Also included are materials relating to the Rothko estate controversy compiled by Stamos' sister, Georgianna Savas, as well as her papers concerning arrangements for Stamos' funeral and posthumous exhibition plans. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Theodoros Stamos papers were donated to the Archives of American Art by Stamos' sister, Georgianna Savas, in 2008 and 2011.

Separated Material

Theodoros Stamos loaned a selection of papers for microfilming on reels N/70-66 - N/70-67. These papers were not included with the 2008 gift and are still available on microfilm and for interlibrary loan. The loaned materials include correspondence, poems, printed material and membership cards that are not described in this finding aid.

Related Material

Among the holdings of the Archives of American Art are oral history interviews conducted by John Jones and Bruce Hooten, February 19, 1965, and by Irving Sandler, April 23, 1968. Also found are Theodoros Stamos letters to Diran Deckmejian, 1977-1995, and Theodoros Stamos letters to James DiMartino, 1977-1988.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Cynthia S. Brenwall in 2009; in 2012, Catherine S. Gaines updated the finding aid to include the 2011 addition.

Preferred Citation

Theodoros Stamos papers, circa 1922-2008. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

Use of original papers requires an appointment. Use of archival audiovisual recordings with no duplicate access copy requires advance notice.

Ownership and Literary Rights

The Theodoros Stamos papers are owned by the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Literary rights as possessed by the donor have been dedicated to public use for research, study, and scholarship. The collection is subject to all copyright laws.

Biographical Note

Painter Theodoros Stamos (1922-1997) worked in New York and spent considerable time in Lefkada, Greece. A first generation Abstract Expressionist, Stamos developed as a color field painter, and had a long teaching career. His later years were encumbered by his role in the Mark Rothko Estate controversy.

Born to Greek immigrant parents in New York City, Stamos attended the prestigious Stuyvesant High School, leaving just three months before graduation to pursue a career in art. From 1941 to 1948 he operated a frame shop where he framed hundreds of Paul Klee paintings for Nierendorf Gallery and encountered customers such as Arshile Gorky and Fernand Léger, experiences that influenced the young artist.

Stamos' first solo exhibition, presented by Betty Parsons in 1943, brought the 20 year old painter to the attention of museums and private collectors. Throughout the 1940s Stamos painted and traveled extensively. By the end of the decade he had had three solo exhibitions and participated in group shows such as the 1945 Whitney Museum Biennial and "The Ideographic Picture," an important early Abstract Expressionist exhibition curated by Barnett Newman.

Through connections made at the American Artists' School Stamos became a notable artist among the New York avant garde during the early years of Abstract Expressionism. He was the youngest of the "Irascibles," a group of American artists who broke from the School of Paris to create a new approach to abstract painting.

In 1951, Stamos built a house in East Marion, New York on Long Island where he lived and worked. Here, he began to develop his color field technique and, influenced by his Greek heritage, continued to express interest in spiritualism and ancient Greek myths and philosophy. In 1958, Stamos' work was shown in a retrospective exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and in "The New American Painting," the Museum of Modern Art's traveling exhibition that introduced European audiences to Abstract Expressionism.

Stamos began his career as an educator in 1950 at Black Mountain College. Later, he taught at Columbia University and Brandeis University, and for more than 20 years was on the faculty of the Art Students League.

Following the death of his friend Mark Rothko, Stamos was involved in a highly publicized lawsuit involving his role as an executor of the estate. The trial ended unsuccessfully for Stamos and its adverse consequences impacted the late part of his career. In 1966, the Rothko children obtained permission to disinter their father's remains from the Stamos burial plot in East Marion, New York; with the assistance of Stamos' sister, Georgianna Savas, arrangements were made to bury Rothko at a cemetery in Valhalla, New York.

Traveling between homes in New York and Lefkada, Greece, Stamos continued to paint and teach late into his life. He died in Greece in 1997.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Theodoros Stamos measure 3.3 linear feet and date from circa 1922-2008. Stamos was a painter primarily associated with the first generation of Abstract Expressionists. Biographical materials, correspondence, writings, business and legal records, printed materials, and photographs document Stamos' career as a painter. Also included are materials relating to the Rothko estate controversy compiled by Stamos' sister, Georgianna Savas, as well as her papers concerning arrangements for Stamos' funeral and posthumous exhibition plans.

Biographical material includes birth and death certificates and interview transcripts. Personal correspondence is with friends and family; professional correspondence pertains to gallery transactions, including a falling out with gallery owner Louis K. Meisel. Among the printed materials are exhibition announcements and clippings of articles in English and Greek concerning his career and personal life. Photographs include views of family and friends, portraits of Stamos by Hans Namuth, Nina Leen and other photographers, as well as images of artwork by Stamos and other artists.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged as 9 series:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1922-2006 (Box 1; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 2: Financial Records, 1979-circa 1990s (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 3: Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997 (Boxes 1, 5; 0.5 linear feet)
- Series 4: Business and Legal, 1974-2008 (Box 1; 2 folders)
- Series 5: Writings, circa 1944-2002 (Box 1; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 6: Artwork, circa 1940s-1980 (Box 1, OV 6-7; 0.3 linear feet)
- Series 7: Printed Materials, 1945-2007 (Box 2, OV 7; 0.4 linear feet)
- Series 8: Photographs, 1943-1999 (Boxes 2-3, 5; 1.0 linear feet)
- Series 9: Georgianna Savas Papers on Theodoros Stamos, 1985-2005 (Boxes 3-4; 0.3 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Abstract expressionism

Painters -- New York (State) -- New York
Painting -- Technique
Painting, American

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Photographs
Transcripts

Names:

Leen, Nina
Meisel, Louis K.
Namuth, Hans
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970
Savas, Georgianna

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1922-2006

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

Biographical materials include birth and death certificates, membership cards, two address books with contact information for artists such as Willem de Kooning and Mark Rothko, and interview transcripts. There are three versions of the Stamos will, including the final draft in which he left the majority of his estate to his sister, Georgianna Savas. Also included are a VHS video cassette of Stamos' memorial service, memorabilia, and a plaque awarded posthumously by a Greek organization.

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | Address Books, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Birth Certificate, 1922 |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | Curriculum Vitae, circa 1950 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Membership and Insurance Cards, 1987-1992 |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Interview Transcripts, 1988 |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | Death Certificate, 1997 |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Last Will and Testament, 1982-1996 Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Obituary and Memorial Service, 1997 <i>1 videocassettes (vhs)</i> |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | Award, 2006 |

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Series 2: Financial Records, 1979-circa 1990's

2 Folders (Box 1)

This series contains records of art sales made by Louis K. Meisel Gallery. Also found are a check book register and a receipt for canvas.

Box 1, Folder 10 Photocopies of checks to Theodoros Stamos from Louis K. Meisel Gallery, 1979-1980

Box 1, Folder 11 Check Register and Receipt, circa 1990s

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Series 3: Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997

0.5 Linear feet (Boxes 1, 5)

Correspondence documents business dealings with museums and galleries that represented Stamos. Also found are letters from E. W. Root, director of Black Mountain College and an early collector of Abstract Expressionist art, a collaged Christmas card from Helen Frankenthaler, and personal letters and notes.

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| Box 1, Folder 12-18 | Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997 <i>7 Folders</i> Oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 1, Folder 19 | ACA Galleries, 1990-1991 |
| Box 1, Folder 20 | Camillos Kouros Gallery, 1988-1990 |
| Box 1, Folder 21 | Galleria D'Arte del Naviglio, 1979 |
| Box 1, Folder 22 | Gallery Lambert Monet, 1979-1980 |
| Box 1, Folder 23 | Louis K. Meisel Gallery, 1979-1981 |
| Box 1, Folder 24 | P.T. Efstathiou Fine Arts, 1992-1996 Image(s) |
| Box 1, Folder 25 | Tanger Gallery, 1958 |
| Box 1, Folder 26 | Gallery Veith Turske, 1979-1986 |
| Box 5 | Oversized Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997 from box 1, folders 12-18 |

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Series 4: Business and Legal Records, 1974-2008

2 Folders (Box 1)

Business and legal records include the estate and final tax records for Theodoros Stamos as well as petitions and legal documents regarding the disinterment of Mark Rothko from the Stamos burial plot in East Marion, NY.

Box 1, Folder 27 Theodoros Stamos Estate Records, 1997-1999

Box 1, Folder 28 Mark Rothko Estate Records, 1974-2008
[Image\(s\)](#)

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Series 5: Writings, circa 1944-2002

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

This series contains an artist's statement and personal notes including price lists for works of art. Writings about Stamos by others include a chronology of Stamos' life through 1970, a 1960 interview with Lawrence Alloway for *Art News and Review*, and a documentary film proposal that include Stamos and his work.

Box 1, Folder 29-30 By Theodoros Stamos, circa 1944-1980, undated
2 Folders

Box 1, Folder 31 By Other Authors about Theodoros Stamos, 1960-2002

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Series 6: Artwork, circa 1940s-1980

0.3 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 6-7)

This series contains artwork by Stamos such as line drawings, collages and small paintings. Also included are a handmade card and drawings by other artists, and illustrated rocks attributed to Stamos and gallery owner, Betty Parsons.

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| Box 1, Folder 32 | Drawings and Paintings by Theodoros Stamos, 1947-1980 |
| Box 1, Folder 33 | Drawings and Cards by Other Artists, 1950, 1951, undated |
| Box 1, Folder 34 | Illustrations on Rocks, undated |
| Box OV 6 | Oversized Sketches and Drawings, circa 1940s |
| Box OV 7 | Oversized Designs for Posters, 1950s |

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Series 7: Printed Materials, 1945-2007

0.4 Linear feet (Box 2, OV 7)

This series contains clippings and exhibition announcements in both English and Greek, relating to Stamos and his artwork, and to other Abstract Expressionists. Posthumous announcements were collected by Georgianna Savas and are mostly from shows of his work that she arranged. Some clippings concern the Rothko Estate controversy and the disinterment of Rothko's remains from Stamos' burial plot.

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| Box 2, Folder 1-8 | Clippings about Theodoros Stamos, 1947-2008, undated <i>8 Folders</i> |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Clippings of Related Artists, 1958-2005 |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | Exhibition Checklist, 1958 |
| Box 2, Folder 11-18 | Exhibition Announcements and Brochures, 1947-2005, undated <i>8 Folders</i> |
| Box 2, Folder 19 | Reproductions, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 20 | Offprints, 1948-1982 |
| Box 2 | Miscellaneous Printed Items |
| Box 2, Folder 21 | Relating to Others, 2002, 1945 |
| Box 2, Folder 22 | Relating to Memorial Service, 1997, 2007 |
| Box OV 7 | Oversized Posters, 1966-1978 |
| Box OV 7 | Oversized Lecture Announcements, 1964 April 8 or 1970 April 8 |

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Series 8: Photographs, 1943-1999

1 Linear foot (Boxes 2-3, 5)

This series includes photographs of Stamos, his family, his homes and studios in New York and Greece, and works of art. Most photographs are unattributed, but photographs by Han Namuth, Lloyd Lozes Goff, Steven Trefonides and Diran Deckmejian (a former student at the Art Students League) are found along with a group photograph of the "Irascibles" taken by Nina Leen for *Life* magazine in 1950. Other photographs document Stamos late in life, his memorial service and grave dedication, and views of posthumous retrospective exhibitions.

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| Box 2 | Artwork |
| Box 2, Folder 23 | Theodoros Stamos, A-Z, and unidentified (executed circa 1947-1967), undated |
| Box 2, Folder 24-27 | Theodoros Stamos, 1994-1999, undated <i>4 Folders</i> |
| Box 2, Folder 28 | Other Artists, 1999, undated <i>2 Folders</i> Oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 2, Folder 29 | Other Artists, Evelyn Jablow interior with Stamos Painting, circa 1960s |
| Box 2 | Events |
| Box 2, Folder 30 | Theodoros Stamos on Lecture Panel, circa 1960s oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 2, Folder 31 | ACA Gallery Exhibition Opening, 1993, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 32 | Hiro Gallery Exhibition Opening, 1996 |
| Box 2, Folder 33 | Theodoros Stamos with Friends; Gallery Opening, circa 1990s |
| Box 2, Folder 34 | Theodoros Stamos Funeral in Lefkada, Greece, 1997 |
| Box 2, Folder 35 | Retrospective Opening and Monument Commemoration in Greece, 1997 |
| Box 2, Folder 36 | Theodoros Stamos Memorial Service, New York City, 1997 |
| Box 2 | People |
| Box 2 | Portraits of Theodoros Stamos |
| Box 2, Folder 37 | Lloyd Lozes Goff, 1947 |
| Box 2, Folder 38 | Diran Deckmejian, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 39 | Hans Namuth, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 40 | Steven Trefonides, circa 1960s |

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| | oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 2, Folder 41 | Bill Wilson, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 42-45 | Unidentified Photographers, undated <i>4 Folders</i> Oversized material housed in Box 5 |
| Box 2, Folder 46 | Group Portrait of the "Irascibles" including Stamos by Nina Leen, 1950 oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 2, Folder 47 | Informal Images of Theodoros Stamos, 1943-1978, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 48-49 | Theodoros Stamos with Family and Friends, 1961-1997, undated <i>2 Folders</i> |
| Box 2, Folder 50-51 | Theodoros Stamos with Friends at Party, 1992, circa 1960s <i>2 Folders</i> |
| Box 2, Folder 52 | Friends, Gavin Arthur and Robert Price, 1919, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 53 | Friends, Family and Others, 1943, undated |
| Box 2, Folder 54 | Colleagues, circa 1990s |
| Box 2, Folder 55 | Family and Friends in Greece, 1997 |
| Box 3 | Places |
| Box 3, Folder 1 | Construction of the Stamos House in East Marion, New York, 1951 |
| Box 3, Folder 2 | Theodoros Stamos' Samosa Studio, 1997 |
| Box 3, Folder 3 | Cemetery; Views of Athens, 1997 |
| Box 3, Folder 4 | Household Interior with Stamos Painting, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 5 | House Under Construction (unidentified location), undated |
| Box 3 | Miscellaneous |
| Box 3, Folder 6 | Images Collected by Theodoros Stamos, undated oversized material housed in box 5 |
| Box 3 | Slides |
| Box 3, Folder 7 | Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, circa 1947-1987, undated |
| Box 3 | Transparencies |
| Box 3, Folder 8 | Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, undated |

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| Box 3, Folder 9 | Portraits of Theodoros Stamos, undated |
| Box 3 | Negatives |
| Box 3, Folder 10 | Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, undated black and white |
| Box 3, Folder 11 | Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, undated color |
| Box 3, Folder 12 | Monument and Family in Greece, 1997 |
| Box 3, Folder 13 | Cemetery views, Athens and Memorial Service, 1997 |
| Box 5 | Oversized Photographs |
| Box 5 | Artwork, 1999, undated from box 2, folder 28 |
| Box 5 | Events, circa 1960s from box 2, folder 30 |
| Box 5 | People, circa 1960s, undated from box 2, folders 40, 42-46 |
| Box 5 | Images Collected by Stamos, undated from box 4, folder 6 |
| Box 5 | Stamos Monument, 1997 or later |

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Series 9: Georgianna Savas Papers on Theodoros Stamos, 1985-2005

0.3 Linear feet (Box 3-4)

This series contains Georgianna Savas' papers relating to her brother, Theodoros Stamos. Found are notes and correspondence about the handling of the Stamos estate and correspondence concerning the Stamos retrospective exhibition at the National Gallery of Greece organized by Savas. There is correspondence relating to the exhumation of the Rothko remains from the Stamos family plot in East Marion, New York and records concerning cleaning and conservation services for Stamos' painting. Condolence cards received by Savas after the death of her brother are also part of this series.

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| Box 3, Folder 14 | Notebook, undated |
| Box 3, Folder 15 | Records, Conservation Receipts, 1985-1988, undated |
| Box 3 | Correspondence |
| Box 3, Folder 16 | Relating to Theodoros Stamos, 1986-2005 |
| Box 3, Folder 17 | Relating to Theodoros Stamos Exhibition in Greece, 1996-1997 |
| Box 4, Folder 1-2 | Condolence Cards, 1997 <i>2 Folders</i> |
| Box 4, Folder 3 | Notes, Stamos Estate, 1999, undated |
| Box 4 | Photographs |
| Box 4, Folder 4 | Foundation for Hellenic Culture Exhibition Opening, 2001 |
| Box 4, Folder 5 | Stamos Foundation Exhibition Installation, Transportation and Unidentified People, 2001 |
| Box 4, Folder 6 | Marymount Exhibition Installation and Book Signing, 2005 |

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