



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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October 3, 2012

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Theodoros Stamos papers
Date:	circa 1922-2008
Identifier:	AAA.stamtheo
Creator:	Stamos, Theodoros, 1922-1997
Extent:	3.1 Linear feet
Language:	Most of the collection is in English; some records are in Greek.
Summary:	The papers of Theodoros Stamos measure 3.1 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

Theodoros Stamos loaned the Archives of American Art material for microfilming in 1970. Stamos' sister, Georgianna Savas, donated papers in 2008 and 2011.

Separated Material

The Archives of American Art also holds materials lent for microfilming (reels N70-66 and N70-67) including correspondence, poems, printed material and membership cards. Lent material was returned to the lender and is not described in the collection container inventory.

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.

Available Formats

Materials lent for microfilming are available on 35mm microfilm reels N70-66 and N70-67 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

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.

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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 3.1 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, 1909-
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)

Scope and Contents: 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
Box 1, Folder 8	Obituary and Memorial Service, 1997 1 Videocassettes (VHS)
Box 1, Folder 9	Award, 2006

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

2 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: 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)

Scope and Contents: 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.

Box 1, Folder 12-18	Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997 7 Folders Notes: 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
Box 1, Folder 25	Tanger Gallery, 1958
Box 1, Folder 26	Gallery Veith Turske, 1979-1986
Box 5	Oversized Correspondence, circa 1940s-1997 Notes: from box 1, folders 12-18

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Series 4: Business and Legal Records, 1974-2008

2 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: 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](#)

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Series 5: Writings, circa 1944-2002

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: 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
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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)

Scope and Contents: 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.

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

Oversize 6 Oversized Sketches and Drawings, circa 1940s

Oversize 7 Oversized Designs for Posters, 1950s

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Series 7: Printed Materials, 1945-2007

0.4 Linear feet (Box 2, OV 7)

Scope and Contents: 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.

Box 2, Folder 1-8	Clippings about Theodoros Stamos, 1947-2008, undated 8 Folders
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 8 Folders
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
Oversize 7	Oversized Posters, 1966-1978
Oversize 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)

Scope and Contents: 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.

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 4 Folders
Box 2, Folder 28	Other Artists, 1999, undated 2 Folders Notes: 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 Notes: 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 Notes: oversized material housed in box 5
Box 2, Folder 41	Bill Wilson, undated
Box 2, Folder 42-45	Unidentified Photographers, undated 4 Folders Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 5
Box 2, Folder 46	Group Portrait of the "Irascibles" including Stamos by Nina Leen, 1950 Notes: 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 2 Folders
Box 2, Folder 50-51	Theodoros Stamos with Friends at Party, 1992, circa 1960s 2 Folders
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 Notes: 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
Box 3, Folder 9	Portraits of Theodoros Stamos, undated
Box 3	Negatives
Box 3, Folder 10	Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, undated Notes: black and white
Box 3, Folder 11	Artwork by Theodoros Stamos, undated Notes: 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 Notes: from box 2, folder 28
Box 5	Events, circa 1960s Notes: from box 2, folder 30
Box 5	People, circa 1960s, undated Notes: from box 2, folders 40, 42-46
Box 5	Images Collected by Stamos, undated Notes: 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)

Scope and Contents: 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.

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 2 Folders
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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