

FINDING AID FOR THE

WILLIAM MORTENSEN ARCHIVE AG 147

Center for Creative Photography
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ 85721-0103

For further information about the archives at the Center for Creative Photography, please contact the Archivist: phone 520-621-6273; fax 520-621-9444

DESCRIPTION

Papers and photographic materials, 1890s-1986, of William Mortensen (1897-1965), photographer, author, and teacher. The bulk of the collection dates from 1950-1965. Includes manuscripts by and about Mortensen, incoming and outgoing correspondence with publishers, personal letters, family photographs, clippings, tear sheets, and posthumous correspondence between his widow and biographers and researchers including photographic historian Deborah Irmas. Documentation of the 1979 retrospective *The Magic of William Mortensen* at Oakland Museum is also included.
ca. 18 linear feet.

PROVENANCE

From the estate of William Mortensen's widow Myrdith Mortensen the collection went to Deborah Irmas. She subsequently donated it to the Center in September 1993.

PROCESSING NOTES

Initial processing by Alice Gillette, January 1995; further processing by Leslie Calmes, November, 1996; electronic version of the finding aid was prepared by Amy Rule, June 1998.

RELATED MATERIALS

See also AG 43, the Durham/Mortensen Collection and AG 170, the Grey Silva Collection.

RESTRICTIONS

Copyright for Mortensen's photographs and writings is held by Deborah Irmas. For additional information consult the archivist.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Please consult "William Mortensen: A Revival," *The Archive* 33 (1998) for extensive biographical information including a chronology, bibliography, and essays about his life and career.

ORGANIZATION

This collection has been given the designation of Archive Group (AG) 147. The papers are divided first into boxes and then into folders. Thus, AG 147:2/1 indicates the first folder in the second box.

Photocopies of newspaper clippings and other fragile papers have been provided for research use. The originals, which are in separate folders, should not be handled.

The papers are organized according to the following outline:

PERSONAL PAPERS, 1897-1968

- Correspondence, 1920-68
- Biographical Materials, 1920s-1965
- Scrapbooks, 1897-61
- Exhibitions, 1927-ca. 1965
- Writings, [n.d.], ca. 1947, 1961
- Memorabilia, [n.d.], 1945

PUBLICATIONS, ca. 1925-65

- Monographs, ca. 1925-43
- Monographs, personal library, 1937-53
- Periodicals, 1925-62
- Clippings, [n.d.], 1925-65

POSTHUMOUS MATERIALS, 1965-1986

- R. S. Balcomb Papers, 1965-80
- Deborah Irmas Papers, 1972-86
- Periodicals, 1965-80
- Clippings, 1966-80

PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIALS, 1800s-1960s

- Photographs, 1800s-1960s
- Transparencies and copy negatives, ca. 1950s-80s

ORIGINAL ART, 1919-1920, 1964

APPENDIX A: Scrapbook "A" Contents

APPENDIX B: Scrapbook "B" Index to Correspondence

APPENDIX C: Etchings/Intaglio Descriptions

PERSONAL PAPERS, 1897-1968

Correspondence, 1920-1968

Letters, telegrams, and postcards to and from William Mortensen. Includes personal, family, and business correspondence. The business correspondence is primarily royalty statements and correspondence with publishers in the 1950s and 1960s. Incoming and outgoing correspondence are filed together.

- AG147:1/1 General, 1920-59
- 2 Postcards, 1922-51
- 3 Business, 1934, 1950-68

Biographical Materials, [n.d.], 1920s-1965

Brochures, promotional literature, correspondence, blank postcards, travel diary, sketchbook, scrapbooks, and other materials that document Mortensen's life and career. Included is information about the Mortensen School of Photography in Laguna Beach, California, and a bound volume of signed releases by the models in Mortensen's photographs.

- AG147:1/4 Travel diary and sketch book, Europe and New York City, 1920s
- 5 Model releases, 1926-58
- 6 Advertisements for monographs, texture process, [n.d.], 1933-62
- 7 Mortensen School of Photography, Laguna Beach, CA, ca. 1933-37
- 8 Student lists for Mortensen School of Photography, Laguna Beach, CA, 1933-62
- 9 Greeting cards by Mortensen and family, [n.d.], 1957, 1960
- 10-11 Postcard collection, [n.d.]
- 12 Laguna Cattery, [n.d.]
- 13 Mortensen stationery, ca. 1963
- 14 Funeral service leaflets, 1965

AG147:2 Scrapbooks, 1897-1961:

Scrapbook A, [n.d.], 1929-61

Brown leather album with "William Mortensen" embossed in gold lettering on the cover; all materials have been removed from the album and placed in a folder.

Contains exhibition announcements, promotional literature, achievement awards, and photographs [See Appendix A for list of contents]

Scrapbook B, 1897-47

Bound volume in blue leather; frontispiece reads, "For Bill Xmas '47"; items were taped or glued to album pages and some are loose; scrapbook was made by

Myrdith Mortensen for William Mortensen, Christmas 1947. Contains drawings, clippings, correspondence, and photographs. Sections are labeled: "Early Years, And Then...Photography, Hollywood and Laguna Beach, Brickbats And/Or Bouquets, Willie's Women." [See Appendix B for index to correspondence in the scrapbook]

AG147:2 Oversize biographical materials:

Blank diploma from Mortensen School of Photography, 1930s
Rand McNally Road Atlas (Chicago: Rand McNally Co., 1948) with annotations on mileage from Laguna Beach, CA to Austin, TX

Exhibitions, [n.d.], 1927-ca.1965

Exhibition announcements and labels documenting exhibitions of Mortensen's work. *See also* Posthumous materials: Deborah Irmas papers for information about exhibitions after Mortensen's death.

AG147:1/15 Exhibition labels, [n.d.], 1927-50
16 Exhibitions, 1929-38, 1951, ca. 1965

Writings, [n.d.], ca. 1947, 1961

Writings by Mortensen including drafts for unpublished articles and monographs. *See also* AG43 Mortensen/Dunham Collection for additional published and unpublished Mortensen writings, ca. 1930-65.

AG147:1/17 "Importance," manuscript, 4 pages, [n.d.]
18 "Meditations of a Reformed Pedagogue," manuscript, 5 pages, incomplete autobiographical information, [n.d.]
19 "The Female Figure," monograph outline with foreword; includes essay titled, "The Academic Nude," [n.d.]
20 Published articles, includes "The Academic Nude," ca. 1947, and two articles from *International Photographer*, "Fragment," and [title unknown] about photographing historical characters, 1961

Memorabilia, [n.d.], 1945

AG147:3 Award plaque to Mortensen by the Johannesburg Photographic Society, 1945
Devotional card

PUBLICATIONS, CA. 1925-1965

Monographs, ca. 1925-1943

Monographs written by or containing photographs by Mortensen.

AG147:4 *Blue and Gold: A Complete Record of the College Year of 1925-1926* (University of California, Berkeley: Associated Students, 1926) [college yearbook]

The Command to Look (San Francisco: Camera Craft Publishing Co., 1937; third printing, 1943)

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám [Hollywood, California: self-published, ca. 1927]

The Seven Ages of Woman (Hollywood, California: self-published, 1927) limited edition, number 1 of 3

AG147:5 *The King of Kings* (as portrayed by photographic reproductions of scenes and characters from the motion picture), limited edition of 50, ca. 1925

Monographs, personal library, 1937-1953

Art monographs from Mortensen's library.

AG147:6 *Degas* (New York: Skira Inc.)
Dessins Français, introduction by Louis Dimier (Paris: Editions Alpina, 1937)
Edouard Manet, text by S. Lane Faison, Jr. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1953)
French Impressionists, text by Herman J. Wechsler (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1952)
Maurice Utrillo, text by Alred Werner (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1952)
Renoir, text by Hans Weigert (Milan: The Uffici Press, ca. 1952)

Periodicals, 1925-1965

Periodicals with photographs by or articles about Mortensen.

AG147:7 *Better Homes--Modes & Manners* 3:3 (Dec/Jan 1928/29)
3:5 (Apr/May 1929)
4:1 (Sept 1929)
Ciné Revue 32:14 (Apr 1942)
Collier's 80:14 (1 Oct 1927)
The Register/Leisuretime Magazine (19 Aug 1962)
Rangefinder 14:9 (Sept 1965)
Theatre Magazine 46:316 (July 1927), 47:1 (Jan 1928)
Town Talks 2:1 (Jan 1952)
Vanity Fair 24:6 (Aug 1925), 30:6 (Aug 1928)

Clippings, [n.d.], 1925-1965

Clippings with articles by and about Mortensen. Includes photocopies of a weekly column he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1941. [See also clippings in the Posthumous Materials: Deborah Irmas Papers]

- AG147:8/1 [n.d.], 1925-38
- 2 1941
- 3 1953-65
- 4 Originals, 1925-65

POSTHUMOUS MATERIALS, 1965-1986

R. S. Balcomb Papers, 1965-1980

Includes correspondence between Myrdith Mortensen, R. S. Balcomb, and others. Correspondence documenting Balcomb's writing of a biography of Mortensen, "Mortensen: Artist With a Camera." Also included is information about Myrdith Mortensen's interest in promoting Mortensen's photography and photographic techniques, correspondence with publishers regarding copyright and copyright infringements, and materials relating to Jacques de Langre who republished two of Mortensen's books and used the Mortensen texture screen process.

- AG147:9/1-2 Correspondence to and from R. S. Balcomb, 1965-80
- 3 "Mortensen: Artist With a Camera," unpublished manuscript by R. S. Balcomb, overview of biographical monograph, ca. 1969
- 4 "Mortensen: Artist With a Camera," unpublished manuscript by R. S. Balcomb, preface to biography of Mortensen, 1969
- 5 "Mortensen: Artist With a Camera," unpublished manuscript by R. S. Balcomb, ca. 1974
- 6 Jacques de Langre advertisements and other materials, 1965-70s

Deborah Irmas Papers, 1972-1986

Correspondence, exhibition announcements, study prints, clippings and other materials that document Irmas' dissertation, writings, and the retrospective exhibition, *The Photographic Magic of Williams Mortensen*, she curated in 1978-81.

- AG147:9/7-15 Correspondence, arranged alphabetically, 1972-81, 1986
- 16-18 William Mortensen photograph inventory, [n.d.]
- 19-20 Research materials, 1930s-80s
- 21-28 Exhibition materials, 1971-81

Periodicals, 1965-1980

Posthumous periodicals with photographs by or containing articles about Mortensen.

AG147:10 *Boogie Woogie Review* 1:1 (Nov/Dec 1979)
Hollywood Reporter 264:15 (13 Nov 1980)
Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies Calendar (Nov 1980)
Newsletter Dignan Photographic Inc. (May 1970) [contains reprint article in *PSA Journal* (March 1970) "The Metalchrome Story," by Grey L. Silva]
Obscura 1:2 (Nov/Dec 1980)
Photograph 1:4 (July 1977)
Rangefinder 23:11 (Nov 1974) [texture screens]
USC Chronicle, [University of Southern California magazine article by Irmas]
(Nov 1980)

Clippings, 1966-1980

Posthumous clippings about Mortensen.

AG147:10 1966-80

PHOTOGRAPHIC MATERIALS, 1800s-1960s

Photographs, 1800s-1960s

Black-and-white photographs documenting Mortensen's commercial work including his pigment process prints and the materials to produce them, examples of texture prints, and portrait work from the 1920s and 1930s. The bulk of the photographs are portraits of William and portraits and nudes of Myrdith made by William Mortensen. Also documented are the Mortensens' family, houses, gardens, friends, and pets. Except for the early Mortensen family photographs, most photographs appear to have been made by William Mortensen.

AG147:11 Commercial work: pigment process prints and production materials, ca. 1952
[includes print with accession number 81:093:022]
Commercial work: texture prints, 1961

AG147:12 Commercial work: studio portraits, 1920s-30s
Family photographs; includes William and Myrdith Mortensen in family group
photographs, 1800s-1960s
Framed family photographs from the Mortensen home
Photographs found in wallets

AG147:13 Portraits of William Mortensen, ca. 1897- 1960s

AG147:14 Portraits of Myrdith Mortensen, 1920s-50s

AG147:15 Mortensen house, gardens, landscapes

AG147:16 Family photograph album with William and Myrdith Mortensen, friends and family, ca. 1940s

AG147:17 Family photographs of William and Myrdith Mortensen, William Mortensen 1912 school class photograph, Mortensen's parents (?), watercolor portraits

Transparencies and copy negatives, ca. 1950s-1980s

Primarily 35mm color transparencies by William Mortensen documenting his life and work in Laguna Beach. Transparencies of Myrdith Mortensen and Mortensen's pets, houses, gardens, and work. Also included are transparencies of Mortensen's work that were made after his death by the estate. Also included are a few plates and negatives for producing pigment prints. No original Mortensen negatives are in this collection.

AG147:18 Color transparencies

- 1 "Morale Dept." [Myrdith Mortensen and Mortensen dogs]
- 2 [William and Myrdith Mortensen, animals]
- 3 "Mollie, Julian, Mortensen Estate"
- 4 [Models]
- 5-6 [Models, women]
- 7 "Camera Club pix of Bill, 4/65"

AG147:19 Color transparencies

- 1 [Gardens, Myrdith Mortensen]
- 2 [Myrdith Mortensen]
- 3 [Myrdith Mortensen, family, animals]
- 4-7 [Mortensen house, garden, and landscapes]
- 8 "Old House and Garden," [n.d]
- 9 "New house gardens," 1963
- 10 "Mortensen painting owned by Anderson," 1969
- 11-12 [Framed prints by Mortensen, numbered 1-40], 1969
- 13 "General collection received 2/26/71; PSA not included [transparencies of framed Mortensen prints], 1969-70
- 14 [Framed Mortensen prints], 1982

AG147:20 Color stereo transparencies

AG147:21 Copy negatives, two images

One black-and-white transparency of Mortensen house

Eighteen 35mm black-and white negatives for Deborah Irmas, 1974

AG147:22 Printing plates

ORIGINAL ART, 1919-1920, 1964

[See also sketchbook in Biographical Materials]

AG147:23 Etchings/intaglio by William Mortensen, 1919-20 [See Appendix C for descriptive list]

AG147:24 Ten drawings by William Mortensen in various media including pastel, ink, and oil, [n.d.], 1953, 1964 [1953 drawing had accession number 81:093:029]

Appendix A: Contents of Scrapbook "A" in AG147:2.

Arrangement: By order in the scrapbook

(1) Diploma de cooperación de la Sociedad Fotografica de Zaragoza - V Salón Internacional, 27 de Octubre de 1929

(2) "Example of Mortensen Texture Process," ca. 1934

(3) Exhibition announcement, Hollywood, CA. The Stendahl Art (4) Galleries. "Photographic Work of William Mortensen," March [1938]

(5) Color photograph of painting by Mortensen, [n.d.]

(6) Achievement Award, Professional Photographers of Southern California, 26 January 1960

(7) 13 January 1961 letter from George Allen Young, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company to Mortensen about *How to Pose the Model*

(8) Promotional brochure from *Camera Craft* for 2nd edition of *Monsters and Madonnas*, ca. 1936

(9) Exhibition and contest announcement, Hollywood, CA. Hollywood Plaza Hotel, "Morgan Photo Exhibition," 1-7 April 1936

(10) Exhibition announcement with Mortensen photograph, Laguna Beach, CA. "1951 Festival of the Arts," 21 July-5 August

(11) Ad proof for *Camera Craft* announcing Mortensen School of Photography in San Francisco, [n.d.]

Appendix B: Index to correspondence in Scrapbook "B" in AG147:2.

Aller, Herbert, 1942
Amos 'n' Andy. See Correl

Bill, Fred R., 1937
Browne, Willard, 1937

Cecil B. DeMille Pictures Corporation, 1926
Chinnery, Sonia, [n.d.]
Coronet Magazine. *See* Dystel
Correl, Charles J., 1942

DeMille, Cecil B., 1942
DuPont, James, 1935
Dystel, Oscar, 1941
Harlow, Jean, 1931
Hexter, Paul L., 1942
Hicks, Mildred, 1947
Horton, Mrs. C.C., ca. 1930

Jacobs, William, 1942

Kuhlmann, Wesley W., 1935

Mortensen, Ellen. *See* Staley
Mortensen, William H., 1937
Mortensen, William P., 1920
Mudd, John P., 1935

Oppenheimer, Carl J., 1934

Quesado, Francisco M., 1934

Rose, Art, 1920
Rosson, Gladys, 1942

Sartori, Frank A., 1935
Staley, Ellen, 1947
Stilliani, 1920

Thorek, Dr. Max, 1935

Appendix C: Description of etchings/intaglio in AG147:24.

1. [Street scene] signed
2. [Street scene]
3. [Street scene; park and people] signed, 1919
4. [Cityscape] signed, 1919
5. [Street scene]
6. [Street scene] 1 of 2 prints from same plate
7. [" "] 2 of 2 prints, signed, 1919
8. [Street scene] signed, 1919
9. [Street scene, France]
10. [Landscape]

11. [Street scene]
12. [Waterscape; city in distance] signed, 1919
13. [Street scene; Chinatown] signed, 1920
14. [Street scene with harbor]
15. [Street scene with harbor]
16. [Street scene; tenements] 1 of 2 prints from same plate, signed, 1920
17. [" " "] 2 of 2 prints from same plate, signed, 1920
18. [Waterscape; city in distance]
19. "Street lower east side - New York" and "Merry Christmas from" 1 of 3 prints from same plate, signed, 1919
20. " " " 2 of 3 prints, signed, 1919
21. " " " 3 of 3 prints, signed, 1919
22. [Waterscape; city in distance] 1 of 2 prints from same plate, signed 1920
23. ["] 2 of 2 prints, signed 1920
24. [Cityscape; view from underneath a pier] signed
25. [Street scene] 1 of 3 prints from same plate, signed (*See also* Biographical Materials: greeting cards)
26. [" "] 2 of 3 prints, signed
27. [" "] 3 of 3 prints
28. [Portrait of a woman] signed
29. "Proof 1" [Portrait of a young girl] initialed W.M.
30. "Advanced art student - N.Y.(over)"; [verso] "Advanced in years" [portrait of a woman], signed, 1920
31. [Cityscape] signed, 1919
32. [Portrait of a woman] 1 of 2 prints from same plate
33. [Portrait of woman; grease pencil over image] 2 of 2 prints
34. [Street scene; laundry and tenements] 1 of 4 prints from same plate, signed, 1920
35. [" "] 2 of 4 prints, signed, 1920
36. [" "] 3 of 4 prints, signed, 1920
37. [" "] 4 of 4 prints
38. [Landscape with trees and mountains] signed
39. [Tree] [on plastic]
40. [Street scene; house and tree] signed
41. [Stairway] signed
42. [Arches with palm tree shadow] signed
43. [Arch] signed
44. [Street scene; house and tree] signed
45. [Nudes; female figure and female torso]
46. [Waterscape] signed
47. "Harlem River on 134 Street"
48. "Portrait of an Old Lady - Rembrandt - 1631"

[end of finding aid]