

THE SAMUEL J. WAGSTAFF, JR. RECORDS  
1956-1978 (Predominantly 1968-1971)  
9 linear feet

\*MOD/WAGSTAFF 1-9  
Accessioned Mar., 1978  
Completed Apr. 21, 1989  
by Gregg T. Trendowski

The records of Samuel J. Wagstaff were placed in the Museum Archives of the Detroit Institute of Arts beginning in March, 1978 by the Department of Modern Art, with subsequent transfers made until November, 1988. Paige boxes containing these records were inventoried by various personnel. Processing of these administrative records and personal papers was not begun until January, 1989 by Gregg T. Trendowski. Additional records were added in March, 1990 by Cherryl Wagner. This material has not been incorporated into the index.

#### HISTORY

Samuel J. Wagstaff, Jr. (Nov. 4, 1921-Jan. 14, 1987) was Curator of Contemporary Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts from September, 1968 through October, 1971. Prior to serving in this position he had been Senior Curator at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut from February 20, 1967 through June, 1968, and Curator of Paintings, Prints and Drawings there from October 1, 1961 through February 20, 1967. He was part-time instructor at George Washington University (18th C. art), and received the David Finley Fellowship from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. He spent two years abroad, mostly in Paris and London, and eight months at the National Gallery (c. 1959-61). Prior to this he had studied at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University for an M.A. in Art History, and served a three month internship in the paintings department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where he helped prepare a catalog of paintings and sculpture for a Gauguin exhibition. His earlier academic background and professional experience consist of a B.A. in English Literature, from Yale University; service during World War II (1943-45) as a Lt. JG, Executive Officer, LST Bureau of Naval Personnel, Washington, D.C., and Assistant Account Executive, Benton and Bowles, New York City; Account Executive, Palm Beach Company; and Account Executive at John Robert Powers Cosmetic Company (1945-55).

Mr. Wagstaff was a well-known collector in various areas, and an authority on Gauguin ceramics, prints and sculpture; the history of photography (particularly lesser known individuals); 18th C. English and 19th C. American silver and silver plate.

He was responsible for the first museum showing of Pop Art in the U.S. (American Paintings and Sculpture from Connecticut

Collections, Wadsworth Atheneum, July 24-Sept. 9, 1962). He was the first museum curator to give prominent minimalist constructivist sculptor Tony Smith a retrospective museum show at the Wadsworth Atheneum (Nov. 8-Dec.31, 1966). At the Detroit Institute of Arts, he was responsible for many important, and one literally ground-breaking, exhibitions of artists on the cutting edge of modern American art. He was a tireless advocate of minimalist, conceptual, and performance art (cf. Exhibition Series).

Mr. Wagstaff resigned in October, 1971, to pursue personal collecting and research goals after an inheritance made him economically independent. Thereafter, he returned to New York City, and in late 1971 with the help of his friend and future executor of his estate, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (1947-1989), amassed one of the largest private photographic collections in the United States, which was sold to the J. Paul Getty Foundation in 1984 for a reputed \$4.5 million. In the last years of his life Mr. Wagstaff devoted much of his time to collecting mid-19th to early 20th C. American silver and silver-plate.

#### SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

The records contain administrative correspondence, personal correspondence prior to and during Wagstaff's tenure as Curator of Contemporary Art at the Detroit Institute of Arts; research work on various artists, periods and schools of art, and files dealing with accessioned art objects and exhibitions during Mr. Wagstaff's tenure. Included are letters between the exhibiting artists and Mr. Wagstaff. In the series on exhibitions there is also much correspondence with the artists, some of whom have later become more prominent. Also included are original drawings and plans by various artists, especially Robert Morris.

Also of interest is Wagstaff's personal correspondence regarding research on Gauguin and the Ecole du Pont-Aven; research notes and a rough draft of an article on sources of influence in the work of Gauguin; a critique of a monograph on the ceramics and sculpture of Gauguin by Christopher Gray. Notes and correspondence regarding the provenance and symbolic history of various objects in the collection of the Wadsworth Atheneum (including various Medieval panels and a missal) are of additional interest. Correspondence regarding Wagstaff's personal collecting parallels some of his work on exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Wadsworth Atheneum and the Detroit Institute of Arts, and after. Notable are early recorded interest in silver collecting; photographic collecting.

Researchers will find this collection of great use because of Wagstaff's importance as a primary figure in the museum exhibition of avant-garde American art of the 1960s and early '70s. Though this collection does not cover his years as a collector and promoter of photography, it provides precursory

documentation and information regarding his collecting and research strategies.

Important subjects include:

- Personal Correspondence, 1956-1961
- Correspondence and research (c.1956-1960) on the influence and sources in the work of Gauguin.
- Ecole du Pont-Aven.
- The Ceramics and Sculpture of Paul Gauguin.
- Medieval panel paintings and missals.
- Exhibitions, Wadsworth Atheneum.
- Exhibitions, Other Ideas
  - Robert Morris Retrospective
  - Michael Heizer

Additional subjects are indexed at the end of this guide.

Among the correspondents are:

- William Bostick, Secretary and Administrator of the Detroit Institute of Arts.
- Frederick Cummings, Director of the Detroit Institute of Arts.
- Christopher Gray, art historian and curator.
- Michael Heizer, artist.
- Ellsworth Kelly, artist.
- Robert Morris, artist.
- William Wegman, artist.

An index to the location of key correspondents will be found at the end of this guide.

## SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

### Series I: Personal Correspondence A-Z Mod/Wag 1

Correspondence covering the years 1956-78.

### Series II: Influences and Sources in the work of Paul Gauguin: 1944-1969 (1956-69). Mod/Wag 2-4.

Includes research on an unpublished paper. A corrected typescript of this paper is included. Correspondence with Christopher Gray and his editor at Johns Hopkins Press regarding Gray's exhibition catalog on the ceramic sculpture of Gauguin are also included.

### Series III: Administrative Correspondence, Wadsworth Atheneum. Mod/Wag 5

Covers the years at the Wadsworth Atheneum 1936-68 (1961-68) (incomplete).

### Series IV: Administrative Correspondence A-Z Mod/Wag 6-6a

This series covers primarily Wagstaff's years at the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1968-71; some earlier and later material is included in order to maintain continuity of subject matter. Includes material on the Friends of Modern Art multiples; Robert Morris earthworks prints and Tony Smith, "Spitball" (1969-76).

### Series V: Exhibitions, DIA, A-Z. Mod/Wag 7-9

Includes exhibitions during Wagstaff's tenure. Drafts and final script for a slide lecture on Painting in France, 1900-1967 are also included (1966-76).

## AUDIOVISUAL AND SPECIAL RECORDS

Photographs have been accessioned under the following accession numbers: AVP 64:899.01-.09. Oversize photographs are accessioned as AVP 64:899.10-.20. Two drawings have been accessioned as AVD 64:35.29-.30.

# CONTAINER LISTING

Series I: Personal Correspondence A-Z: 1956-1978

Mod/Wag 1

1. Personal Correspondence: 1960-66
2. Personal Correspondence: 1968
3. Personal Correspondence: 1/69-7/69
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5. Personal Correspondence: 1/70-8/70
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8. Talks, 1964

Series II: Influences and Sources in the Work of Paul Gauguin: 1944-1969 (1956-1969).

Mod/Wag 2.

1. Gauguin Research: Correspondence: 3/59-12/76
2. Draft "Some Sources for Gauguin: n.d.
3. Critique on Gray "The Sculpture and Ceramics of Paul Gauguin: 1961-1963.
4. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
5. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
6. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
7. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Accession Catalog, Musees Nationaux.
8. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Primarily Ecole du Pont-Aven (Emile Bernard).
9. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Ecole du Pont-Aven (Emile Bernard).
10. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Ecole du Pont-Aven (Armand Seguin).
11. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Ecole du Pont-Aven (Paul Serusier).
12. Gauguin Research: Photographs, Ecole du Pont-Aven (Emile Bernard).
13. Gauguin Research: Photographs.

Mod/Wag 3

1. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
2. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
3. Gauguin Research: Photographs.
4. Gauguin Research: Clippings (in French), 1959-60.
5. Gauguin Research: Reproductions.
6. Maurice Denis: Five Woodcuts struck from Original Blocks, 1967.

Series II: (Continued)

Mod/Wag 4

1. Catalogs: 1944-1968.
2. Chaase, Charles: Gauguin et le Groupe de Pont-Aven, 1921 (Photostat).
3. Bertrand, Louis: Gaspard de la Nuit, 1904.

Series III. Research, Wadsworth Atheneum 1936-68 (19961-68).

Mod/Wag 5

1. Clippings: 1961-1962.
2. Research re Medieval Cross: 1964-1967.
3. Research re Winslow Homer: Correspondence, 1968
4. Research re Winslow Homer: Photographs and Reproductions.
5. Research re Winslow Homer: Catalogs: 1936-1951
6. Research re Fifteenth Century North Italian Missal, 1967.
7. Medieval Painting Exhibition: Photographs.

Series IV Administrative Correspondence, DIA 1962-76.

Mod/Wag 6

1. Administrative Correspondence, Exhibitions Offered/Rejected, 1969-1971
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- 1b. Administrative Correspondence, General, 1970
- 1c. Administrative Correspondence, General, 1971
- 1d. Administrative Correspondence, Grants, 1964-70
2. Administrative Correspondence, Objects Offered/Rejected, 1969-1971
3. Expenses and Travel Reports, 5-1-69/8-11-71
- 3a. Friends of Modern Art: Tony Smith, "Spitball", 1969-71.
- 3b. Tony Smith, "Spitball", 1969-76.
4. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, General, 1962-1971

Series IV (Continued)

Mod/Wag 6a

1. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Dealers, A-B, 1970-71
2. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Dealers, C-G, 1968-71
3. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Dealers, H-L 1969-71
4. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Dealers, M-R, 1969-70

Series IV (Continued)

Mod/Wag 6a (Continued)

5. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Dealers, S-W, 1969-71
6. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Museums, Art Institute of Chicago, 1968-70
7. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Museums, Flint Institute of Arts, 1969-70
8. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Museums, Museum of Modern Art, 1969-71
9. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Museums, St. Louis, City Art Museum, 1969-71
10. Gallery and Museum Correspondence, Museums, Walker Art Center, 1969-71
11. Kelly, Ellsworth, 1969-70

Series V Exhibitions, DIA

Mod/Wag 7

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4. Sculpture by G. Alden Smith, 1968-1969
5. Detroit Collects, 1969
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9. 21st Michigan Artist-Craftsmen Exhibition, Donors and Prizes, 1969

Series V (Continued)

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8. Robert Morris, Original Drawings, N.D.

Series V (Continued)

Mod/Wag 8 (Continued)

9. Tannahill Bequest, 1970
10. Motherwell, Works on Paper, 1970
11. Legacy of Albert Kahn, 1970
12. Graphic Works of Stanley Mouse, 1970

Series V (Continued)

Mod/Wag 9

1. 58th Michigan Artists Exhibition, 1969-1970
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4. 58th Michigan Artists Exhibition, Installation Photos
5. Lydia Winston Malbin Poster Exhibition, 1971
6. Michael Heizer Exhibition, 1971
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13. Michael Heizer, Earthwork, Reviews, 1971
14. Picabia Exhibition, 1969-1971

Mod/Wag 10 Unidentified material. Includes photographs, film strips, and drawings.



(Material added in March, 1990 has not been incorporated into the index)

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SVA/SITE Project; 1969?; 6-4

Appendix: Series & Box Numbers

MOD/WAGSTAFF Series I Personal Correspondence, primarily 1960-71.  
Box 1

MOD/Wagstaff Series II Gauguin, et. al., Research  
Correspondence 3 March, 1959--1969 [+ n. d.]  
Box 2

MOD/Wagstaff Series III Wadsworth Atheneum  
Curatorial Work, 1961-1968  
Box 5

MOD/Wagstaff Series IV., DIA Administrative Records  
Box 6

Series V., DIA Exhibitions, 1968-1971  
Boxes 7-10