Descriptive Summary

Title: Toshio Asaeda Watercolor Drawings collection

Dates: 1927-1935, bulk 1932

Collection Number: MSS-016

Creator/Collector: Asaeda, Toshio
California Academy of Sciences

Extent: 1 manuscript box, 5 oversize boxes (6.46 linear feet)

Repository: California Academy of Sciences
San Francisco, California 94118

Abstract: Watercolor drawings of specimens made in the field while on expedition, primarily the 1932 Crocker expedition. Drawings are numbered and dated and include notes on subject, location, scale, etc. Collection also contains some photographs taken by Asaeda on expeditions.

Language of Material: English

Access
Access is unrestricted

Preferred Citation
Toshio Asaeda Watercolor Drawings collection. California Academy of Sciences

Biography/Administrative History

Toshio Asaeda, an artist with special gifts for taxidermy, painting and photography, was born December 9, 1893 in Tokyo, Japan. After four years at Tokyo Teachers College, studying Geology, Zoology, Botany and Geography, he emigrated in April 1923 to the United States in order to attend the University of Chicago. His American education was cut short by an earthquake that rocked Tokyo, cutting off his education funds. In 1924, Mr. Asaeda accepted a job at the James L. Clark Studios in New York. Dr. Clark was in charge of the taxidermy and exhibit preparation for the American Museum of Natural History. Mr. Asaeda credits Dr. Clark with teaching him the art of taxidermy. From 1925 to 1927, Mr. Asaeda lived in San Francisco; it was during this time that he began his forty-year relationship with the California Academy of Sciences. His initial post was as an artist for the ichthyology department. He returned to New York in late 1927 to resume his work with Dr. Clark. However, after only two years, in 1930, Mr. Asaeda returned to San Francisco accepting a job with a color photography forerunner, Natural Color Photo Print Studio. A year later, in 1931, Mr. Asaeda took a place on writer Zane Grey’s expedition to the South Pacific. He served as the expedition’s artist and photographer while also collecting specimens for the Academy. Mr. Asaeda spent the spring of 1932 to the fall of 1939 (they were forced to stop by the outbreak of World War II in Europe) adventuring all over the Pacific with millionaire yachtsman Charles Templeton Crocker. Once again he was the primary photographer and artist on the expeditions. Apart from oil paintings of the beautiful islands he visited, Mr. Asaeda painted watercolors of marine subjects, corals, birds and insects. He also collected birds and other specimens. He drew up maps of the islands and made a ten-foot cast of an Easter Island head, which is now owned by the American Museum of Natural History. Many of the paintings and drawings from these expeditions have been used in various publications, including those produced by the California Academy of Sciences and the American Museum of Natural History. In 1940, Mr. Asaeda opened his own photography studio in downtown San Francisco, on Grant Avenue. This was a short-lived business venture as Mr. Asaeda and his wife, Suzuka, were sent to a Japanese Internment Camp in Topaz, Utah (not far from the Great Salt Lake) in 1942. Here Mr. Asaeda taught adult internees United States geography and stone polishing to pass the time. After the war and his release from internment, Mr. Asaeda took a job preparing, drawing, and photographing fossils at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California. That same year, 1947, he wrote a letter requesting a job at the Academy, so his wife could return to her friends in San Francisco and he would once again have enough work to keep him busy. In 1949, Mr. Asaeda accepted a position as Assistant Curator in the Department of Exhibits. It was the perfect post, allowing Mr. Asaeda to utilize his many artistic and technical skills. After sixteen years, Mr. Asaeda retired in 1965 to begin work on his garden. On March 18, 1968, Toshio Asaeda died from an evidently long-standing illness.

Scope and Content of Collection

Watercolor drawings of specimens made in the field while on expedition, primarily the 1932 Crocker expedition. Drawings are numbered and dated and include notes on subject, location, scale, etc. Collection also contains some photographs taken by Asaeda on expeditions.

Indexing Terms

Ichthyology
Scientific illustration