
Collection number: M0816

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Theodore Wores Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1880-1999
Collection number: Special Collections M0816
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Biography
If the measure of a painter is the number of times that he or she has been shown, then Theodore Wores ranks higher today than any of his critics would have imagined. From the time that he became an acknowledged professional in his art in the 1880s, Wores' has been shown with relative frequency throughout the intervening years.

Born in 1859 in San Francisco, Wores was indulged in his talent by perceptive parents who enrolled him in the San Francisco Art Association's School of Design so that he could study art under Virgil Williams, a well-known San Francisco artist of the period. In 1874, the young Wores had advanced in his art so far that his parents sent the sixteen-year-old to study at the Royal Academy in Munich. Munich in 1974 was the rival of Paris as the art capital of Europe, with young artistic
aspirants flocking to the German city owing to the shambles existing in the French capital as a result of the Franco-Prussian War. So many Americans came to Munich to study art that they formed the American Art Students Club of Munich. Among the membership of this club were William Keith, Toby Rosenthal, William Merritt Chase, and Frank Duveneck. The courtly Wores, with his keen gray eyes, shortly fell under the spell of Duveneck and his theories. A cadre of students, including Wores, Duveneck, Orrin Peck, John White Alexander, Frank Currier, Joseph Henry Sharp, and Julius Rolshoven, lived in a small village outside the city, and, when not in class, ate together, traveled throughout Germany and Italy on painting junkets, and shared their artistic discoveries.

Munich taught the young Wores "to paint with oil pigments-creating a neutral ground on which to record a basically realistic formal interpretation of model, still life, or scene. By working up to light and down to dark, a schematic value relationship was quickly established." In Munich, this was the "virtual end of the painting. a monochromatic essay in technical virtuosity." Hallmarks of the Munich style were realistic observation and alla prima painting.

But Wores broke away from this realism and its "unified color." He abandoned the brown, black, and white effects of the Munich School for a "brilliant, high-keyed color technique, which, though they had never met is said to be often close to Van Gogh's highly personal use of alla prima painting. Wores, under the influence of Frank Duveneck's enthusiasm for plein aire painting, created his own personal and fresh version, using color to represent sunlight and shadow and, particularly, to adopt Duveneck's theory that the genuine foundation for a painting was the brush work, and not the charcoal or pencil drawing of a draughtsman. The painter, if necessary, could make rough outlines, "but preferably cover the canvas directly with paint, boldly blocking in the large masses."

Wores returned to San Francisco after six years in Munich, and established his studio in the heart of downtown. Exhibitions of his work followed and so did prizes, commission, and triumphant reviews. To his other subjects, he added a series of very well-received renditions of scenes in San Francisco's Chinatown. His popularity led to his election to the Bohemian Club, San Francisco's exclusive club for professional men.

With his reputation now firmly established, as well as his bank account, Wores, who had met James Whistler in Venice in 1879, now took Whistler's advice and packed up his paint box, palette, and easel and sailed for Japan. The pictures that came out of his sojourn in the Orient were among his most sought after. Back in San Francisco in 1894, Wores added commissioned portraits to his other subjects. Before long, through exhibitions and sales, his coffers grew healthy. The habit of leaving the studio for painting trips in the open had stuck with him from his Munich days, and now he added landscapes to his painting talents. A painting trip to Hawaii and Samoa brought profitable shows in San Francisco, Boston, and New York. Next on his itinerary was Spain, where he discovered "the sort of subject I have been searching for for years. I had thought I had found it in Japan and Samoa. But these scenes all dwindle away in comparison with the beauty and picturesqueness of this place."

Again back in San Francisco, Wores was in line for three momentous events. He was in Los Angeles, having brought a number of his paintings to that city for an exhibition, when he learned about the San Francisco earthquake of April 1906. Rushing back to San Francisco, he found that his family's home as well as his studio and all it contained had been lost. This blow was somewhat assuaged by his being appointed Dean of his old school, the San Francisco Art Association's School of Design, which was now associated with the University of California. Wores remained dean for seven years, during which the third great event in his life took place. In 1910, he married the attractive Miss Carolyn Bauer, whom he had met when she came to sit for her portrait the year before their marriage.

Theodore and Carolyn, who remained childless, led an elegant and unfettered life, filled with travel and society activities. For Theodore, it was a heady time, moving in the rarefied circles of the Bohemian Club in New York, being invited to exhibit across the country, and hobnobbing with the elite from West to East.

The travel bug persisted, and Wores resigned his deanship in 1913, and was once more on the road with his brush and palette. Sometimes Carolyn accompanied Theodore, other times he traveled alone. For several years in the mid-1900s, Wores painted in the Canadian Rockies in spring, in the Indian lands of the Southwest in the fall, in Chicago and New York in winter, and in California in summer, catching the lush valleys of northern California in full bloom. From 1918 on, these "blossom paintings" dominated his work.

The couple left San Francisco in 1926, to move to remote Saratoga, some fifty miles outh, at the foot of California's Coastal Range, in the heart of his beloved blossom land. The move occurred the day after Wores publicly announced his philosophic aversion to what was termed "modern art" (Cubism and Futurism), which was causing a fundamental upheaval in artistic circles. "It is a disease," he told reporters, "the weird grotesque daubs that a so called new school is trying to foist on the public are anything but artistic." "I shall live," he said, "in recollection of the golden days when I roamed through art capitals of the world. And I shall remember the hideous monstrosities of cubism and futurism only as fantastic nightmares of the past."

This outburst drew bad press for Wores, as the newspapers, ever ready to foment a scrap, published retorts by two art professors at the University of California, and the dean of the San Francisco School of Fine Art. But Wores had said...
his piece. He was now seventy years old, and his best work was behind him.

Theodore and Carolyn remained in Saratoga for thirteen years, until he could no longer paint because the sight in those once keen gray eyes was failing. In early 1939, the couple returned to San Francisco, where Theodore died quietly at home on September 11, 1939, in his eightieth year.

Today, art historians vary in their summation of Wores’ contribution to art. It was true that he absorbed the dark, realistic style of Munich, but it is also true that he attempted with some considerable success to break out of the unbroken somberness to bring into his paintings, especially the landscapes, a brilliance fueled by vivid color. Some consider him merely a workaday artistic craftsman, others regard Wores as a forerunner of painting directly on the canvas, in plein aire, and of bringing the “dominant strategies of Impressionism into northern California,” well before any other painters.

Scope and Content

The Theodore Wores Collection contains material especially pertinent to the painter’s career in art. A relatively small amount of correspondence is organized by decade, from 1880 to 1939 (1880-1909, 1910-1919, 1920-1929, 1930-1939). The rest of the Collection includes exhibit catalogs (1973-1999), a biography of Wores that accompanied an exhibit in 1968-1969, a few magazine articles by Wores, two albums of photographs of the artist’s oriental paintings, framed photographs of the painter’s studio in San Francisco, photographic portraits of Wores, a considerable collection of reviews and other publicity, including the controversy over his pronouncements on Cubism and Futurism. In addition, a map case file (97-201.1) contains photographs, prints, and mounted news clippings, mainly relating to his residence (1926-1939) in Saratoga, California. The painter’s palette and paint box complete the Collection.

Access Terms

Damrosch, Walter, 1862-1950.
Duveneck, Frank, 1848-1919.
Gray, Percy, 1869-1952.
Keith, William, 1938-1911.
Peck, Orrin.
Peters, Charles Rollo.
Phelan, James D. (James Duval), 1861-1937.
Root, Elihu, 1845-1937.
Russell, Ida.
Lewis, Agnes Smith, 1843-1950.
Art, Modern--20th century--United States.

Box 1, Folder 1

Correspondence, 1880-1909

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco from William Keith, Munich, Germany, January 30, 1884. Keith relates printing problems. Eva Withrow. 1884
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, from D.W. McCall, Montreal, Canada, July 29, 1898.
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from [__.__.?] Gilchrist, Matautu[?], Hawaii, May 3, 1902
Letter to Theodore Wores, Honolulu, Hawaii, from Roland F. [______?], (M. Knoedler & Co.), London, September 9, 1902 1902
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, [?] Garath [?], New York, December 30, 1902
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, from Charles de Kay, New York, March 5, 1903.
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, from A. Esterbrook [?], Boston, April 2, 1903.
(See also letters from George B. Mallon, March 28, 1913 and February 8, 1915.) 1903
Letter to Theodore Wores, Los Angeles, from Ida Evelyn Russell [Mrs Alexander Russell], May 10, 1906. San Francisco earthquake of April, 1906. (See also letter from Ida Evelyn Russell, February 19, 1906.) 1906

Correspondence, 1910-1919
Letter to Theodore Wores, Honolulu, from Robert H. Fletcher, San Francisco, November 12, 1910. 1910
Postcard to Theodore Wores, Honolulu, from P. Eyre Macpline, Venice, Italy, December 7, 1910. 1910
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco from George Barry Mallon, New York, March 28, 1913. The Delineator, The Woman’s Magazine, Adventure. (See also letters from George Barry Mallon, May 2, 1903 and February 8, 1915.) 1913
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from C. A. Hamond [?], Norfolk, England, April 8, 1913. 1913
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Peter F. Dunne, San Francisco, June 3, 1913. 1913
Postcard to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from [______?], Haden [?], France, June 27, 1913. 1913
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from W. Sproule, San Francisco, December 17, 1913. 1913
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from George Barry Mallon, New York, February 8, 1915. (See also letters from George B. Mallon, May 2, 1903 and March 28, 1913.) 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Agnes [Ketia?] Smith, Perak, Federated Malay States, March 11, 1915. 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Frank Duveneck, Cincinnati., March 27, 1915 (See also letters from Frank Duveneck, April 19, 1915, and May 17, 1915.) 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from H. Shugio [?], San Francisco, April 18, 1915. 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Frank Duveneck, Cincinnati, April 19, 1915 (See also letters from Frank Duveneck, March 27 and May 17, 1915.) 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Frank Duveneck Cincinnati, May 17, 1915. (See also, letters from Frank Duveneck, March 27, 1915 and April 19, 1915.) 1915
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Walter Sando [?], Riverside, California, February 3, 1917. 1917
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, from Charles L. Freer, Detroit, December 22, 1917. 1917
Invitation to Theodore Wores, New York, from Walter Damrosch, [New York?], [December, 1917]. See also Walter Damrosch, March 21, 1918. 1917
Card to Theodore Wores, New York, from Robert Chrett [?], Hubbard Woods, Illinois, January 9, 1918. 1918
Letter to Theodore Wores, New York, from Walter Damrosch, New York, March 21, 1918. (See also invitation from Walter Damrosch, December 1917.) 1918
Envelope [only] to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from [?] April 22, 1919. 1919

Correspondence, 1920-1929
Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Elihu Root, San Francisco, March 16, 1923. 1923

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from G. P. Jacomb-Hood, Calcutta, India, February 2, 1927. (See also letter from G. P. Jacomb-Hood, June 26, 1927.)

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Ivanhoe Whitted, Columbus City, Iowa, March 6, 1927.


Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Mrs. Alma B. Spreckels, San Francisco, March 27, 1931.


Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from George H. Hotaling San Francisco, April 16, 1931, with a copy of a letter to A. Harry Field, from George Hotaling, April 17, 1931.


Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Percy Gray, [Location unknown], April 27, 1931.

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Douglas Tilden, Berkeley, California, February 1, 1932.

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from Jane Amundsen, Sacramento, California, March 18, 1932.

Letter to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from William Ritchell, Carmel Highlands, California, February 19, 1933.

Letter to Theodore Wores from the Bay Area Art Association, with membership forms enclosed, envelope dated October 17, 1935.


Annotated letter (copy) to Andrew Summers Rowan, from Jose Zarza, Consul for Cuba, July 27, 1938. sent to Theodore Wores, 1938 February 6, 1939. [1939]


Notecard to Theodore Wores, from M. Townsend, New York, April 21 [no year date] n.d.

Notecard to Theodore Wores, from [?] dated November 21 [no year date] n.d.


Envelope [only] to Theodore Wores from Library of Congress, [copyright section], November 19, 1914.
Entry forms and prospectus for 13th Biennial Exhibition,( December 1932-January 1933), to Theodore Wores, San Francisco, from the Corcoran Gallery, Washington D.C., September 12, 1932. 1932

Box 1, Folder 7
Exhibit Catalog, "Theodore Wores Retrospective," Kennedy Galleries, New York, May 4-June 1, 1973

Box 1, Folder 8

Box 1, Folder 9

Box 1, Folder 10

Box 1, Folder 11

Box 1, Folder 12

Box 1, Folder 13

Box 1, Folder 14
Theodore Wores: Artist in Search of the Picturesque, by Lewis Ferbrache`, San Francisco, 1968, 63 pages [Biography]. Published in connection with a retrospective exhibit of Wores' paintings at the California Historical Museum (San Francisco), Triton Museum ( Santa Clara, California), and Carmel Museum of Art (Carmel, California), 1968-1969.

Box 1, Folder 15

Box 1, Folder 16

Box 1, Folder 17

Box 1, Folder 18

Box 1, Folder 19

Box 1, Folder 20
Theodore Wores: Copies of San Francisco Newspaper Publicity (Additional). February 16, 1879 to April 10, 1910, 1879- with summaries. Loose leaf. (63 pp.)

Box 1, Folder 21
Exhibit Catalog, "TheWorld of Theodore Wores," Iris and B Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, Stanford, California, June 23-August 29,1999

Box 2, Folder 1
Bound Volume of Newspaper and Other Publicity on Theodore Wores and his Work. (86 pp., Announcements, Reviews, Commentary, Notes.) Applegarth Studio, London, 1881-Chelsea Testimonial, 1891. 1902

Box 2, Folder 2
Bound Volume of Newspaper and Other Publicity on Theodore Wores and his Work. (96 pp.) Photo portrait 1902- of Mrs. Wores. Controversy: traditionalists vs. modernists. 1938

Box 3, Folder 1

Box 4
Exhibit Placards, location of Theodore Wores' Studio pre-1906, and an anecdote regarding Wores and a woman's portrait. (2 placards). n.d.
| Box 4 | Photographs of Theodore Wores' studio, pre-1906, San Francisco. (4 framed photographs, labeled 2-1, 2-2, 2-3, and 2-4) n.d. |
| Box 5 | Wooden Paint Box belonging to Theodore Wores, n.d. |
| Box 6, Folder 1 | Theodore Wores as a Young Man. (2 B/W photo portraits, 8" x 10") n.d. [1880?] |
| Box 6, Folder 2 | Photograph album containing copies of Theodore Wores' Japanese and Chinatown paintings, and from his Munich days (24 pp. 14" x 18" sepia tone photos) n.d. [1880's] |
| Box 7 | Theodore Wores' oil painting palette. Wooden, (approx. 2-ft. long [Vertical crack]) [1890+] |
| OS Box 8, Folder 1 | Placard announcing permanent Wores exhibit at Saratoga Art Gallery (1 placard 2" x 4") (97-20.1) [1930?] |
| OS Box 8, Folder 2 | Photo of Theodore Wores at his easel (1 photo) (97-201.1) [1930?] |
| OS Box 8, Folder 3 | Mounted photo of painting by Wores of his Saratoga studio (97-20.1) [1930?] |
| OS Box 8, Folder 4 | Colored and B/W photoprints of sketches of Villa Montalvo, 1925 & Saratoga, California, former home of James D. Phelan. 1927 (2 prints) (97-20.1) |
| OS Box 8, Folder 5 | Photocopy of postcard to Wores from James D. Phelan (97-20.1) 1936 |
| OS Box 8, Folder 6 | Mounted newscrop with illustration by John W. Winker. (97-20.1) 1924 |
| OS Box 8, Folder 7 | Mounted photographs and newspaper photos of exterior of Wores' studio and blossom paintings, Saratoga, California. (5 photos, 1 clip) (97-20.1) 1930 |
| Map File Case 9, Folder 2 | Mounted photographs, Theodore Wores and his studio, Saratoga, California. (11 photos) (97-20.1) n.d. [1926?] |
| Map File Case 9, Folder 3 | Mounted newscropings and illustrations of Theodore Wores and his studio, Saratoga, California. (97-20.1) 1923-