

Center for Creative Photography

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Finding aid for the
William Mortensen Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection,
1937-2004
AG 191

William Mortensen Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1937-2004

AG 191

Creator

The Center for Creative Photography

Abstract

Materials related to the life and career of William Mortensen (1897-1965), photographer, author, and teacher.

Quantity/ Extent

4.5 linear feet

Language of Materials

English

Biographical/ Historical Note

Albert W. Mortensen—this is what is recorded as his name on the Utah 1900 census record—was born in 1897 in Park City, Utah. His family moved to Salt Lake City when he was 11 years old. He was interested in painting and was trained by his high school teacher, and possibly took lessons before that. He was inducted into the army in 1916 and discharged in 1918. Upon his release from the army, Mortensen spent 1919 and at least part of 1920 in New York City, possibly attending the Arts Students League while there. He traveled to Greece in 1920 and returned the same year. Traveling back to Utah, he took a job teaching art at his alma mater in Salt Lake City. By the end of the school year he left his job at East Side High School, and in 1921 traveled by train escorting a friend's sister to Hollywood. (The sister was Fay Wray.)

Mortensen evidently knew someone in Los Angeles who put him in contact with film director King Vidor. He worked in the burgeoning film industry alternately painting scenery, making masks, and engaging in various film art-related services. Simultaneously he began work at Western Costume Company photographing silent film stars in costume.

In 1924 he married Courtney Crawford, a librarian, and moved into her home on Hollywood Boulevard, where he maintained a studio from 1925-1931. Also, during this time, he began to enter and show in photographic salons both here and abroad. His work was published in various journals and newspapers, including *Photograms of the Year*, *American Annual of Photography*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Los Angeles Times*.

Mortensen moved to Laguna Beach in 1931 and opened a studio on the Pacific Coast Highway (then called South Coast Highway)—the first of four spaces that he rented over the next thirty years. His school, the Mortensen School of Photography, officially opened in 1931 and always occupied the same address as his studio.

In 1933 Mortensen married Myrdith Monaghan and met George Dunham who became a friend and model. More importantly, 1933 is also the year when he began his long writing collaboration with Dunham, which didn't end until 1960 with an incomplete manuscript titled *Composition*. The 32-year collaboration yielded 9 books in multiple editions and printings, 4 pamphlets, and over 100 articles in magazines and newspapers. Both Myrdith and Dunham proved to be his most significant models, helping him to produce his most important body of work. The school remained open until a short time after his death from leukemia in 1965.

Scope and Content Note

Collection consists of materials collected from separate sources at different times. The collection is divided into eight series: Research on Mortensen negatives; *The Command to Look*; Publications by Mortensen; Publications about Mortensen; Auction records for Mortensen photographs and books; Larry Lytle research materials; R. H. Cochrane, Jr. materials; Richard Bennett+ notebook.

Subgroup One, Research on Mortensen Negatives, contains correspondence and research materials collected by CCP archivist Amy Rule. Includes an inventory of the 55 gelatin silver nitrate film negatives at the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House. These negatives evidently were acquired from the Louis Walton Siple American Museum of Photography.

Subgroup Two, *The Command to Look*, consists of two editions of Mortensen's book, one a damaged copy of the 1937 edition: San Francisco: Camera Craft, third printing November 1943; the second is a photocopy of a republished edition: Los Angeles: Jacques de Langre, 1967.

Subgroup Three, Publications by Mortensen, consists of *The Female Figure* by William Mortensen (Newport Beach, CA: Jay Curtis Publications, 1954) [photocopy]; *How to Pose the Model* by Mortensen and George Dunham (3rd edition) [copy of dust jacket]; *The Texture Screen* by William Mortensen (Newport Beach, CA: Jay Curtis Publications, 1954) [photocopy]. Miscellaneous articles including photocopies of articles in the *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* (May – July 1941); "The Hermits of Baltimore," *Camera magazine* 78:2 (February 1953), 24-31, 88.

Subgroup Four, Publications About Mortensen, contains photocopies of photographs in *International Photographer* (December 1940-December 1943); Miscellaneous articles about Mortensen; Miscellaneous articles on related subjects; Publications by Deborah

Irmas; Dissertation on Mortensen: *The Manner of Mortensen: Aesthetic Communication and the Construction of Metaphysical Realities* by Edward Montgomery Clift. University of Pennsylvania, 1992. (129 pp.)

Subgroup Five, Auction Records for Mortensen Photographs and Books, contains photocopies of records in auction catalogs, 1989.

Subgroup Six, Research Materials Collected by Larry Lytle, Mortensen Biographer, 1990s, contains copies of public records related to Mortensen's life such as the record of his birth in 1897, Los Angeles County census records, passport application, World War I draft registration card, Orange County voters registration file, Salt Lake City directory pages, and other official public records; Bibliography compiled by Lytle in 1997; Lytle photographs of Mortensen addresses in Laguna Beach; Mortensen School brochures (copies); Lytle comments on the contents of the Gray Silva Collection at CCP; Chronology of Mortensen's addresses, 1932-1966; Transcription of telephone interview between Lytle and Robert Balcomb, 1998; 16th Annual Festival of Arts and Pageant of the Masters, Laguna Beach (copy; Cecil B. DeMille's Production *The King of Kings* by Jeanie Macpherson, [undated] (copy; *The Mode in Costume* by R. Turner Wilcox, 1948; with inscription, "4-15-50 Bill Mortensen with sincere regards – Kelly L. Taulbee" [pages possibly marked by Mortensen; Four copy negatives of Mortensen images, [undated]; Photocopies of magazine articles, 1940s-1950s; photocopies of Mortensen photographs; Hood Medal, 1949 (copy).

Miscellaneous research notes from Larry Lytle.

Biographical materials related to Mortensen and Dunham, including photographs of grave stones, marriage certificate of Myrdith and William Mortensen, death certificates of Myrdith and Dunham, notes and copies of pages from city directories.

Art sources for Mortensen subjects. Copies of illustrations in books and magazines showing possible sources for Mortensen's subjects and compositions.

"The Command to Look: The Story of William Mortensen, Parts 1, 2, 3," by Larry Lytle. Printouts from the online journal *The Scream* (8 May 2002), extensively illustrated with scans of Mortensen's photographs.

"The Illustrative Photographs of William Mortensen Used in Camera Craft Publications," by Larry Lytle, 1997.

George Dunham: Miscellaneous copies of official records, notes, and emails related to the education of Dunham including proof that he attended Harvard University, 1921-22.

Dunham: Documents from Dunham's career at Pomona College including his writings in student publications, 1917-1921.

Dunham: Copies of newspaper clippings, emails and other documentation of Dunham's life in Laguna Beach, 1927-65.

Laguna Beach research materials, research materials related to Mortensen's career in Laguna Beach. Copies of original materials in the Laguna Beach Historical Society. Supplied with the assistance of LBHS staff member Jane Janz. Also includes copies of articles by Mortensen, George Dunham, Paul Outerbridge, and others writing in the *South Coast News* and other publications about Mortensen's studio and the Mortensen School of Photography in Laguna Beach, the Laguna artists' scene, the Festival of the Arts and Pageant of the Masters, the Festival Photographic Contest, and publication of Mortensen's photographs and books. Of special note are clippings related to the 1956 claim by the U.S. Postal Service authorities that Mortensen's book *The Female Figure* was obscene.

Miscellaneous Larry Lytle research materials, including copies of *The Camera* magazine (1944-1946), newspaper article about Lytle lecture in Laguna Beach (2006), and various research notes.

Miscellaneous materials documenting the photographic career of Larry Lytle. These include they annual calendars (*Destination 2008*, *Sandwich Exotica 2006*, *Fun & Games 2005*, *Tintypes 2004*, *Inventions of the Twentieth Century 2000*, *Magic & Illusion 1999*, and *The Best Parts 1998*).

Subgroup Seven, R. H. Cochrane, Jr. Materials, contains negatives by Robert H. Cochrane, Jr., a Mortensen Metal Chrome Student, 1939.

Subgroup Eight, Richard Bennett Notebook, undated, contains a note book created by Richard Bennett, student of William Mortensen, undated (ca. 147 pages); includes extensive notes on Mortensen's photographic techniques and materials involved in the pigment, bromoil, and texturescreen processes. The notebook was deaccessioned from the Salt Lake City Art Center Library, 2005 and donated to the Center.

Subgroup Nine, Photographs by William Mortensen, features an undated photograph of a man in monk robes, signed "Wescosco Studio William Mortensen"; inscription: "to my friend Mr. Dellarowe from Eugene H. Tracy."

Arrangement

Subgroup 1: Correspondence and research materials on Mortensen negatives

Subgroup 2: The Command to Look

Subgroup 3: Publications by Mortensen

Subgroup 4: Publications about Mortensen

Subgroup 5: Auction records for Mortensen photographs and books

Subgroup 6: Research materials collected by Larry Lytle, Mortensen biographer, 1990s

Subgroup 7: R. H. Cochrane, Jr. Materials

Subgroup 8: Richard Bennett notebook, n.d.

Subgroup 9: Photography by William Mortensen

Subgroup 10: Other materials: Rubaiyat by William Mortensen

Names and Subject Terms

Mortensen, William [<http://vocab.getty.edu/ulan/500064799>]

Restrictions

Conditions Governing Access

Access to this collection requires an appointment with the Volkerding Study Center.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright for unpublished materials resides with the author and must be researched before research copies can be made.

Provenance

Subgroup 6, Gift of Larry Lytle, 2010

Subgroup 7, Gift of Elivio and Janet Serrano, 2007

Subgroup 8, Gift of James Swenson, 2005

Subgroup 9, Gift of Theresa Bitondo, 2016

Related Materials

The Center has several archival collections containing materials documenting the life and career of William Mortensen. Researchers are invited to consult the:

William Mortensen Archive (AG147)

William Mortensen & George Dunham Collection (AG43)

In addition, CCP has collections acquired from a number of Mortensen's students:

Robert Balcomb (AG180)

Anson Beman (AG185)

Ralph D. Hosenpud (AG227)

Ben Maxey (AG112)

Grey Silva (AG134)

CCP also has collections related to other photographers from the Pictorialist tradition:

Paul Anderson (AG40)

Aubrey Bodine (AG139)

Adolf Fassbender (AG168)

Preferred Citation

William Mortensen Miscellaneous Acquisitions Collection, 1937-2004. AG191. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

Processing Information

Amy Rule did the preliminary organization in May 2003 and prepared a draft finding aid in August 2009.

Finding aid updated by Paige Hilman in February 2018.

Container List

Subgroup 1: Correspondence and Research

Box Folder

1 1 Correspondence and research materials on Mortensen negatives.

Subgroup 2: *The Command to Look*

Box Folder

1 2/1 Damaged Copy of *The Command to Look*, 1937 edition

2/2 Photocopy of *The Command to Look*, (Los Angeles: Jacques de Langre, 1967)

Subgroup 3: Publications by Mortensen

Subseries 1: Monographs

Box Folder

1 3/1 *The Female Figure* by William Mortensen (Newport Beach, CA: Jay Curtis Publications, 1954) [photocopy]

How to Pose the Model by William Mortensen and George Dunham (3rd edition) [copy of dust jacket]

The Texture Screen by William Mortensen (Newport Beach, CA: Jay Curtis Publications, 1954) [photocopy]

The rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám by William Mortensen. Copy gifted to CCP in 2017 and in the CCP Library. DVD with images made by Larry Lytle of the monograph stored here.

Periodicals

- | | | |
|---|-----|---|
| 1 | 3/2 | Miscellaneous articles including photocopies of articles in the Los Angeles Times Home Magazine (May – July 1941) |
| | 3/3 | “The Hermits of Baltimore,” <i>Camera magazine</i> 78:2 (February 1953), 24-31, 88 |

Subgroup 4: Publications about Mortensen

Box Folder

- | | | |
|---|-----|--|
| 1 | 4/1 | [photographs] <i>International Photographer</i> (December 1940 – December 1943) |
| | 4/2 | Miscellaneous |
| | 4/3 | Miscellaneous articles on related subjects |
| | 4/4 | Publications by Deborah Irmas |
| | 4/5 | Dissertation on Mortensen: <i>The Matter of Mortensen: Aesthetic Communication and the Construction of Metaphysical Realities</i> by Edward Montgomery Clift. University of Pennsylvania, 19952. (129 pp.) |

Subgroup 5: Auction Records for Mortensen photographs and books

Box Folder

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|---|-----|---|
| 1 | 5/1 | Photocopies of records in auction catalogs, 1990s – |
|---|-----|---|

Subgroup 6: Research Materials collected by Larry Lytle, Mortensen biographer, 1990s

Box Folder

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|---|-----|--|
| 1 | 6/1 | Miscellaneous research notes from Larry Lytle |
| | 6/2 | Biographical materials related to Mortensen, wife Myrdith, and George Dunham |
| | 6/3 | Art sources for Mortensen subjects |
| | 6/4 | “The Command to Look: The Story of William Mortensen, Parts 1, 2, 3,” by Larry Lytle, May 8 2002 |

- 6/5 "The Illustrative Photographs of William Mortensen Used in Camera Craft Publications," by Larry Lytle, 1997
- 6/6 George Dunham: Miscellaneous copies of official records, notes, and emails related to the education of Dunham
- 6/7 Dunham: Documents from Dunham's career at Pomona College, 1917-1921.
- 6/8 Dunham: Copies of newspaper clippings, emails and other documentation of Dunham's life in Laguna Beach, 1927-65.
- 6/9 Research materials related to Mortensen's career in Laguna Beach
- 2 6/10 Mortensen Biographical Materials (copies of official public records)
- 6/11 Bibliography compiled by Lytle in 1997
- 6/12 Lytle photographs of Mortensen addresses in Laguna Beach
- 6/13 Mortensen School brochures (copies)
- 6/14 Lytle comments on the contents of the Gray Silva Collection at CCP
- 6/15 Chronology of Mortensen's addresses, 1932-1966
- 6/16 Transcription of telephone interview between Lytle and Robert Balcomb, 1998
- 6/17 16th Annual Festival of Arts and Pageant of the Masters, Laguna Beach (copy)
- 6/18 Cecil B. DeMille's Production The King of Kings by Jeanie Macpherson, [undated] (copy)
- 6/19 Photography magazine articles, 1940's-1950's (copies)
- 6/20 Mortensen photographs (photocopies)
- 6/21 Hood Medal chronology sheet, 1949
- Negatives
- Four copy negative of Mortensen images, n.d.
- Monograph
- The Mode in Costume* by R. Turner Wilcox, 1948; with inscription, "4-15-50 Bill Mortensen with sincere regards – Kelly L. Taulbee" [pages possibly marked by Mortensen]

Miscellaneous Larry Lytle research materials

- 3 6/22 *The Camera* magazine (1944-1946) 4 copies
- 6/23 Newspaper articles about Lytle Lecture in Laguna Beachy (2206) and
Mortensen's studio building; review of Lytle book
- 6/24 Original research by Larry Lytle, 1996-1997
- 4 Miscellaneous materials documenting the photographic career of Larry
Lytle.

Calendars

Destination, 2008

Sandwich Exotica, 2006

Fun & Games 2005

Tintypes, 2004

Inventions of the Twentieth Century, 2000 [2 c.]

Magic & Illusion, 1999

The Best Parts, 1998

Exhibition announcements

Booklets of Lytle photographs

Vanitas, momento mori and other meditations on death

The Strange and Amazing Case of Pygmalion and Galatea

Subgroup 7: R. H. Cochrane, Jr. Materials

Note: Nitrate negatives have been isolated in cold storage and require two weeks advanced notice to be accessed.

Box Folder

- 5 Negatives by Robert H. Cochrane Jr., a Mortensen Metal Chrome Student,
1939 [Nitrate negatives have been isolated in cold storage]

Subgroup 8: Richard Bennett Notebook

Box Folder

- 3 Richard Bennett Notebook, n.d.

Subgroup 9: Photographs by William Mortensen

Box Folder

- 6 [man in monk robes], undated; Signed "Wescosco Studio William Mortensen"; inscription: "to my friend Mr. Dellarowe from Eugene H. Tracy"
- 7 1 DVD with images made by Larry Lytle of the monograph by William Mortensen, *The rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. This copy was acquired by L.L. Burns.