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Finding aid for the  
Mortensen/Dunham collection, circa 1930 - 1964

AG 43

**Mortensen/Dunham collection, circa 1930 - 1964**

**AG 43**

**Creator**

Mortensen, William

Dunham, George

**Abstract**

Papers, publications, and photographs, circa 1930 -1964, of William Mortensen (1897 - 1965), photographer, teacher, and writer, as collected by his assistant and co-author George Dunham. The bulk of the collection consists of published monographs and tearsheets, Mortensen's manuscripts on the aesthetics and the techniques of photography, and his work prints of figure and landscape studies.

**Quantity/ Extent**

5 linear feet

**Language of Materials**

English

**Biographical/ Historical 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.

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

The strength and bulk of this collection resides in 37 typescript manuscripts of published and unpublished articles and monographs, some with handwritten annotations or corrections, written by Mortensen between 1933 and 1950. From the early 1930s until the end of the 1940s, Mortensen, with the aid of his model, friend, and editor George Dunham, produced numerous articles and books on photography. Eight published monograph titles are represented in this collection. These books span his writing career from his first book, *Projection Control* (1934), to the third edition of *How to Pose a Model* (1956).

The collection also includes approximately fifty magazine articles that Mortensen published from 1933 to 1948 in such journals as *Camera Craft* and *Popular Photography*. These articles reveal his personal, technical, and critical considerations on portraiture, the printing of negatives, pictorialism, the bromoil process, and other contemporary concerns. Several of these articles were later expanded into books. Some of the articles contain handwritten annotations.

Correspondence is represented in the collection with 46 letters, mostly incoming, from the editors and publishers of *Camera Craft*, *Popular Photography*, Morgan and Morgan, and Simon and Schuster. There are also a few miscellaneous letters about the bromoil

process and other technical problems discussed in Mortensen's books. George Dunham, acting as Mortensen's assistant, handled some of this correspondence.

The collection also includes miscellaneous printed items such as calling cards, catalogs, and pamphlets describing the Mortensen School of Photography. There is also a series of illustrations done by Mortensen in the early 1930s for the Milk Commission of Los Angeles County. Clippings of Mortensen's monthly advertisements and illustrations regarding his publications and school, as well as reviews by others of his published works are included. Four rare pamphlets, published in 1954 in a series titled *Mortensen System*, outline his approach to the negative, texture screen and model.

While fine prints are not part of this collection, 149 work prints are included. The majority of these are gelatin silver prints of various sizes, mostly untitled and undated, consisting of landscapes, figure studies, and portraits. These prints were probably done between 1935 and 1955; some of them were used to illustrate his publications.

This collection contains no records of business activities in Hollywood or Laguna Beach, his personal life and daily activities, exhibitions, or experimental photographic processes.

### **Arrangement**

This collection has been designated Archive Group (AG) 43 and has been arranged according the following outline:

Series 1: Correspondence, 1935-1965

Series 2: Manuscripts, circa 1933-1965

Series 3: Printed materials, circa 1930-1960

Series 4: Monographs, 1934-1956

Series 5: Periodicals, 1933-1948

Series 6: Pamphlets, ca.1937-1954

Series 7: Photographs, circa 1935-1955

Series 8: Correspondence, originals

Series 9: Manuscripts, originals

### **Names and Subject Terms**

Mortensen, William [<https://lccn.loc.gov/n79145570>]

Dunham, George [<https://lccn.loc.gov/n90652596>]

## Restrictions

### Conditions Governing Access

Copyright ownership is unclear for Mortensen's photographs and writings. For additional information, consult the archivist.

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

### Conditions Governing Use

It is the responsibility of the user to obtain permission from the copyright owner (which could be the institution, the creator of the record, the author or his/her transferees, heirs, legates or literary executors) prior to any copyright-protected uses of the collection.

The user agrees to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Arizona Board of Regents, the University of Arizona, Center of Creative Photography, including its officers, employees, and agents, from and against all claims made relating to copyright or other intellectual property infringement.

## Provenance

Purchased from the heirs of George Dunham through the Alta Bookstore, Laguna Beach, California in 1980.

## 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)

William Mortensen Miscellaneous Acquisitions collection (AG191)

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

Robert Balcomb (AG180)

Anson Beman (AG185)

Richard Bennet (AG191)

R. H. Cochran, Jr. (AG191)

Ralph D. Hosenpud (AG227)

Ben Maxey (AG112)

Grey Silva (AG134)

**Preferred Citation**

Mortensen/Dunham collection, circa 1930 - 1964. AG 43. Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ.

**Processing Information**

Processed September 1984 by Roger Myers. Electronic version prepared by Amy Rule, June 1998. Revised August 2009. Finding aid updated in 2017 by Paloma Phelps.

## Container List

### Series 1: Correspondence, 1935-1965

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by correspondent

Quantity: 7 folders

Box	Folder	
1	1	General, 1935 - 1965
	2	<i>Camera Craft</i> , 1936-1957
	3	Dunham, George, circa 1935-1965
	4	Morgan and Morgan, 1962
	5	<i>Popular Photography</i> , 1937
	6	Simon and Schuster, 1936-1959
	7	Stuart, Charles, 1959

### SELECTED INDEX TO CORRESPONDENCE

*Camera Craft*, 1936-1957

Davis, B.G., *see Popular Photography*

Dunham, George, circa 1935-1965

Morgan, Willard D., *see Morgan and Morgan*

Morgan and Morgan, 1962

*Popular Photography*, 1937

Simon, Richard L., *see Simon and Schuster*

Simon and Schuster, 1936-59

Stuart, Charles, 1959

Young, George Allen, *see Camera Craft*

### Series 2: Manuscripts, 1933-1960

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by title

Quantity: 1.5 linear feet

Box	Folder	
1	8	Fragments, circa 1933-1950
	9	<i>The Abrasion Tone Process</i> , 1938
	10	<i>The American Camera Neurosis</i> , circa 1933-1950
	11	<i>An Analysis of the Picture Mind</i> , circa 1933-1950

- 12 Biographical essay, untitled, circa 1946-1965
- 13 Brochure on correspondence course; some biographical information, circa 1933-1965
- 14 *Bromoil Prerequisites*, 1937
- 15 *The Bromoil Transfer: Factors in Inking*, 1936
- 16 *The Circle of Confusion: Focal Length in Portraiture*, 1936
- 17 *Colour in Photography*, 1938
- 18-22 *The Command to Look*, 1937
- 23-25 *Composition*, 1960
- 26 On composition: untitled, circa 1960
- 27 *Costume Elements*, circa 1935
- 28 *Developing Theory*, circa 1939 [Note: Author is not Mortensen. Text describes his use of the Gamma-D developer.]
- 29 *The Function of the Model*, circa 1936
- 30 Text on the history of photography: untitled, ca.1946
- 31 *I Am the Picture*, circa 1933-1950
- 32 *Let's Be Candid about the Candid Camera*, 1938
- 33 *Micro-Organisms*, ca. 1933-1950
- 2 1-8 *The Model*, 1936
- 10 *The Modern Predicament*, ca. 1933-50
- 11-16 *Monsters and Madonnas*, 1936
- 17 Mortensen School of Photography, correspondence course. Lesson 1: Negative Quality, n.d.
- 18 Mortensen School of Photography: untitled, ca. 1962
- 19 *Mortensen Texture Process*, press announcements, ca. 1934
- 20 *Notes on the Miniature Camera*, 1934
- 21-24 *Outdoor Portraiture*, circa 1940
- 25 *The Perfect Negative*, 1937
- 26 *Photography and Tradition*, ca. 1937
- 3 1-4 *Pictorial Lighting*, circa 1935
- 5-8 *Pictorial Lighting*, 1947
- 9 *Pictorial Make Up*, 1935
- 10 *Portraiture and the Basic Light*, circa 1935
- 11 *Projection Control*, circa 1934-1942
- 12 *Projection Control in Portraiture*, circa 1937
- 13 *Theory of Negative Exposure and Control*, circa 1937
- 14 *Trial by Jury*, 1936
- 15-17 *Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism*, 1934
- 18 *We Are the Pictures or Heels and Heroes*, circa 1933-1950



19-20      *The World of Stereo*, circa 1935**Series 3: Printed materials, circa 1930-1960**

Arrangement: By record type

Quantity: fraction of a linear foot

Box	Folder	
3	21	Calling cards, ca. 1940
	22	Catalogs, circa 1930-1950s
	23	Clippings, circa 1930-1960
	24	Illustrations, Milk Commission, circa 1932
	25	Teaching aids, circa 1935

**Series 4: Monographs, 1934-1956**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by title

Quantity: 0.5 linear feet

Box	Folder	
4		<i>The Command to Look</i> , 1937
		<i>Flash in Modern Photography</i> , 2nd ed., 1947
		<i>Flash in Modern Photography</i> , 3rd ed., 1950 [annotations]
		<i>How to Pose the Model</i> , 3rd ed., 1956
		<i>The Model</i> , 1st ed., 1937 [annotations]
		<i>Monsters and Madonnas</i> , 1936 [annotations]
		<i>Outdoor Portraiture</i> , 1940 [annotations]
		<i>Pictorial Lighting</i> , 1st ed., 7th printing, 1943 [2 copies]
		<i>Pictorial Lighting</i> , 1st ed., 8th printing, 1944 [page cuts]
		<i>Pictorial Lighting</i> , 2nd ed., 1947 [annotations]
		<i>Print Finishing</i> , 1st ed., 4th printing, 1945 [annotations]
	<i>Projection Control</i> , 2nd ed., 1934 [annotations]	

**Series 5: Periodicals, 1933-1948**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by title of periodical, then chronologically

Quantity: 0.5 linear feet

*Camera Craft*

Box	Folder	
5	1	"Projection Control," 40:11 (Nov. 1933), pp.445-6.
	2	"Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism: Interpretations of Reality," 41:3 (Mar. 1934), pp. 103-10.
		"Venus and Vulcan: Creative Pictorialism: An Essay on Creative

- Pictorialism: 2.  
Sources and Uses of Materials," 41:4 (Apr. 1934), pp. 153-62.  
"Venus and Vulcan: Creative Pictorialism: 3. Selection and the Function of Control," 41:5, (May 1934), pp. 205-15.  
"Venus and Vulcan: Creative Pictorialism: 4. Fallacies of Pure Photography," 41:6, pp. 257-265.  
"Venus and Vulcan: Creative Pictorialism: 5. A Manifesto and a Prophecy," 41:7 (July 1934), pp. 309-17.  
"Notes on the Miniature Camera: About the Paper Negative," 41:9 (Sept. 1934), pp. 409-17.
- 3 "Notes on the Miniature Camera:3. Outdoor Portraiture," 42:1 (Jan. 1935), pp. 2- 12. [handwritten annotations]  
"On American Snapshots: 4. Glorifying the American Snapshot," 42:2(Feb. 1935), pp.65-73. [handwritten annotations]  
"Pictorial Make Up," 42:5 (May 1935), pp. 210-19. [handwritten annotations]  
"Pictorial Make Up," 42:6 (June 1935), pp. 264-71.
- 4 "The Circle of Confusion: Focal Length in Portraiture," 43:3(Mar.1936), pp. 104- 12. [handwritten annotations]  
"Muddy Waters," 43:4 (Apr. 1936). [1 black-and-white reproduction]  
"Home Made Mortensen Lighting Equipment," by V. Pokorny, 43:5 (May 1936), pp. 219-22.  
"Our Book Shelves," 43:6 (June 1936), p. 309. [review of *Monsters and Madonnas*]  
"Trial by Jury," 43:12 (Dec. 1936) pp. 566-74.
- 5 "The Six Phases of Control: The Outline of a System," 44:3 (Mar. 1937) pp. 106- 15.  
"The Perfect Negative," 44:5 (May 1937), pp. 206-11.  
"Bromoil Prerequisites," 44:8 (Aug. 1937), pp. 359-68.
- 6 "Let's Be Candid About the Candid Camera," 45:1 (Jan. 1938), pp. 2-8.  
"Color in Photography," 45:5 (May 1938), pp. 200-7.
- 7 "Portraiture: Surface and Substance," 47:8 Aug. 1940), pp.385-91.  
"A Discipline for Portraiture," 47:9 (Sept. 1948), pp. 430-6.  
"Portrait Procedure: Pt. 1," 47:12 (Dec. 1940), pp. 585-93.
- 8 "Make Up for Portraiture: 1. General Mechanics," 48:5 (May 1941), pp.

224-35.

"The Seven Shapes: 2. Corrective Uses of Make-up," 48:6 (June 1941), pp. 278- 85.

"The Cart and the Horse: The Ditherings of an Unregenerate Romantic," 48:12 (Dec. 1941), pp. 723-7.

*Central Camera Company*

9 "Portraiture and the Basic Light," circa 1935, pp. 73-7.

*Digest and Review*

10 "Portraiture and the Basic Light," circa 1935, pp. 73-7.

*International Photographer*

11 11 13:9 (Oct. 1941), p. 2. [reproductions only]

13:10 (Nov. 1941), p. 2. [reproductions only]

*Minicam Photography*

12 "A Folio of Color from William Mortensen," 8:4 (Jan. 1945), pp. 55-8.

*Popular Photography*

12 "A Folio of Color from William Mortensen," 8:4 (Jan. 1945), pp. 55-8.

13 [Reproductions], ca. 1938.

14 "The Picture Is The Thing," by Wick Evans, (May 1938), pp. 13-4; 94-8.

"Mortensen Makes Up Girl as Tibetan Monk," (July 1938), pp. 50-1.

"How to Make Abrasion Tone-Prints, Pt.1," Aug. 1938), pp. 20-2; 90-1.

"How to Make Abrasion Tone-Prints, Pt. 2," Sept. 1938), pp. 20-1; 90-1.

"Abrasion-Tone for Pictorial Effect, Pt.3," (Oct. 1938), pp. 20-1; 70-3.

15 "Pictures I Hate," (Dec. 1940), pp. 28-9; 132; 134; 136; 138.

"First-Get a Good Subject," (Jan. 1941), pp. 20-1; 120-3.

"De-Personalize Your Pictures," (Feb. 1941), pp. 26-7; 95-7.

"Create Lasting Interest," (Mar. 1941), pp. 26-7; 114; 115.

"Keep It Simple," (Apr. 1941), pp. 26-7; 74; 76-7.

16 "What You Should Know About Good Prints: Pt. 1.," (Feb. 1943), pp. 22-3; 70-1.

"The Right Negative for Enlarging: Pt. 2," (Mar. 1943), pp. 22-3; 79-81.

"How to Get Good Print Quality: Pt. 3," (Apr. 1943), pp. 22-3; 90-2.

- "Controlling Contrast for Better Prints: Pt 4," (May 1943), pp. 22-3; 84-85.  
"Elements of Photographic Composition: Pt.1," (Oct. 1943), pp. 19-21; 70-1.  
"Elements of Photographic Composition: Pt. 2," (Nov. 1943), pp. 28-9; 92-3.  
"Elements of Photographic Composition: Pt. 3," (Dec. 1943), pp. 28-30; 88-90.
- 17 "Light at Work: Pt. 1," (Oct. 1944), pp. 22-5; 81.  
"Light at Work: Pt. 2," (Nov. 1944), pp. 24-6; 100. "Light at Work: Pt. 3," (Dec. 1944), pp. 26-27; 91-4.  
"The Paper Negative," (Nov. 1945), pp. 21-3; 108; 110; 112.
- 18 "The Paper Negative: Materials and Methods for Control," (Jan. 1946), pp. 34-7; 108; 110.  
"The Paper Negative: A Test of Skill in Advanced Methods of Control," (Mar. 1946), pp. 36-39; 108; 110; 112.  
"A Project in Costuming," (Feb. 1948), pp. 49-51; 157-8.

**Series 6: Pamphlets, circa 1938-1954**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by title

Quantity: 6 pamphlets

Box	Folder	
5	19	<i>Gamma `D': Atomic Fine Grain Developer</i> , circa 1945 <i>A Mortensen Library</i> , ca.1938 <i>The Mortensen System</i> , 1954 <i>The Paper Negative</i> <i>The Female Figure</i> <i>Know Your Negative</i> <i>The Texture Screen</i>

**Series 7: Photographs (work prints), circa 1935-1955**

Arrangement: By subject, mostly untitled and undated

Quantity: 1 linear foot (149 prints)

Box	Folder	
6		Landscape and architecture
7		Figurative studies and portraits

**Series 8: Correspondence, originals**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by correspondent

Quantity: 6 folders

Box	Folder	
8	1	General, 1935-1965
	2	<i>Camera Craft</i> , 1936-1957
	3	Dunham, George, circa 1935-1965
	4	Morgan and Morgan, 1962
	5	Simon and Schuster, 1936-1959
	6	Stuart, Charles, 1959

**Series 9: Manuscripts, originals**

Arrangement: Alphabetical, by title

Quantity: 1.0 linear foot

Box	Folder	
8	7	Fragments, circa 1933-1950
	8	<i>An Analysis of the Picture Mind</i> , circa 1933-1950
	9	Brochure on correspondence course; some biographical information, circa 1933-1965
	10	<i>The Circle of Confusion: Focal Length in Portraiture</i> , 1936
	11-13	<i>The Command to Look</i> , 1937
	14-16	<i>Composition</i> , 1960
	17	On composition, untitled, 1960
	18	<i>The Function of the Model</i> , circa 1936
	19-26	<i>The Model</i> , 1936
	27	<i>The Modern Predicament</i> , circa 1933-1950
	29	<i>Monsters and Madonnas</i> , 1936
9	1-2	<i>Monsters and Madonnas</i> , 1936
	3	Mortensen School of Photography, correspondence course. Lesson 1: Negative Quality, n.d.
	4	<i>Mortensen Texture Process</i> , press announcements, circa 1934
	5	<i>Notes on the Miniature Camera</i> , 1934
	6-9	<i>Outdoor Portraiture</i> , circa 1940
	10	<i>The Perfect Negative</i> , 1937
	11	<i>Photography and Tradition</i> , circa 1937
	12-15	<i>Pictorial Lighting</i> , 1st ed., ca.1935
	16-19	<i>Pictorial Lighting</i> , 2nd ed., 1947
	20	<i>Pictorial Make Up</i> , 1935

- 21 *Portraiture and the Basic Light*, circa 1935
- 22 *Projection Control*, circa 1934-1942
- 23 *Theory of Negative Exposure and Development*, circa 1937
- 24 *Projection Control in Portraiture*, circa 1937
- 25 *Trial by Jury*, 1936
- 26-28 *Venus and Vulcan: An Essay on Creative Pictorialism*, 1934
- 29 *We Are the Picture or Heels and Heroes*, circa 1933-1950
- 30-31 *The World of Stereo*, circa 1935