THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION

Augustus Vincent Tack: Landscape of the Spirit

1993

Finding Aid

The Phillips Collection Library and Archives 1600 21st Street NW Washington D.C. 20009 www.phillipscollection.org

CURATORIAL RECORDS IN THE PHILLIPS COLLECTION ARCHIVES

INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

Collection Title: Augustus Vincent Tack: Landscape of the Spirit; exhibition records Author/Creator: The Phillips Collection Curatorial Department. Leslie Furth, Guest Curator Size: 7 linear feet Bulk Dates: 1900-1998 Inclusive Dates: 1859-1998 NOTE: These dates include photocopies of research materials dated 1859-1990 Repository: The Phillips Collection Archives

INFORMATION FOR USERS OF THE COLLECTION

Restrictions: The collection contains restricted materials. Please contact Karen Schneider, Librarian, with any questions regarding access.

Handling Requirements:

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<u>ABSTRACT</u>

Augustus Vincent Tack: Landscape of the Spirit exhibition records contain materials created and collected by the Curatorial Department, The Phillips Collection, during the course of organizing the exhibition which explored Tack's progression towards abstractionism. Included are research files and catalogue and exhibition planning and design files.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Augustus Vincent Tack's contribution to art has been only partially explored and understood, as Leslie Furth states in her catalogue essay, A Mystic's Journey to Abstraction. This is due partly to the fact that so much of Tack's work is owned by the Phillips Collection, having been bought or commissioned by Duncan Phillips and bequeathed by Tack's widow to the museum. Tack did not fit easily into the modernist movement, preferring to travel his own path. The exhibition Augustus Vincent Tack: Landscape of the Spirit provided information about Tack's development and his contribution to the rise of modern American abstract painting. Duncan Phillips was an early admirer of Tack and they soon became friends. Phillips made Tack vicepresident of the first board of trustees of The Phillips Collection and sought his advice in developing the museum.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE COLLECTION

This exhibition and its catalogue document Tack's aesthetic development, unique aspects of his technique and his sources of inspiration. Leslie Furth states in the catalogue that, Tack's artistic direction is thought to have paralleled, but remained independent of, the avant-garde. His "abstract mysticism and technical innovation," his passion for color and decorative surface effects, for Asian art and for parallels between music and art, all paved the way for his abstraction. His religious upbringing and Jesuit education, as well as the "accidents of nature" that he observed in the landscapes of Massachusetts and the American West, informed his art. He also used photography to experiment with fragmentation of form.

John La Farge and Henry Siddons Mowbray were strong influences, as were the aesthetic movement and the idealistic naturalism of the American Renaissance movement. Tack applied methods learned from his exposure to these artists and movements in painting both his murals and his abstractions.

Beginning in 1897, Tack lived in Deerfield, Massachusetts and his early landscapes painted there show the beginnings of his interest in abstraction. It was also in Deerfield that he met Mary and Frances Allen, tonalist photographers who provided a stimulus to Tack in his approach to the local scenery.

Although he did not like New York City, Tack maintained a studio there. He joined the Architectural League and the Century Association, and signed a contract with the Kraushaar Galleries. As Leslie Furth states, his work began to move from "perceptual observation of a landscape to more fanciful decorative evocations of nature and the human figure." Tack stated that he sought to "be able to exert a great power over the mind and the emotions without any resort to literary associations." Tack's deepening interest in Asian art led him to new concepts of landscape painting. Duncan Phillips, who was drawn to his abstractions, encouraged his progress toward abstractionism.

Tack's shift in style required new techniques and he began to work with unblended pigments and to use heavy impasto. Duncan Phillips described these explorations as "a semi-sculptural mosaic of pure pigments calculated to illuminate dark churches...baffling in its difficulties." Tack travelled to France during this period, and his technique showed the influence of French impressionism, pointillism and symbolism.

In his later work, as Ms. Furth wrote, Tack "sought a truly abstract language of forms and the removal, or minimizing, of the artist's hand, he borrowed from traditional mural painting methods. He seemed aware that his abstractions never lost touch with nature and its suggestion of divine forces at work. In highly original applications of ancient methods and disparate styles, he united tradition and modernism in a striking manner." Tack's visit to the Rocky Mountains in 1920 deeply affected his approach to painting. He told his dealer "I have been developing some compositions of form and colors based on essential rhythm…they are abstractly decorative at the same time as combining a deep mystical meaning." In 1924, his western paintings were the focus of Tack's first solo exhibition at The Phillips Collection, inaugurating the lower library (now called the Music Room) for public exhibitions.

Tack's later work continued to build on the imagery of the Music Room works until well into the 1930s and even into the 1940s. The final monumental mural work of his career was the fire curtain he created for George Washington University's Lisner Auditorium, a commission that he won with the assistance of Duncan Phillips. The work was extremely difficult due to its size and location. A near-fatal heart attack caused Tack to return to Massachusetts and leave its completion to his assistant, Carl Lella.

Phillips's collecting of Tack works slowed in the 1930s, but he still supported him, arranging gifts of Tack paintings to other institutions, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1949 Phillips hosted an exhibition of Tack's work that Tack visited shortly before his death. He wrote to Phillips "I can only make a feeble effort to express to you my appreciation of your recognition...You have been a very great friend." In bequeathing the paintings remaining in his possession to Phillips, Tack entrusted Phillips with their disposition to other museums and galleries; Phillips placed works at the Brooklyn Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art and others.

The exhibition opened at The Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. on May 22, 1993 and continued through August 22, 1993. It then traveled to eight other venues: The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in Lincoln, Nebraska from November 2, 1993 through January 16, 1994; the Laguna Art Museum in Laguna Beach, California from February 25 through May 8, 1994; Telfair Academy in Savannah, Georgia from May 31 through August 7, 1994; Davenport Museum of Art in Davenport, Iowa from September 4 through November 6, 1994; Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery in Austin, Texas from January 20 through March 5, 1995; the Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach, Florida from March 17 through April 16, 1995; the Hubert Johnson Museum of Art in Ithaca, New York from August 19 through October 22, 1995; and finally a later exhibition at the Morris Museum in Augusta, Georgia from August 4 through October 26, 1998.

The primary creator of the catalogue and exhibition planning records in this collection was Leslie Furth, guest curator.

The collection consists of the research, catalogue and exhibition planning files of the curator. These records consist of research materials assembled, as well as catalogue and exhibition planning and execution documents such as legal and financial records, correspondence, loan requests and responses, schedules, installation design and checklists.

CUSTODIAL HISTORY AND ACQUISITION INFORMATION

This collection is owned by The Phillips Collection, and was accessioned from the curators' offices in accordance with the museum's records schedule.

PROCESSING AND DESCRIPTION INFORMATION

Date Processed: July 1, 2010 through September 13, 2010

Processed By: Valerie Vanden Bossche, Volunteer, supervised by Karen Schneider, Librarian

Processing Notes: After an initial survey of the collection, some duplicate materials were identified and a number of documents were identified as of no future reference value for the collection. In further discussions between the librarian and the processor, approval was given to weed duplicate documents (retaining those with hand-written notes), photocopy documentation and housekeeping documents. Duplicates and/or drafts of contracts were weeded. Boxes and folders containing restricted materials were marked with a red dot (see note above re 'restrictions').

The original alphabetical arrangement of the research, catalogue and exhibition files was maintained, with the exception of the Chronological Research files. Folder headings were maintained where possible, but, for greater clarity and accuracy, most were re-written or created in the absence of headings on the original file folders. Metal paperclips were removed and replaced with plastic clips. There were a great many Post-It Notes, sometimes in layers, which were removed, copied and the copies paper-clipped to the front of the original document. All documents were re-foldered in acid free folders.

Finding Aid Written By: Valerie Vanden Bossche, Volunteer, supervised by Karen Schneider, Librarian
Encoded By: Sarah Osborne Bender, Cataloging and Technical Services Librarian
Encoding Method:

RELATED MATERIAL

Historic Deerfield www.historic-deerfield.org/library P.O. Box 53 Deerfield, MA 01342 Tel: 413-775-7125 library@historic-deerfield.org

ARRANGEMENT OF THE COLLECTION

The collection is organized as three series: Series I: Research Series 2: Catalogue Planning Series 3: Exhibition Planning

The research material is divided into three sub-series, Chronological Research, General Research and Object Research. The curator's original chronological (for Chronological Research) and alphabetical arrangements (for General and Object Research) were preserved. Documents within folders are arranged chronologically with the oldest documents in front to the most recent in the back of each folder. The Research Series is comprised of eleven document boxes.

The catalogue material is in one series. Folders are arranged alphabetically. Documents within folders are arranged chronologically with the oldest document in front to the most recent in the back of each folder. The Catalogue Planning Series is comprised of one document box.

The exhibition material is divided into two sub-series; General Exhibition Planning and Traveling Exhibitions Files. Folders are arranged alphabetically in both sub-series. Documents within folders are arranged chronologically with the oldest document in front to the most recent in the back of each folder. The Exhibition Planning Series is comprised of two document boxes.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

Series I: Research 1859-1993 and undated

Series I consists of research materials assembled in planning the catalogue and the exhibition. Included are photocopies of articles and book chapters; quotes and notes on chronology of Tack's works; correspondence (of note is correspondence with family members/descendents and with Peter J. Sprang, former curator of Historic Deerfield, Inc. and owner of historical material on Tack); and notes from interviews with various family and friends, such as Jean P. Tack Kuehn, Tack's daughter-in-law, Arthur Fuller, John Gernand and Saville Ryan of whom Tack painted two portraits when she was a child. Arranged chronologically in sub-series one and alphabetically in sub-series two and three.

Sub-series I.I: Chronological Research 1875-1990

Sub-series 1.2: General Research 1859-1993 and undated

Sub-series 1.3: Object Research 1899-1993 and undated

Series 2: Catalogue Planning 1986–1994 and undated

Series 2 consists of bids, correspondence, financial and legal documents, images, meeting, planning and publisher files. Arranged alphabetically by subject.

Series 3: Exhibition Planning 1986–1998 and undated

Series 3 consists of correspondence, checklists, financial and legal documents, images, design and administrative records. Both Sub-series I and Sub-series 2 are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Sub-Series 3.1: General Exhibition Planning 1986-1994 and undated

Sub-Series 3.2: Traveling Exhibition files 1992-1998 and undated

Box Inventory

Series I: Research 1859-1993 and undated

Sub-series I: Chronological Research 1875-1990 and undated

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Box 2	Folder I Folder 2 Folder 3	Chronological Research, 1920-1924 Chronological Research, 1925-1929 Chronological Research, 1930-1934
Box 3	Folder I Folder 2 Folder 3 Folder 4	Chronological Research, 1935-1939 Chronological Research, 1940-1944 Chronological Research, 1945-1949 Chronological Research, 1950-1959
Box 4:	Folder I Folder 2 Folder 3 Folder 4	Chronological Research, 1960-1969 Chronological Research, 1972-1979 Chronological Research, 1980-1982 Chronological Research, 1983-1990

Sub-series 2: General Research 1859-1993 and undated

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Folder 2	Allied War Salon, 1917-1955
Folder 3	American West, 1923, 1991 and undated
Folder 4	Architectural League, 1901 and undated
Folder 5	Art Education, 19 th Century, 1981, 1989
Folder 6	Art Students League 1 of 2, 1940-1992 and undated
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Folder 8	Articles [correspondence] Elizabeth Chew, 1914-1972 and undated
Folder 9	Bayne, William W., 1967-1968 and undated
Folder 10	Bourdelle, [Antoine and Rhodia Dufet], 1976, 1992
Folder II	Bowers, Mrs. Fredson, 1992
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Folder 13	Carrere, Theodore, 1992-1993 and undated
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Folder 15	Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, 1987-1992 and undated
Folder 16	Correspondence, Leslie Furth & David Scott, and notes, 1985-1987 and undated

Folder 17 Crisis of Teens, 1917	7-1982 and undated
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- Folder 18 Cross, Mrs. Donald, 1986, 1987
- Folder 19 Deerfield Academy, 1903-1992 and undated
- Folder 20 Directory Listings, 1925, 1926, 1976 and undated
- Folder 21 Duncan Phillips gifts/donations of Tack works to other museums, 1987-1993 and undated

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- Folder I Ellinger, Robert [wife was Tack niece]; Miriam Ryan, 1968-1992
- Folder 2 Family History & Collection, 1914-1985 and undated
- Folder 3 Family Photograph ca. 1908, undated
- Folder 4 Family Tree, undated
- Folder 5 Ferguson, John B. & Mrs. Ferguson & Helen Keller Portraits, undated
- Folder 6 Fuller, Arthur [family] Interview, 1967
- Folder 7 Furth, Leslie notes, undated
- Folder 8 Gernand, John Interview, undated
- Folder 9 Glass slides of Tack works, notes on, undated
- Folder 10 Harvey, Stephen Collection, 1989 and undated
- Folder II Historic Deerfield Collection, 1901-1993
- Folder 12 Hubbard Auctioneers Interview & correspondence, 1986 and undated
- Folder 13 Humphreys, George H. Interview & correspondence, 1971-1992 and undated
- Folder 14 Japonisme, 1900, 1979, 1992 and undated
- Folder 15 Kraushaar Galleries [Exhibitions], 1917-1944
- Folder 16 Kuehn, Jean P. Tack [Tack daughter-in-law] Interview, 1986 and undated
- Folder 17 La Farge, John 1 of 2, 1993 and undated
- Folder 18 La Farge, John 2 of 2,
- Folder 19 Lay, Charles Downing & George [owned "The Crowd"], 1992 and undated

Legler, Jeffrey Goodhue [family], 1991
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Maniatty, Stephen G. [Deerfield] Interview, 1971 and undated
McBeth, William – Tack correspondence with, 1904-1955
McDonell, Edward – Winter Landscape, undated
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Folder 13	Murphy, J. Francis, undated
Folder 14	New Haven Paint & Clay Club, 1991 and undated
Folder 15	New York University – Teaching, 1992
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Folder 17	Notes from Shipping Records Registrar's Office
	1919-1940, 1972 and undated
Folder 18	Notes – Leslie Furth, undated
Folder 19	Passport Information, National Archives, 1992 and undated
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Folder 22	Ribout, Jacques Interview and Correspondence, 1967, 1993
Folder 23	Robb, Mrs. M.A. [family], 1870-1992
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		Correspondence, 1930 and undated
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	Mowbray, 1993
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- Folder 17 Old Woman with Red Shawl c. 1900, 1986
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- Folder 24 Portrait of Chief Justices Harlan F. Stone and Charles
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Folder 5	Portraits and Abide With Us – Williams College, 1939-1992
Folder 6	Response, The, 1967-1992 and undated
Folder 7	Rosa Mystica, 1985-1992 and undated
Folder 8	Seaside Scene, Figures and Sky, 1986 and undated
Folder 9	Simon of Cyrene, Remorse of Eve, 1967-1991 and undated
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Folder II	Study for Sister Death, undated
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Folder 16	Unidentified Portrait and drawings, 1991-1993
Folder 17	Untitled Painting – Jack Pevere owner, 1966, 1987 and undated
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Folder 19	Uphill Road, 1931-1986 and undated
Folder 20	Various Portraits – National Portrait Gallery, 1923-1974 and undated
Folder 21	Various Portraits – Raydon Gallery, undated

- Folder 22 Violet Tack Portrait, 1986
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- Folder 5 "News and Events," 1993
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Folder 20	Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993-1994 and undated [restricted]
Folder 21	Tour Schedule, 1994 and undated
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