### Wallace McMahon Mitchell, 1911-1977

Papers, 1934-1980  
5 linear ft.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acquisition Number:</th>
<th>1990-21</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition:</td>
<td>The papers of Wallace MacMahon Mitchell were transferred to the Cranbrook Archives, April 1991, from the offices of the Cranbrook Academy of Art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access:</td>
<td>Access to Box 8 is restricted until the year 2040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copyright:</td>
<td>Copyright for this collection is held by the Cranbrook Educational Community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Index:</td>
<td>See end of finding aid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs:</td>
<td>Transparencies have been removed to the Archives negative collection; slides are in box 7; photographs and a catalog of photographs of Mitchell’s work are in boxes 5-6A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio/Video:</td>
<td>Audio cassette tapes were removed to the Audio Cassette collection. 3 8mm films (filmed by Joan Bence) were removed to the film collection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Processing:</td>
<td>Patricia Pykary, 1991; Mary Beth Kreiner, 2010</td>
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</table>
Wallace MacMahon Mitchell was born 9 Oct 1911 in Detroit, Michigan to Arthur Z. and Edith MacMahon Mitchell. In 1930, after attending public schools in Detroit, Mitchell enrolled in Olivet College, transferring the following year to Hamilton College, Clinton, NY. He received a BA from Northwestern University, Chicago, Ill. (1934); spent a year studying at Cranbrook under Zoltan Sepeshy (1934-1935); and toured Europe. In 1936 Mitchell completed his MFA at Columbia University in New York.

Returning to Cranbrook, Mitchell was first employed as a painting instructor (1936-1954) during which time he also taught Arts and Crafts at Cranbrook School (1944-1947).

In June 1941, Mitchell married Virginia "Jill" Mills. They had two children, Dinah (7 Nov 1942) and Jeffrey (1 Oct 1943). The Mitchells were divorced in 1955, and the following year Mitchell married Mary Stringer. They had two sons, Daniel (22 Feb 1959) and Patrick (7 Jul 1963).

In 1946, the Guggenheim-funded Museum of Non-Objective Painting included two of Mitchell's paintings in their European Exhibition. Two additional paintings were added to the European collection in 1948. These four paintings are now part of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum collection.

In 1950, Mitchell had his first New York one-man exhibition at the prestigious Bertha Schaefer Gallery. Between 1950 and 1962 Mitchell's paintings and constructions were a frequent part of Schaefer's exhibitions. At the same time Mitchell received commissions to design rugs, murals and three-dimensional constructions for private patrons, the University of Kentucky and the Fisher Body Division at the General Motors Tech Center. During these years Mitchell developed into a geometric abstractionist emphasizing color and its movement.

Successful as an instructor and artist, Mitchell then became an administrator. He was registrar of the Art Academy from 1944 until 1956, when he was appointed Director of the Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum. In spite of his administrative duties, his creative work continued and it was during the early 1960s that he began his inventive driftwood sculpture works. He continued to experiment with different media from wood to plexiglass in his painting constructions. He was selected to be President of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1970. In 1975, Mitchell announced that he would retire as President at the end of the 1976-1977 academic year, and a retrospective exhibition was planned. However, he died suddenly of a heart attack on January 13, 1977, and the retrospective exhibition became a memorial tribute.
Scope and Content of Collection

The collection contains the papers of Wallace Mitchell and his family during his years as a Cranbrook graduate student, instructor and an administrator of the Cranbrook Academy of Art. Some correspondence and minutes of the Cranbrook Academy of Art during Mitchell's tenure as president is included, though much of it was removed and added to the CAA Administration Records in Feb 2007.

A large bulk of the collection pertains to Joan Bence's interviews and correspondence with Mitchell's friends, colleagues and patrons in the preparation of her publication, *The Art of Wallace Mitchell*. Also included are catalogs and materials related to Mitchell’s commissions and exhibits.

The photographic material includes negatives, transparencies, slides and photographs. Taped interviews were removed to the Audio Cassette collection.

The papers of Wallace MacMahon Mitchell are organized into the following series:

Series I. Professional (Boxes 1-3) Among the biographical and professional papers contained in the series are correspondence, applications, commissions and exhibitions, articles and clippings, obituaries, and materials relating to Mitchell’s Memorial exhibition in 1977.

Series II. Research (Boxes 4-5) This series consists of Joan Bence's interviews and correspondence with Wallace Mitchell's family, friends and patrons in the preparation of a biographical manuscript. It also includes a typescript of Mrs. Bence’s completed manuscript, *The Art of Wallace Mitchell*, and typescripts of two additional, unpublished articles on Mitchell.

Series III. Photographic Materials (Boxes 5-7) This series contains photographs of Wallace Mitchell and of his works.

Series IV. Restricted (Box 8)

Related Collections

- Cranbrook Academy of Art Records (1998-05)
- Cranbrook Academy of Art, Office of the President (Slade) Records (1995-09)
- Cranbrook Foundation RGI: Office Records (1981-05)
- Cranbrook Archives Photograph File
- Cranbrook Archives Scrapbook Collection (newsclippings)
Series I: Professional

Box 1

2. Sketch of Wallace Mitchell by Marianne Stengell, 1939
3. Correspondence, 1940-1969
6. Studio Inventory, 1977
7. Obituary and Tribute, 1977
8. Memorial Fund, 1977
9. Academy News, 1940
10. Art Digest, 1950
11. Art News, 1950
12. Clippings, 1935-1953
15. Clippings, 1977-1984
16. Clippings Record, 1939-1974
17. Museum Addresses, 1973
18. Byerly Company Commission, 1956
19. Rising Rug Commission, 1956
20. Exhibition Catalogs and Announcements, 1942-1974

Box 2

1. Cranbrook Academy of Art Exhibition; 1947, 1951
3. Cranbrook Academy of Art Exhibition; Feb 1953
4. Cranbrook Academy of Art Exhibition; Mar-Oct 1953
5. University of Minnesota Exhibition; 1954
6. Illinois Institute of Technology Exhibition; 1963
7. Cranbrook Academy of Art Faculty Exhibition; 1964
8. Franklin Siden Gallery; 1965
11. Paintings by Wallace Mitchell Exhibition; 1971
12. Cranbrook Art Auction, 1974-1976
13. Memorial Exhibition, collection preparation; 1976-77
14. Mitchell/Varian Interview, c.1976
15. Peterson/Varian Interview, c.1976
16. Drafts for Introduction to Memorial Exhibition Catalog, by Elayne Varian, c. 1976
17. Memorial Exhibition, catalog preparation I; 1977
18. Memorial Exhibition, catalog preparation II; 1977

Box 3

1. Memorial Exhibition, photos and negatives; 1977
2. Memorial Exhibition, Exhibition catalog; 1977
3. Memorial Exhibition, supplemental catalog; 1977
4. Memorial Exhibition, catalog orders; 1977
5. Memorial Exhibition, slide kits; 1977
6. Memorial Exhibition, preparation receipts; 1977
7-10. Memorial Exhibition, shipping orders and receipts; 1977
11. Memorial Exhibition, invitation preparation; 1977
14. Memorial Exhibition, Preview reception: 1977
15. Memorial Exhibition, return deliveries; 1977

Box 3b

Research/Interview contact cards for Memorial Exhibition

Series II: Research

Box 4

2. “The Art of Wallace Mitchell,” chapters 4-6, by Joan Bence
7. “Vision from Cranbrook: Wallace Mitchell’s ‘Turnabout’ Mural at the University of Kentucky” by Joan Beehler Bence, unpublished
8. Student Rosters, 1944-1950
9. Correspondence and Interviews, A; 1980-1987
10. Correspondence and Interviews, B-Be; 1981-1985
11. Correspondence and Interviews, Bi-By; 1980-1984
12. Correspondence and Interviews, C-D; 1977-1984
13. Correspondence and Interviews, E-G; 1977-1984
15. Correspondence and Interviews, Ham-Hat; 1977-1981
16. Correspondence and Interviews, Hi-Ka; 1979-1986
17. Correspondence and Interviews, Ken; 1974-1986
18. Correspondence and Interviews, Kem-Ku; 1980-1984
19. Correspondence and Interviews, L-Mc; 1977-1983

Box 5

1. Correspondence and Interviews, Me- : 1979-1981
2. Correspondence and Interviews, Michaels; 1980-1984
3. Correspondence and Interviews, Mil-Mit; 1982-1983
4. Correspondence and Interviews, Mitchell (Family)—Mary, Daniel, Patrick; 1979-1982
5. Correspondence and Interviews, Mitchell (Family)—Daniel, David, Dinah, Patrick; 1979-1982
6. Correspondence and Interviews, Mitchell (Family)—Jeffrey, Jill; 1977-1982
8. Correspondence and Interviews, N-P; 1979-1982
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10. Correspondence and Interviews, S-Sm; 1981-1987
11. Correspondence and Interviews, Sm-Sn; 1977-1981
12. Correspondence and Interviews, So-Sy; 1976-1984
13. Correspondence and Interviews, T-V; 1980-1983
14. Correspondence and Interviews, W-Z; 1977-1995

Series III: Photographic Materials and Memorabilia

15. Explanation of coding system for photographs, negatives, transparencies, and slides

Box 6

Box 6A

1. Photographs—Personal, 1939-1976
2. Photographs—Works and exhibitions
3. Photographs—Transparency “System”

Box 7

Slide Boxes

Slides are marked with Code Numbers, which are explained in Folder 5, Box 5

1. Code #1-#89
2. Code #90-#237
3. Code #239-#299; plus slides of groups of works and slides of exhibition installations

Series IV: Restricted until 2040

Box 8
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