

Guide to the Donna Stein Papers on Thomas Wilfred

MS 2036



compiled by Christy Tomecek

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P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
(203) 432-1735
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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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CALL NUMBER: MS 2036

CREATOR: Stein, Donna

TITLE: Donna Stein papers on Thomas Wilfred

DATES: 1914–2001

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 4.33 linear feet (8 boxes)

LANGUAGE: The material is in English.

SUMMARY: The papers document Stein's professional and scholarly work on kinetic light artist Thomas Wilfred. The majority of the collection consists of research materials on Wilfred and his art work, including scholarly and popular magazine articles, writings by Wilfred, and photographs of Wilfred's compositions and studio. Included are materials from two exhibitions of Wilfred's work that Stein curated for the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, New York. Finally the collection contains Stein's master's thesis on Wilfred, and professional correspondence regarding Wilfred's artwork, the exhibitions, and professional publications. Materials cover from 1914 to 2001, with the bulk from 1962 to 1972.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Donna Stein, 2015, 2017.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

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Preferred Citation

Donna Stein Papers on Thomas Wilfred (MS 2036). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Related Materials

Related materials: Thomas Wilfred Papers (MS 1375).

Biographical / Historical

Thomas Wilfred

Thomas Wilfred was a kinetic light artist whose body of work consists of compositions that he called "Lumia." He was born Richard Edgar Løvstrøm on June 18, 1889 in Naestved, Denmark. Wilfred trained as both an artist and a musician, starting both drawing classes and piano lessons in 1903. In 1908 he moved to Paris, France, to study painting, sculpture, and voice at the Sorbonne, although he never earned a degree there. Beyond the piano, he also learned how to play the archlute, a European folk instrument. Both his art training and musical training would play important roles in developing his Lumia compositions. He also was a freelance newspaper journalist and wrote and published poetry. In 1913, he took the professional name Thomas Wilfred for his musical career, which he would continue to use as an artist. He served in the Royal Danish Army during World War I. After finishing his military service in 1916, he moved to the United States.

Wilfred's earliest memory was of his father using a faceted crystal egg as a prism to project colors on a wall to entertain Wilfred. He started experimenting with refracting light in 1905 with a cigar box, an incandescent lamp, colored glass, and lenses. He also studied theoretical works on light that related colors on the light spectrum with musical scales. His work progressed to projecting different colors on a screen by playing a keyboard instrument he built called a clavilux. Wilfred started performing at his first studio in South Huntington, New York as well as performing at concerts at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, New York, Queen's Hall in London, England, and the Royal Opera House in Copenhagen, Denmark. He also created several standalone compositions, many as commissions. In 1930, he founded the Art Institute

of Light to serve as a place of study for artists wishing to work in Lumia. Wilfred died on August 15, 1968 in Nyack, New York.

Donna Stein

Donna Stein is the Deputy Director of the Wende Museum in Culver City, California. She is also an art historian, art critic, and curator. She has studied at the University of California, Los Angeles and the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. She has curated exhibitions in museums in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

Scope and Contents

The papers document Stein's professional and scholarly work on kinetic light artist Thomas Wilfred. The majority of the collection consists of research materials on Wilfred and his art work, including scholarly and popular magazine articles, writings by Wilfred, and photographs of Wilfred's compositions and studio. Included are materials from two exhibitions of Wilfred's work that Stein curated for the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, New York. Finally the collection contains Stein's master's thesis on Wilfred, and professional correspondence regarding Wilfred's artwork, the exhibitions, and professional publications. Materials cover from 1914 to 2001, with the bulk from 1962 to 1972.

Arrangement

The papers are arranged in four series and one addition: I. Stein's thesis materials on Thomas Wilfred, 1950-1971. II. Correspondence, 1950-2001. III. Exhibition files, 1965-1996. IV. Research materials, 1914-1981.

Collection Contents

Series I: Stein's thesis materials on Thomas Wilfred, 1950–1971

This series contains the outline and rough draft of Stein's master's thesis written while studying at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and related correspondence with artist Thomas Wilfred. The thesis materials include a typed outline and typed drafts of each thesis chapter as well as handwritten drafts on legal pad sheets. Correspondence with Wilfred includes interview questions, diagrams of compositions, and edits of specific parts of Stein's thesis. Materials are arranged alphabetically.

b. 1, f. 1	Outline and rough draft of master's thesis	1965
b. 1, f. 2	Research correspondence with Thomas Wilfred	1950–1971

Series II: Correspondence, 1950–2001

This series includes correspondence with individuals related to the loan and maintenance of Wilfred's compositions for Stein's exhibitions, requests of Stein for assistance with research on Wilfred, and requests of Stein for assistance with further exhibitions of Wilfred's work. There is also a small amount of correspondence regarding Stein's manuscript review of an article on Wilfred by Stephen Eskilson for *Leonardo* journal. The series is arranged alphabetically.

b. 2, f. 1	Ars Studio	1971–1972
b. 2, f. 2	Conway, John	1950–1971
b. 2, f. 3	Epstein, Eugene	1964–1969, 2001
b. 2, f. 4	Land, Richard	1965–1971
b. 2, f. 5	Mazzia, Valentino Don Bosco	1959–1972
b. 2, f. 6	Moritz, William	1977–1986
b. 2, f. 7	Review of <i>Leonardo</i> article	2001
b. 2, f. 8	Wilfred's artwork	1968–1980

Series III: Exhibition files, 1965–1996

This series comprises materials related to two exhibitions of Wilfred's artwork that Stein curated at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, New York. Materials include photographs and drawings of compositions and composition schematics, catalog texts and proofs, reviews of the exhibitions, and press releases. Materials are arranged by site of exhibition and alphabetically therein.

Corcoran exhibition		
b. 3, f. 1	Bills and invoices	1969–1971
b. 3, f. 2-3	Catalog text and proofs	Circa 1969-circa 1971
b. 3, f. 4-5	Correspondence and related notes on compositions	1965–1996
b. 3, f. 6	Critical reviews	1971
b. 3, f. 7	Negotiations	1969–1971
b. 3, f. 8	Press release	1971
b. 3, f. 9	Prints and transparencies of technical drawings for exhibit installation	1971
b. 3, f. 10	Prints of technical drawings and related photographs and correspondence	1971
Museum of Modern Art exhibition		
b. 3, f. 11	Installation photographs	Circa 1971
b. 3, f. 12	Press release and checklist	1971

Series IV: Research materials, 1914–1981

This series comprises research materials for different projects related to Wilfred. A significant portion of this series includes bibliographic note cards composed by Stein. Other materials include photographs of Wilfred's artwork and studio, articles on Wilfred, writings by Wilfred, including his manuscript, *Lumia, the Art of Light*, and chronologies and lists of Wilfred's artwork compiled by Stein and/or Wilfred. There is also information on other kinetic light artists, including Frank Malina and Nicolas Schöffer. Materials are arranged alphabetically.

Articles on light		
b. 4, f. 1	General	1914–1968
b. 4, f. 2-3	Articles mentioning Wilfred	1918–1968
b. 4, f. 4	Articles related to Wilfred	1930–1965
b. 4, f. 5	Bibliography	Circa 1965-1970
b. 4, f. 6	Biography of Wilfred	1922–1971
b. 4, f. 7	Excerpts from Wilfred's writings	Circa 1919-circa 1968
b. 4, f. 8	Exhibitions list	Circa 1971
b. 4, f. 9	Joe's Lights	1969–1971
b. 4, f. 10	Museum of Modern Art painting and sculpture acquisition catalog	1962
b. 4, f. 11	Museum of Modern Art newsletter article and related memoranda	1968
b. 6–7	Note cards	Circa 1960-circa 1971
Other kinetic light artists		
b. 4, f. 12-13	General	1964–1977
b. 5, f. 1	Malina, Frank	1963–1981
b. 5, f. 2	Schöffer, Nicolas	1965
b. 5, f. 3	Photographs and negatives of Wilfred's West Nyack studio	Undated
b. 5, f. 4	Photographs and transparencies of Wilfred's Lumia compositions	Undated
b. 5, f. 5	Publicity on Thomas Wilfred	Circa 1920-1968
b. 5, f. 6	Reiback, Earl	1970–1974
b. 5, f. 7-8	Revised manuscript of <i>Lumia, the Art of Light</i> by Thomas Wilfred	Circa 1945-circa 1947
b. 5, f. 9	Wise Gallery pamphlets	1964–1970

Accession 2017-M-045: Additional material, 1967–1971

b. 1, f. 1	Exhibition catalog and gallery information	1967
b. 1, f. 2	Slides of Wilfred’s artwork	1971

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Art -- Exhibitions
Kinetic art
Light art

Names

Stein, Donna
Wilfred, Thomas, 1889-1968

Corporate Bodies

Corcoran Gallery of Art
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)