

Collection #
P 0545
OM 0372

GEORGE JOSEPH MESS MATERIALS, 1938–1962

[Collection Information](#)

[Biographical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Contents](#)

[Cataloging Information](#)

Processed by

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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
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Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 OM folder, 1 box OVB graphics, 3 framed prints

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1938–1962

PROVENANCE: Evelynne Mess Daily; Almagre Books, Bloomington, Indiana; unknown

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: DuBois, June, *Indiana Artists George and Evelynne Bernloehr Mess: A Story of Devotion*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1985. General Collection: N6537.M48 D8 1985; Blanche Stillson Papers. General Collection: M 0466; “Winter and Summer Catalog of the Circle Art Academy of Indianapolis, Season 1928–1929. Pamphlet Collection: N330.I552 C57 1929

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1985.0718, 1986.0670, 1990.0303, 1998.0067, 2003.0567x

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

George Joseph Mess (1898–1962) was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, to Joseph J. Mess (1871–1933) and Anna Gleis Mess (1875–1960). He had two younger brothers, Arthur G. (1899–1909) and Gordon B. (1900–1959).

In 1899 the Mess family moved to Indianapolis in 1899, where George attended Manual Training High School and the John Herron Art Institute. Though he served in the Army during the First World War, he was never shipped overseas. After the war, he attended Butler University and Columbia University Teachers' College, where he studied under the artist and educator Arthur Wesley Dow. Later in his career, he took summer courses at the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France (1929), and was awarded a Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Fellowship (1931).

In 1921 Mess returned to Indianapolis to run a commercial art business with his brother Gordon, and to pursue further studies with painter William Forsyth at Herron. It was in one of Forsyth's classes that he met Evelynne Bernloehr (1903–2003), whom he married in 1925. Along with Evelynne and Gordon, Mess founded and taught at the Circle Art Academy, a commercial art school in downtown Indianapolis that operated from 1927 to 1932. After the academy closed, Mess joined Gordon in organizing the Circle Engraving Company, where he headed the commercial art department for five years. In 1937, George and Evelynne Mess moved to Chicago, where he served on the staffs of *Esquire*, *Coronet*, and *Apparel Arts* magazines. Due to Mess's failing health, though, the couple moved back to Indianapolis in 1940 and devoted their time to teaching and producing artwork. From 1949 until his death in 1962, George Mess taught at Indiana University's Indianapolis campus.

Both George and Evelynne Mess became notable figures in the artistic communities of Indianapolis and Brown County, and much of their success has been attributed to their support of each other's work. Over the span of his career, Mess produced many paintings, mostly Impressionist-style landscapes in muted earth tones. However, Mess is mostly known for his superb prints of rural scenes. These are more modern in style, with undulating lines and sharp contrasts that call to mind the works of other successful printmakers of the 1930s and 1940s, such as B.J.O. Nordfeldt, Elizabeth Catlett, and Rockwell Kent. His work, always signed "George Jo Mess," is represented in numerous public collections, including the Indianapolis Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Sources:

Collection Materials

DuBois, June, *Indiana Artists George and Evelynne Bernloehr Mess: A Story of Devotion*.

George Joseph Mess Scrapbook Collection Guide. Manuscript Collection: OM 0372

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This visual collection consists of a short scrapbook and five prints—three framed and two unframed.

Though similar in style, the prints (all aquatints) depict a variety of subjects. *The Handy Pump* and *Snow Bound* are explicitly rural, and *Four O'Clock*, an interior scene featuring a cast-iron stove, is likely rural as well. However, *Christmas Eve*, which depicts figures struggling through deep snow in front of Christ Church Cathedral, is set in the heart of downtown Indianapolis. Though the scenes are pleasant, they are not idyllic. In most of them, a contrast is set between exterior chill and interior warmth.

The fifth print is Mess's 1940 half-length self portrait. In it, the artist turns to the side with his eyes crinkled and an amused smile on his face. His shirt collar is open, and drawing instruments fill the pockets of his rumpled vest. Mess's conception of himself is capable, comfortable, friendly, and non-threatening.

The scrapbook is short, comprising a few news clippings and reproductions of Mess's work. Also present is a letter from the artist to a Mr. Milkman, who had inquired about including Mess's work in a book.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

George Joseph Mess Scrapbook, ca. 1938–62

Christmas Eve, 1936
Aquatint
10 5/8 x 8 13/16 inches (image)
1986.0670

Snow Bound, 1936
Aquatint
10 3/4 x 8 3/4 inches (image)
1990.0303

Self Portrait, 1940
Aquatint
18 5/16 x 15 3/4 inches (frame)
Gift of Evelyn Mess Daily
1985.0718

Four O'Clock, 1943
Aquatint
13 15/16 x 15 1/2 inches (frame)
2003.0567x

The Handy Pump, 1943
Aquatint
13 15/16 x 15 1/2 inches (frame)
2003.0567x

CONTAINER

OM 0372

OVB Graphics
Box 1, Folder 1

OVB Graphics
Box 1, Folder 2

Framed Prints
1 of 3
FF 6-k

Framed Prints
2 of 3
FF 6-k

Framed Prints
3 of 3
FF 6-k

CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog:
<http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P 0545).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.