

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

A Guide to the Otto Plaug Papers, 1898-2008

Summary Information

Repository

Albany Institute of History & Art Library

Creator

Otto Plaug

Title

Otto Plaug Papers, 1898-2008

Identifier

MG 259

Date

1898-2008

Physical Description

3.0 linear feet; 5 boxes

Physical Location

The materials are located onsite in the Museum.

Language of the Material

English, German

Abstract

Artist Otto Plaug was born in Dessau, Germany, in 1898, and immigrated to the United States with his family in 1906. His primary work was in landscapes and abstract works, but early in his career, he also painted a number of Laguna Pueblo tribal members during a visit. Settling in Greenfield Center, New York, following his 1941 marriage to Bernhardine Schmitz, Plaug continued painting nearly until the end of his life in 2000, at 102 years of age. He was buried in Greenridge Cemetery in Saratoga Springs, New York.

This collection contains biographical materials, clippings, correspondence, ephemera, writings, scrapbooks, photographic materials, and audio/visual materials.

Preferred Citation

Preferred citation for this material is as follows:

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Conditions Governing Access and Use

Restrictions on Access

None

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

Accession: # 2020.016, Gift of Albert B. Roberts
Accession Date: July 2020

Processing Information

Processed by H. Cox, June 2020.

Biographical/Historical

Otto Plaug was born on August 16, 1898 in Dessau, Germany to Marie C. Richter (-1912) and Otto M. Plaug (1873-1919). His sister, Erika, was born in 1903.

In 1906, the family immigrated to the United States, initially settling in Wilton, New York, where Otto, Sr. worked for the Standard Wall Company. Marie Plaug died in 1912, and Otto, Sr. married Judith Anna sometime later.

Plaug's father arranged for Otto to attend art school at Strasbourg (then Germany), in 1914. When World War I broke out later that year, Otto moved in with his grandparents, Karl and Wilhelmina, and began attending the New School of Arts and Crafts in Hamburg. In 1917, he was imprisoned at Ruhleben for six months, and upon release in 1918, was remanded to his grandparents' home under house arrest for the duration of the war.

In 1919, Otto learned that his father was very ill, and booked passage on a ship to return to America. Before his ship could arrive, his father died, which he learned about on disembarking. Erika was still a minor, and Otto was awarded custody of her in February 1921. She was accepted into nursing school, and was set to begin studies that fall. Tragically, in late July she died while swimming with Otto in a local quarry.

Left without family in the United States, Plaug decided to travel to the American West. Both he and his father had appreciated Native American culture, and he visited a number of Pueblo villages. While in Laguna, New Mexico, he paid tribal members 25 cents each to pose for his paintings. Plaug also had his first art exhibition there, at the Santa Fe Museum of Art, which resulted in the sale of three of his paintings to the Santa Fe Railroad for commercial purposes.

Upon his return to New York in 1925, Plaug continued to pursue his interest in art in a variety of ways, producing landscapes, working as a scenery painter for the Metropolitan Opera and the Ziegfeld Follies, teaching art and design, and designing book jackets for Lippincott. In 1936, he studied at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Art in New York City.

In 1941, Plaug married Bernhardine Schmitz, (born 1897), a fellow German immigrant whom he had befriended while in Wilton. They settled in Greenfield Center, New York, and Plaug continued painting and exhibiting his works, including at least two shows at the Albany Institute of History & Art. Bernhardine would become locally known for her gardens. In the 1950s, Otto and Bernhardine traveled the American West, once more visiting the Pueblo tribes and other places of interest.

Bernhardine died in 1988 and was buried in the Greenridge Cemetery, in Saratoga Springs, New York. Otto lived to be 102 years old, and died in October 2000. He was also buried in the Greenridge Cemetery.

Scope and Contents

The Otto Plaug Papers consist of biographical materials, clippings, correspondence, ephemera, writings, scrapbooks, photographic materials, and audio/visual materials. The collection encompasses the years 1898-2008, with the bulk of the records from the 1920s-2000s.

Biographical Materials, 1898-2000, includes personal and vital records of Otto Plaug, along with the same materials for family friend Georg Hoffmann, Plaug's wife Bernhardine, his sister, Erika, and his father, Otto Plaug, Sr.

Clippings, 1943-2000, undated, consists of newspaper and magazine clippings Plaug found of interest personally, those that may have served as inspirations for artwork, and those related to his artwork and exhibits.

Correspondence, 1899-1998, undated, is comprised of letters written to and from Plaug, Plaug's wife Bernhardine, his sister, Erika, and his mother, Marie.

Ephemera, 1915-1923, undated, encompasses a number of calling cards from friends and relations, some German currency, and portfolio enclosures from Plaug's school days.

Membership and Associated Materials, 1920-1931, contains several booklets from organizations with which Plaug may have been affiliated.

Programs, 1920-1962, incorporates both programs for some of Plaug's exhibits and one for the nursing school to which Erika had intended to attend.

Research Materials, 1967-2002, holds information gathered by Plaug regarding Pueblo people, possibly including information on those whom he painted or their relations.

Sales Records, 1996-2008, includes records of Plaug's later sales, including those works sold after his death.

Writings, 1919-2007, encompasses an essay written about Plaug, as well as his own journals and notes.

Scrapbooks, 1997, undated, contains some biographical and artwork-related information and a retrospective on Plaug in his 99th year.

Photographic Materials, 1899-1990s, undated, incorporates photographs, negatives, and a single slide of Otto, family members and friends, home life, and trips he made.

Audio/Visual, undated, holds a single CD of Plaug's images.

Contents List

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Description	Box	Folder
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