



Olin Dows (1904 – 1981)

Work from World War II – An Artists Archive of the European Theatre - 1942- 1945



Figure 1 - Gunnery Tactics, Normandy (?), July, 1944

The William Holman Gallery is honored to present the archive of Olin Dows¹, Technical Sergeant 1st Cl., a decorated War artist who served in the European Theater of Operations from 1942 until the end of World War II in 1945. It is the intent of the Estate to try and keep this enormous and impressive body of work, which includes more than 800 photographs, drawings, watercolors, journals and sketches as well as related correspondence, together as an intact record of one man's courage and perseverance.

These works are the complete collection of what Dows kept, including works which were returned to him by the Department of the Army after the end of the war. Dows' archive is complemented by the works that remain in the Archives of the Army, as well as the FDR Presidential Library in Hyde Park, NY. The WWII work covers Dow's induction into the US Army at Ft. Meade, Maryland, his training in the west of England in 1943-44. The collection then covers the 270 days of fighting beginning with the 'Battle of the Hedgerows' at St. Lô in Normandy, through the liberation of Paris and the terrible winter (The Battle of the Bulge) at Bastogne in Belgium, as well as the push through Metz into Germany and the Ruhr Valley. The documents culminate with the historic crossing of the Elbe River at

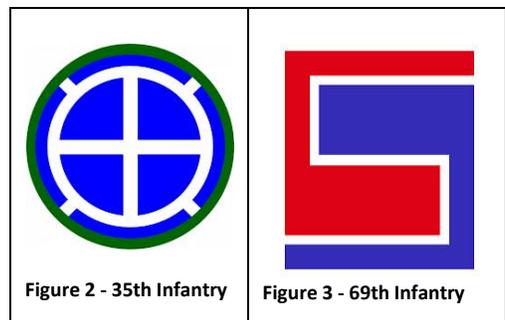


Figure 2 - 35th Infantry

Figure 3 - 69th Infantry

¹ With an emphasis on his WWII artwork and documents

Torgau with the US 69th Infantry Division meeting the Russian (Red) Army before the Allies final drive to Berlin.

This was a Herculean journey for Dows who carried a rifle and a camera as well as his watercolors and charcoal. The work is immediate and powerful; his watercolors were used by the Army for domestic information and exhibition in the US, while his photographs and terrain sketches were employed on the battlefield for reconnaissance. While we prepare a more detailed catalogue of the archive and checklist of the contents, this document serves as a summary of the holdings and materials from which we will draw an exhibition of the war work at the gallery in September, 2013.

Olin Dows enlisted in the U.S. Army in June 1942 and was stationed at [Fort Meade](#), Maryland while waiting to be sent to Officers training school, Dows willingly gave up this opportunity to serve instead in the [European Theater of Operations](#) as a [war artist](#). He was appointed head of a group of three artists to cover the ETO. He remained in England for a year, attached to the Historical Section of the US Army. A month after his arrival in England, Congress denied the necessary appropriations and the art program



Figure 4 - Soldiers Bathing near St. Lo, Normandy, July, 1944 (original 3.75 x 4.0 inches)

was officially canceled. He was instead given active duty photography missions, but nevertheless kept up with his drawing and water color drawing. In England he was attached to the 166th Signal Photo Unit and went with them to Normandy late in June 1944.

Dows saw action at St. Lo, Bastogne with the 101st Airborne and the 29th Army Rangers, through to Metz, with the [Third Army](#), 69th Infantry Division, in the final drive across Germany to Torgau, on the Elbe River. He covered the [35th Infantry Division](#) after [D-Day](#) and was with them from June to

September 1944. In September, 1944 we have photographs of Dows in the studio of Pablo Picasso in Paris at the Liberation. Three months later he was assigned to 101st Airborne and spent all winter recording the Battle of the Bulge at Bastogne. On the drive across France to the Elbe in March-April, 1945, we know Dows was present at the liberation Buchenwald in early April, 1945 from which no work, except two photographs, has survived in this collection. He was present at the union of American and Soviet Forces at Torgau on the Elbe River on April 25, 1945 and recorded this meeting in several watercolors, as well as many photographs. He was discharged from the Army in August, 1945.

Decorated with a Bronze Star for bravery, Dows was instrumental in the surrender of a large group of German Regular Army soldiers without an engagement. He was a competent German speaker and had been in Germany with his sister in 1938 on a drawing trip.



Figure 5 - Olin Dows receiving the Army's Bronze Star for bravery in the battle for St. Lo, Normandy



Figure 6 - Dead Horses and Equipment, near Torgau, Germany, April, 1945

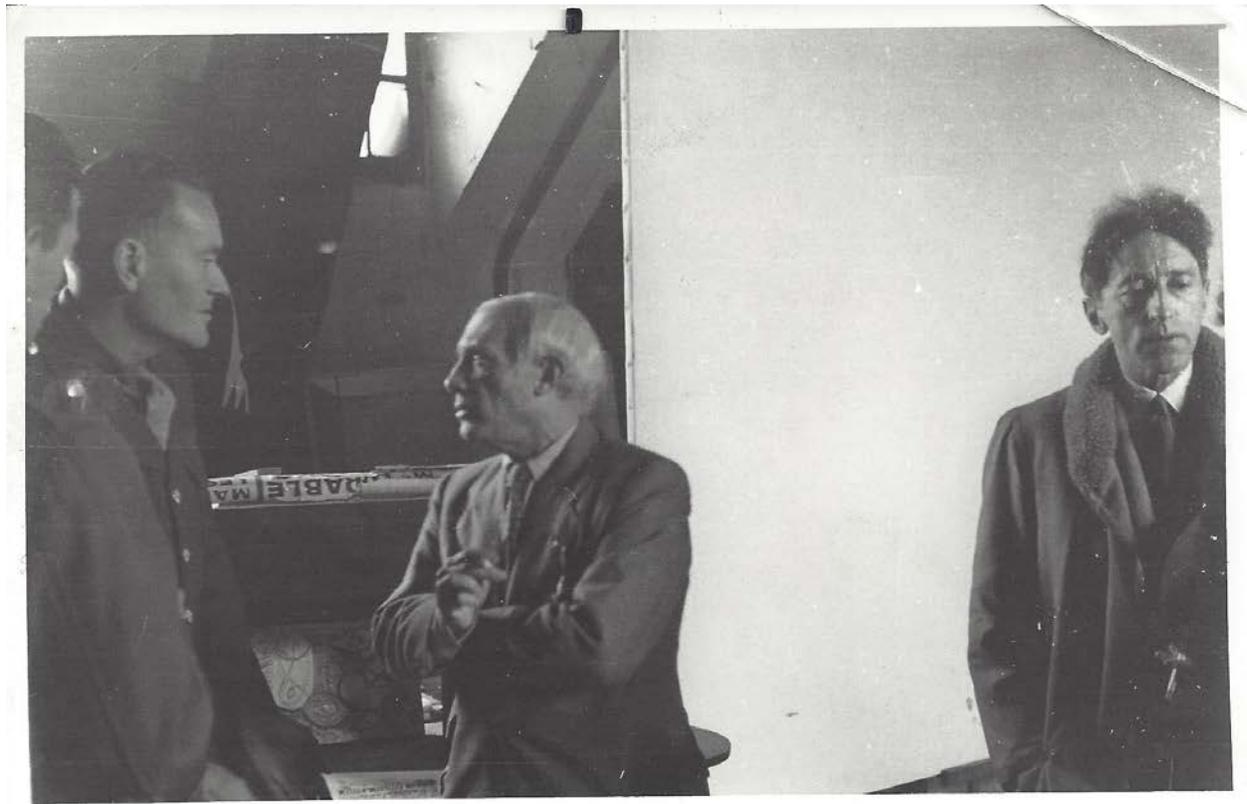


Figure 7 Olin Dows with Picasso and Cocteau – Liberation of Paris, August, 1944



Figure 8 - Fixing Wings on Troop Gliders, Devon, England 1944



Figure 9 - LST landing training, Devon, England, 1943

Summary Contents of the Olin Dows Archive

1. 400 black and white photographs

These were taken with Rolleiflex cameras (taken from the D-Day landing in June, 1944 through April, 1945 in Germany). Taken and developed in the field with:

- The 35th Infantry Division from Utah Beach to Paris
- Furlough in Paris in August- September, 1944
- Bastogne and the Battle of the Bulge December –January, 1945
- Third Army, 69th Infantry Division to Metz February, 1945
- Third Army to Ruhr Valley, Kassel, Hanover, Magdeburg,
- 20th Corps assignment to Leipzig and Torgau March – April 25, 1945

Censor stamps and inventory numbers. These relate directly to many of the watercolors as subjects and to the large multi-sheet technical terrain reconnaissance drawings used to inform infantry commanders about upcoming challenges.

Subjects include:

- i. West of England training and bivouac
- ii. Beach landings and LST practice, 1943 -44
- iii. D-Day Landings of 35th Infantry Division
- iv. Battle of the Hedgerows on road to St. Lo
- v. Battle of St. Lo
- vi. Across France to Paris
- vii. Paris Liberation
- viii. Bastogne
- ix. Metz
- x. Ruhr Valley Campaign
- xi. Magdeburg
- xii. Metz
- xiii. Dahlem
- xiv. Riesa
- xv. Elbe River
- xvi. Torgau and Russian Meeting

2. 150+ Watercolors, Pen and Ink and Pencil Drawings

The drawings and watercolors appear in various sizes from 4 x 6 inches to 18 x 29 inches. They represent

- Highly finished presentation drawings that were shipped back to England and the United States for Army command use and exhibition

- **Camp sketches of Army life**
- **Records of training, transport and pre-invasion activities in the US and England**
- **Combat sketches and annotated notebooks**
- **Studies for a famous published poster commemorating Bastogne**
- **Combat technical terrain Drawings used for field reconnaissance and artillery planning in France September, 1944 and later in Germany , March 20 -23rd, 1945.**
- **Studies from Photographs later developed into watercolors**

3. 340 related Sketches and Studies

Certainly the most enchanting and intimate part of the collection are the Sketches and sheet from Dows Sketchbooks, all of them pulled out of sketchbooks that we assume were jettisoned along the way as he progressed through France and Germany.

- **Series of Watercolor and ink drawings from specific subjects**
 - **Portraits with names of dozens of soldiers and often intimate notes**
 - **Bastogne**
 - **Camp Life**
 - **101st Airborne**
 - **Combat Medics**
 - **Field Bakery**
 - **Transport Ship**
 - **Airfields England**
 - **29th Rangers England, 1943**
 - **Heads of named individual soldiers**

WHG:August 17, 2013



Figure 10 - Battle of St. Lo, Normandy, July 1944

Biographical Note

Olin Dows (1904 - 1981) was born in Irvington-on Hudson and in 1908 moved to a large farmhouse on the Hudson River just below Rhinebeck, New York where he lived for the much of his life when not in Washington, D.C. and Pirque, Chile. By his own admission he wanted to paint from the time he was 12 years old and admired artists including Maxwell Parrish, Remington, Augustus John, Charles Dana Gibson, Blake, Whistler and the decorative screens of Robert Chanler, who was raised at Rokeby in Germantown, N.Y. His family's close friendship with President Roosevelt's family informed his career for many years.

Dows entered Harvard College in 1922 and studied art, then studied architectural drawing at MIT and drew portraits and made screens in his dorm room. Within three years he had moved to Yale Art School and studied there with Eugene Savage and Edwin Cassius Taylor through 1927. In 1928 and 1929 Dows studied at the Art Students League in New York City with some unusual classmates including David Smith, Clyfford Still, Beatrice Cuming, Burgoyne Diller and Jackson Pollock. Thomas Hart Benton was a professor there at this time.

During the 1930's Dows traveled to Mexico and made woodcuts, watercolors and a few paintings, to Egypt which inspired many screens and also to Germany in the summer of 1938 on the eve of World War II. Living in Washington and having a long standing relationship with the Roosevelt's, he served as a member of the administration during the Great Depression. Working with Forbes Watson and the Treasury Department, Dows was a central figure in several aid-to-artist programs, all prior to the Federal Arts Project created under the WPA in 1935. Dows and a team reviewed hundreds of competition entries for paintings, sculptures and particularly murals intended for the many federal buildings constructed across the nation as part of the relief effort.

Many of the commissions were for post offices across the country; including two he painted himself in Hyde Park and Rhinebeck, N.Y. It is of note that as an administrator Dows approved contracts for murals and art work to Milton Avery, Thomas Hart Benton, George Biddle, John Stuart Curry, Philip Evergood, Rockwell Kent, Reginald Marsh, Max Weber and Grant Wood. These friends, teachers and colleagues explain a great deal about his stylistic influences and his lack of interest in abstraction. Dows drew and painted what he saw and what interested him. At the end of this tenure he was largely responsible for the publication of the survey "Art in Federal Buildings", Washington, D.C., 1935.

After a lengthy trip to Germany in 1938 with his sister where he drew and observed the rise of the Nazi party, Dows returned to Rhinebeck and painted the two post offices in the period before Pearl Harbor. In 1941-2 Dows again joined the Treasury and Office of Civilian Defense. By the end of 1942 he joined the Army as a technical private and was promoted to Technical Sargent before D-Day. Dows was asked to serve as one of three official war artists assigned to the European Theatre of Operations. He was in active combat, staged in the west of England, landed with the 35th Infantry Division and was decorated with the Bronze Star for capturing 20 German soldiers. He saw action at St. Lo, near Paris, the Battle of the Bulge at Bastogne, Torgau and the Ruhr Valley campaign in 1945.

After the war he returned to Rhinebeck to work and paint. Between 1947-49 he wrote and illustrated "Franklin Delanor Roosevelt at Hyde Park". In 1950 he married the Chilean Minister to Holland, Carmen Vial-Freire de Senoret, traveled extensively and worked on watercolors, paintings and large paneled screens in the United States and Chile over the next thirty years. Olin Dows died in 1981.

Collections

Baltimore Museum of Art
Boston Museum of Fine Art
Corcoran Gallery of Art
Library of Congress
Phillips Collection

FDR Library, Hyde Park, New York
National Collection of Fine Art
Vassar College Museum