Wharton Harris Esherick (1887-1970) & the Wharton Esherick Museum

An Annotated Bibliography
Compiled by Ron McColl
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Explanatory Note

This bibliography aims to provide a guide for scholars or others researching the work and life of Wharton Harris Esherick (1887-1970). It includes both primary and secondary works divided into various categories (see table of contents). All sections are arranged alphabetically except for “exhibition catalogs,” which are listed in chronological order.

When they appear, annotations are intended to concisely indicate the unique content of specific articles, collections, or other items. Naturally, many of the resources collected here contain some redundant information. Therefore, general or background information on Esherick and his work discussed in articles, for example, is not explained in annotations; rather, particular anecdotes or quotes exclusive to particular sources typically comprise the bulk of the annotations.

The approach taken to this bibliography is inclusive rather than selective, though several exclusions have been made based on the following rationales.

Several books on craft, furniture, or art, which contain only a brief mention of Esherick or limited images of his work, were not included in this list. No effort was made to identify all articles announcing the opening of exhibitions or sales including Esherick’s work. The selected articles of this type which have been included were chosen for one of the following reasons: to illustrate the relative reputation of Esherick at a particular time; to demonstrate the range of prices commanded by his works at a particular time; to illustrate the way Esherick was contextualized as an artist at a particular time. Similarly, articles announcing events such as the annual woodworker’s competitions at the museum were included only when they were known to contain quotes or anecdotes beyond the scope of information provided by the museum’s press releases. Articles reviewing books about Esherick were likewise excluded from the bibliography.
Primary Sources
Books Illustrated by Wharton Esherick


Chapin, Katherine Garrison. *Bright Mariner*. Duffield and Green, 1933. Esherick produced three woodcut illustrations on yachting themes for this memorial pamphlet: a small vignette of a sloop tipped onto the front wrapper; a full page print (illustrated above), and a small vignette of a sloop on calm seas for the last printed page. Not listed among the books in Prints by Wharton Esherick.*


Other Works Containing Esherick Illustrations

“February” is the Esherick woodcut included in this calendar.  
[https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/american-block-print-calendar-1937-13778](https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/items/detail/american-block-print-calendar-1937-13778)

Cover and frontispiece illustration of Buck Fever, originally published in the *Marion Democrat* and the *Smyth County News,* is by Esherick.

A broadside of Chubb’s poem, which originally appeared in the August, 1934 issue of *Poetry.*  
[https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.16202900/](https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.16202900/)


Contains “Of a Great City” by Esherick.

Esherick woodcuts illustrate the covers of this series of pamphlets printed privately by Toomer.


Prints in Periodicals

- April, 1922
  - Published: *Century*, 1922 & *The Dial*, March 1926
- The Bid, 1933
  - Exhibited: New York World’s Fair, 1939
- Building, 1924 (From Song of the Broad Axe)
  - Published: Century, June 1923
- Chessmen at Play, no date
  - Used for Weyhe Gallery invitation
- Curls, 1924
  - Published: *New Republic*
- December, 1923
  - Published: *Century*, December 1923
- February, 1923
  - Published: *Century*, June 1923
- Free, 1925
  - Published: *Forum*, August 1928
- Frontispiece – Harrowing, 1927 (From As I Watched the Ploughman Ploughing)
  - Published: Vanity Fair, February 1929 & The New Woodcut, 1930
- Gail’s Cabin, 1923
  - Published: *Century*, December 1923
- January, 1923
  - Published: *Century*, June 1923 & *American Girl*, January 1925
- Jug Hollow, 1927 (From As I Watched the Ploughman Ploughing)
  - Published: Vanity Fair, February 1929
- March – The Manure Spreader, 1923
  - Published: *Century*, June 1923
- Riding, 1928
  - Published: *The Forum*, August 1928
- September (Sometimes referred to as September Corn), 1922
  - Published: *Century*, June 1923
- Sky, 1928
  - Published: *The Forum*, August 1928
- Summer Lilies, 1929
  - Published: *The Forum*, November 1929
- Surf Fishing, 1927
  - Published: *The Forum*, August 1928
- Swing, 1925
  - Published: *The Forum*, August 1928
- Three Rhinoceri, 1922
  - Published: *The Forum*, December 1923
• Turkey, 1934
  o Illustration for a verse by Thomas Caldecott Chubb entitled “Turkey Gobbler Land”. Edition: 800, printed by The Centaur Press, Philadelphia
• Turkey Gobbler Land, 1934
  o Illustration for a verse by the same name by Thomas Caldecott Chubb entitled “Turkey Gobbler Land”. Edition: 800, printed by The Centaur Press, Philadelphia
• Two Friends, 1923
  o Published: Tuthill Advertising Agency for Roehys Nursery
• Winter, 1924
  o Published: The Forum, May 1924
• Woodmen, 1924
  o Published: The American Girl, June 1924
Archival Collections Containing Esherick Correspondence, Papers, or Materials

Anderson, Sherwood, Papers, The Newberry Library, Chicago. Includes correspondence between Sherwood and Eleanor Anderson and Wharton and Letty Esherick; Esherick sketches, prints, and woodblocks; and letter from Henry van Meier to Esherick regarding tombstone design.

Centaur Book Shop and Press Archive, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

Chester County Art Association Collection, Special Collections Department, Francis Harvey Green Library, West Chester University. Contains some correspondence between Esherick and association, documents showing Esherick as an early board member, and early annual exhibition catalogs including Esherick’s works. This collection is unprocessed; no finding aid exists.

Content, Marjorie, Papers and Photographs, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Includes correspondence between Content and Esherick dating from 1937 to 1963.

Dreiser, Theodore, Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania. Collection includes correspondence between Dreiser and Esherick, prints by Esherick, and the manuscript for “He Helps Me Build a Building,” an article Dreiser encouraged Esherick to write.


Esherick, Wharton, Family Papers, Wharton Esherick Museum. The museum is the primary repository of Esherick’s personal papers and business papers and correspondence, sketches, personal library, and many other items.

“The Furniture and Sculpture of Wharton Esherick: December 12, 1958 through February 15, 1959, Museum of Contemporary Crafts of the American Craftsmen's Council, New York,” Exhibition Collection, Museum of Contemporary Crafts/American Craft Museum Archives, American Craft Council Library, Minneapolis, MN. This collection includes correspondence, press releases, clippings, photographs, exhibition catalog, and list of owners of pieces lent for exhibit. Several photographs from the collection may be viewed online at: [http://digital.craftcouncil.org/digital/search/searchterm/The%20Furniture%20and%20Sculpture%20of%20Wharton%20Esherickemode/exact](http://digital.craftcouncil.org/digital/search/searchterm/The%20Furniture%20and%20Sculpture%20of%20Wharton%20Esherickemode/exact) Additional items from the collection are viewable online in Kearstin L. Roy’s “Idiosyncratic Wharton Esherick” blog post (see Popular Articles in this bibliography).

Hedgerow Theatre Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University. Contains correspondence between Esherick and Jasper Deeter as well as wood and linoleum printing blocks by Esherick.
Hedgerow Theatre Company collection, 1901-2016, Ms. Coll. 1321, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.


   Includes photographs and price information for several early Esherick pieces as well as background views of studio’s early interior. Finding aid: https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/henry-varnum-poor-papers-13442/ [items are digitized and viewable online]


   Correspondence includes price information related to several Esherick pieces on consignment in the 1930s at the Seligmann gallery in New York City. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/jacques-seligmann--co-records-9936/subseries-1-3/box-34-folder-21 [items are digitized and viewable online]

Swanberg, W. A., Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

   Includes notes from Swanberg’s 1962 interview with Esherick in preparation for Swanberg’s biography on Theodore Dreiser.

Toomer, Jean, Papers, James Weldon Johnson Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

   Contains unpublished manuscript of “Talks with Peter,” which Toomer based on the 1937 conversations he had with Wharton’s son Peter and inspired by the philosophy of Gurdjieff.

Wildenhain, Frans, Papers, 1890-1986, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Zigrosser, Carl, Papers, Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts, University of Pennsylvania.

   Includes some correspondence between Zigrosser and Esherick.
Oral Histories & Interviews


Castle recounts visiting Esherick and shares his personal opinions of Esherick’s work and level of craftsmanship. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/castle81.htm

Castle recounts visiting Esherick, explains Esherick’s connection to Frans Wildenhain and Rochester’s Shop One gallery, and also discusses the house Wharton designed for Michael Watson. https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-wendell-castle-16166#overview

Joseph Esherick recalls his boyhood visits to his uncle Wharton’s studio.

Esherick is interviewed by McKinley and Maloof in this anniversary edition of *Craft Horizons* celebrating the first generation of “the new American craftsman.”

Miscellanea

In this brief letter to the editor Esherick reveals his impressions of Rose Slivka’s article, dismissing the photographs (and presumably the highlighted pieces), while praising the argument and citing Chekhov to make his point.
Secondary Sources
Books & Book Chapters

Coniders Esherick’s influence on Maloof and includes discussion of correspondence and visits between the two men.

The essential biography of Wharton Esherick. Numerous photographs of the artist, his work, and related artefacts illustrate this full portrait of his life and legacy.

A 2010 edition of this title was edited by Paul Eisenhauer and published by Schiffer (see below).


In this book chapter, the authors include interview excerpts with Joseph Esherick, who describes much of the inspiration he drew from Wharton. Particularly covers the influence of literature on the work of both men.

Discusses the Eshericks’ time at Fairhope, Alabama.


Joseph Esherick briefly relates his time with Wharton in this long chapter covering the former’s fuller career.

Includes only limited discussion of Esherick, but situates him as a pioneering and inspirational force in the twentieth century studio furniture and modern craft movements.


Esherick and his studio make an appearance in Ford’s book following the latter’s visit with Esherick during the Christmas season of 1934.


Helphand, Kenneth. “‘My Garden, My Sister, My Bride’: The Garden of ‘The Song of Songs.’”  
Includes a brief interpretation of the Esherick woodcut “Solomon Had a Vineyard” from *The Song of Solomon*.


Rideout, Walter B. *Sherwood Anderson: A Writer in America*. Vol. 1, U of Wisconsin, 2005. Both volumes of this biography include several discussions of relations between Anderson and Esherick.


Scholarly Articles


The authors of this article on artist Walter Anderson consider the similarities he shared with Esherick in training, geography, and Arts & Crafts style.


This article considers the dismantling of architectural woodwork, conservation issues, and preparation for the installation of the music room from the Curtis Bok House in the upcoming expansion of the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s American Art galleries. In addition, insights on Wharton Esherick as both an artist and craftsman that were revealed in the process of the dismantling are addressed.


A reconsideration of the international competition to design a Monument to the Unknown Political Prisoner (proposed by the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London) to which Esherick submitted an entry.


Provides a full treatment of early anthroposophic influences on Esherick designs.


This essay briefly considers Esherick’s “Of a Great City” as a work transforming the window into a modernist abstraction.


An article on the 1937 staging of Sherwood Anderson’s play *Winesburg* at the Hedgerow Theatre. Esherick’s relationship to both Anderson and the Hedgerow is discussed.

Theses & Dissertations


Acknowledges Esherick’s contributions to fine book publishing, listing him among a select group of the era’s top book illustrators.


An exhaustive treatment of the Hessian Hills School, where Esherick’s children attended classes in the late 1920s and both Wharton and Letitia Esherick worked. The dissertation explains the school’s connection to the Gardner-Doing Dance Camp and other ideas, places, and people relevant to the Eshericks.

This overview of the rise of the studio wood movement discusses the influence and context of Esherick’s work. The thesis particularly discusses the transition from the Arts & Crafts movement to the rise of contemporary craft following WWII.


The only thesis to date to fully investigate Esherick’s artistic legacy.


Esherick is considered as a leading exemplar of the craft element in studio furniture, though the thesis goes on to challenge the traditional view of craft as the movement’s primary influence.


A study of the significance, designation, visitation, membership, governance, collections, and programs of many Greater Philadelphia area historic house museums.


Includes a brief discussion of Howe and Esherick’s “Pennsylvania Hill House” exhibit at 1939 New York World’s Fair.


An intellectual history of Marietta Johnson’s school at Fairhope, Alabama.


This long study includes an extended survey of Esherick’s work.


Traces the influence and cultural significance of this important gallery where Esherick work was often shown.
Exhibition Catalogs (in chronological order)


*Esherick, Faggi and Zadkine, Drawings and Sculpture*. Argent Galleries, 1944.
Chester County Art Association (catalogs from multiple 1930s exhibitions)

*Catalogue of the Inaugural Exhibition of a Circulating Gallery of Pictures.* Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, 1925.

*Exhibition of Paintings by Wharton Harris Esherick.* Babcock Galleries, 1921.
Popular Articles


This review of the 2011 University of Pennsylvania exhibition considers Esherick’s place in the context of modern art, design, and craft.


Includes visitor and tour counts for museum’s most recent season.
Brief mention of the pending demolition of the Curtis Bok House and the plans to save the interior work of Esherick’s.


Announcement of Nathan and Rose Rubinson Memorial Fund of the Philadelphia Foundation Award to the Wharton Esherick Museum.


Article discusses the hiring of the Wharton Esherick Museum’s first director, contemporary attendance counts, and goals for fundraising and endowment.


Discusses current prices for Esherick pieces.


"Lecture to Show Fairhope Connection to Wharton Esherick's Artistic Career." *Press-Register* (Mobile, AL), 7 Jan. 2011, p. 5.


Reviews Esherick’s one-artist show at the Babcock Gallery in New York City, which ran from March-April, 1921. The reviewer specifically remarks on several paintings, generally praising the artist’s manner and choice of subject.


Article announces the 2003 annual international exposition of SOFA (Sculpture, Objects and Functional Art) at the Seventh Regiment Armory in New York and includes quotes from various curators on the collectability of Esherick’s works.


"Peter Esherick." *Allentown Morning Call*, 5 June 2013. Obituary of Wharton’s Esherick’s son, Peter.

“Philadelphia.” *American Art News*, Vol. 19, No. 20, 26 April 1921, p. 5. Short notice of exhibit at McClee’s Galleries in Philadelphia featuring “oils, watercolors, pastels, pencil drawings and two sculptures” by Esherick. The paintings were made “in Southern Alabama, the Adirondacks, at Cape Cod and in the Chester Valley, Pa.”


Letter to the editor relating Todd’s initial meeting with Esherick at the Hedgerow Theatre and the lasting relationship that ensued.


Brief announcement of the formation of the Wharton Esherick Museum.

Short article relating the opening ceremony of the Wharton Esherick Museum. Includes brief anecdote shared by David Esherick at the event.


Wright, Dennis J. "Grant Enables Weekly Tours of Museum." *Pottstown Mercury*, 01 July 2007, p. 4.

Yarnall, Sophia. “Sculptured Wood Creates the Unique Interiors of the Curtis Bok House.”
An excellent source for information on, and images of, this important Esherick commission. The article also provided significant national attention for Esherick’s work on the eve of the Pennsylvania Hillhouse Exhibit at the 1939 New York World’s Fair.
**Films & Broadcasts**


*Art House.* Created by Don Freeman. First-Run Features, 2016.


*Bucks County.* Narrated by Robert L. Green, 1977.


*I Am Known As an Artist.* Created by Carolyn Coal, 2017.


**Symposia, Conferences, and Presentations**


**Miscellanea**


The pamphlet features images of Pennsylvania crafts and contains an image of an Esherick library ladder.