

ABOUT THE ART

Memorial Niche

Gallery 3

ACKLAND

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Gallery 3 includes only two works of art, both of which represent William Hayes Ackland, the Museum's benefactor, and both of which relate to his decision to leave money to establish an art museum at a university in the South, to be named after him. The gallery's small space and marble walls were designed to create an atmosphere of reverence in keeping with what Ackland must have had in mind when he stipulated that his tomb and effigy be installed in the museum. Members of the Ackland Art Museum's current staff have chosen to include a painted portrait in the installation. Its presence offers visitors more visual information about the man and calls attention to the memorial niche's function as a gallery space as well as a site of interment.

In keeping with the Museum's practice with our other collection galleries, there are also written interpretive materials about the painting, the sculpture, and the artists who made them. Interested visitors may also explore some of the sources listed in the back of this About the Art Guide with a QR code that links to ackland.org.

QUESTIONS?

Contact us at acklandlearn@unc.edu

ACKLAND ART MUSEUM

The University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
101 S. Columbia Street
Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Phone: 919-966-5736

MUSEUM HOURS

Wed – Sat 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Sun 1 – 5 p.m.
Closed Mondays & Tuesdays.
Closed July 4th, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve,
Christmas Day, & New Year's Day.



Milton Elting Hebard
American, 1917–2015
Recumbent Figure of William Hayes Ackland, 1961
bronze, partially gilded
Ackland Fund, 61.28.1

About the Art

- William Hayes Ackland's last will and testament, dated November 10, 1938, provided for the construction of a museum and stipulated: "When said Building shall have been completed, I direct that my remains be transferred to the apse which is to be a part thereof, for permanent interment in a marble sarcophagus beneath a recumbent statue."
- Representations of the deceased as a figure lying down on their tomb go back to the Middle Ages in Europe. Such figures were often shown in a pose of "eternal rest."
- Ackland is shown with his head and feet resting against pillows, draped in a voluminous, full-length robe. The ethereal, baroque drapery contrast with the realism of the face, which depicts Ackland himself.
- The scroll in the figure's hands may allude to Ackland's career as a writer.
- This effigy was commissioned by the Ackland Art Museum two years after it opened in 1958. Hebard's figure replaced an earlier effigy by an unidentified Italian craftsman that presented Ackland in an elegant business suit.

About the Artist

1917: Born in New York City

1938: First solo exhibition, at ACA Gallery in New York City

1941: First public sculpture, commissioned by the Works Progress Administration for a post office in New Jersey

1948: The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York acquired a sculpture

1955: Won the Rome Prize and then settled in the Italian capital for almost 50 years

1961: Created the effigy of William Hayes Ackland and a 220 ft outdoor frieze with signs of the zodiac at John F. Kennedy Airport, New York

1966: Sculpted a life-size bronze of James Joyce for the author's grave in Switzerland

1966 and 1977: Created sculptures of Shakespeare plays for a theater in Manhattan's Central Park

2004: Returned to the United States

2015: Died in Los Angeles, California



Robert O. Skemp
American, 1910–1984

William Hayes Ackland, c.1950

oil on canvas

William Hayes Ackland Estate Collection,
58.9.1

About the Art

- This posthumous portrait of William Hayes Ackland (1855–1940) was surely commissioned by the executors of his Trust in the 1950s for donation to the Ackland Art Museum, which opened in 1958.
- Based on one or more photographs of M. Ackland as a young man, the painting sets off a brightly illuminated face against a more muted background.
- The pose and setting convey a message of wealth, traditional refinement, leisure, and well-groomed elegance. Mr. Ackland is clearly represented as a man of letters, in a library with books prominent in the shelves behind and on the table beside him. He holds what might be intended as one of his manuscripts.
- In 1892 Ackland published a novel, *Sterope: The Veiled Pleiad*, a sentimental melodrama on antebellum life in New Orleans and on a fictional plantation on the banks of the Mississippi. He was known for his ability to quote European and American poetry at length.
- A versatile artist, Skemp was known over the course of his career, for advertising campaigns, magazine illustrations, pin-up illustrations of young white women in risqué poses, religious compositions, and marine imagery, in addition to commissioned portraits such as this one.

About the Artist

1910: Born in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania

1928–29: Studied at Art Students League in New York City

1952: Won the Gold Medal at exhibition of the Art Director's Club of Chicago, IL

Late 1940s: Moved to New York

Early 1950s: Began portrait practice

1969: Painted commissioned portrait of Dean Douglas Brown of Princeton University in New Jersey

c. 1970: Painted portrait of oil magnate and philanthropist J. Paul Getty

1984: Died in Bridgehampton, New York

Further Reading about William Hayes Ackland's life, writings, and estate

Read the information on the Ackland's website about the Museum's history, William Hayes Ackland's biography, and the choice of UNC-Chapel Hill for the Ackland Art Museum.

<https://ackland.org/about>

Explore the holdings in the Louis Round Wilson Library Special Collections related to William Hayes Ackland and the establishment of the Museum.

<https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb2444697>

<https://catalog.lib.unc.edu/catalog/UNCb7965812>

Learn about Belmont Mansion, the historic house museum in Nashville, Tennessee that was originally the residence built by William Hayes Ackland's parents.

<https://www.belmontmansion.com/>

Read a review of Joshua D. Rothman's *The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America* (2021), a recent book about slave traders in the nineteenth-century United States, including Isaac Franklin, William Hayes Ackland's mother's first husband, whose estate she inherited at his death.

<https://www.nyjournalofbooks.com/book-review/ledger-and-chain>

Learn about other art museums whose benefactors are interred in the building, including the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven, CT

<https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2022/04/29/the-dead-shall-be-raised-or-buried-under-the-yuag/>

the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, England

<https://www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk/planning-your-visit/making-the-most-of-your-visit/top-things-to-do-at-the-gallery/>

and the Ca' d'Oro in Venice, Italy (seen in video at 10:25).

https://www.frick.org/interact/miniseries/travels_curator/ca_doro_venice