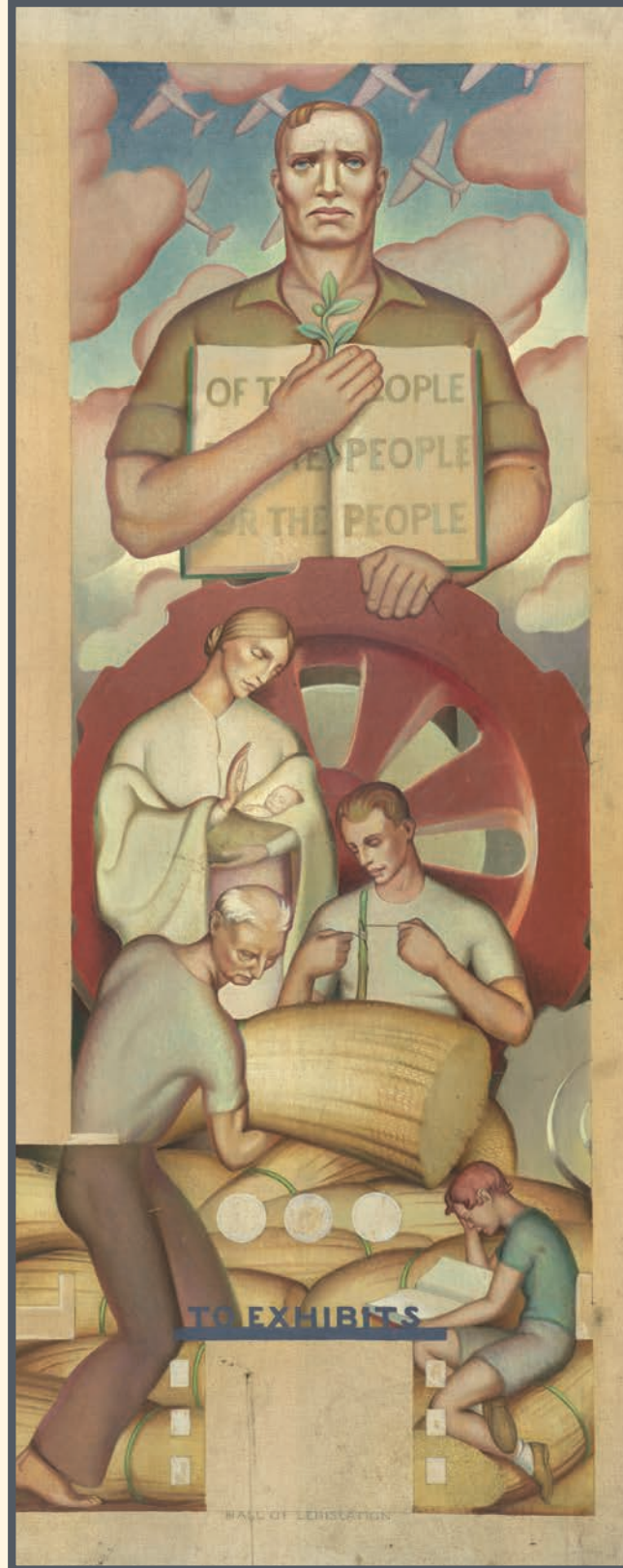




ROOM WITH A VIEW

MURALS BY ATHOS MENABONI

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

ROOM WITH A VIEW

MURALS BY ATHOS MENABONI

January 23 - June 28, 2012
Don Russell Clayton Gallery
Dr. Bobbie Bailey and Family Performance Center

Kennesaw State University | Art Museum & Galleries

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Room with a View: Murals by Athos Menaboni



Cat. 17 - Detail

This exhibition is dedicated to the mural work of Athos Menaboni and features four large-scale wall treatments of his design and making: *A Tree in Autumn with Birds*, a painted silk screen that once occupied the board room at the Lockheed Martin Corporation in Marietta; *Earth, Sea and Sky*, a glass mosaic made in memory of the artist's mother for The Cerebral Palsy School and Clinic in Atlanta; a reverse-painted mirrored panel from the Capital City Club's famed Mirador Room; and the wall-sized mural, *Rolling Hills of Cherokee County, Georgia*, that was originally located in the Mitchell Street branch of the Citizens & Southern National Bank in downtown Atlanta. These four major works are accompanied by photographs of additional projects completed by the artist, proposal drawings, and other information assembled to enhance our understanding of Menaboni's rich and varied work in this field. It is our hope that with this exhibition and catalogue we will build a strong foundation for future research regarding this important Atlanta artist.

Murals are typically paintings that are either painted directly on a prepared wall or onto canvas or cloth that is attached to the wall.¹ Sometimes akin to wallpaper or a faux finish, they become a part of the architecture in a way that is different from a framed painting; offering a personalized and unique form of decoration. As such, murals can also provide a vista, opening up the architectural space they inhabit to give viewers the illusion of a different time or place. Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment* (1535-41), in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, is a supreme example of a large-scale painting on the wall that was meant to do much more than adorn the area behind the altar.² Commissioned by Popes Clement VII and Paul III, the fresco projected a message of both God's power and papal jurisdiction. Rather than simply please the eye, it was intended to inspire fear and awe. Other Italian painters of the time, working for the Catholic Church or wealthy patrons, succeeded in similarly effective displays. Athos Menaboni, a native of Italy who lived and worked in Atlanta from 1927 until his death in 1990, was very much influenced by the wonder of Renaissance painting. He studied at the Royal Academy of Art in Florence and with Belgian muralist Charles Doudelet (1861-1938). Best known for his depictions of birds, Menaboni earned a portion of his living through mural work, the earliest opportunities for which were provided by Atlanta's premier classicist architect, Philip Shutze.

Shutze was born in Columbus, Georgia, in 1890 and studied architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta and Columbia University in New York City. But his real education in classical architecture came during a residency at the American Academy in Rome (1915-17, 1919-20). While

studying in Italy, he also made a lifelong friend in his fellow Rome Prize winner, Allyn Cox, an American mural painter.³ Shutze's immersion in all things Italian was to be advantageous to the young Menaboni, who arrived in Atlanta in the late 1920s, and in the process of seeking work, met the architect. Fluent in the Italian language, knowledgeable and supportive of classical art, the two men were immediately compatible. Through Shutze, Menaboni received his first two jobs in Atlanta, painting pink marble to look like green marble in the second floor bathroom of the Inman House (1928, now known as the Swan House) and producing a simulated marble effect on the columns in the newly built Temple of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (1928/9). Both the Temple and the Inman House were Shutze designs. In her book on Menaboni, Barbara Taylor writes that during this same time period, the painter also completed the sky portion of the Cyclorama mural.⁴ She cites a 1928 article in the *Atlanta Journal* in which Menaboni compares his experience of working on the high scaffolding necessary for this project to his World War I duty as a pilot.⁵

The late 1920s also found Menaboni completing three larger projects in Atlanta: the ceiling for the Rhodes-Haverty Building, two angels for the chapel at the St. Joseph Infirmary⁶ (fig. 1), and four Italian landscapes for the Albert Howell House. In addition to marking the first major commissions for the Atlanta newcomer, they also reveal the multiple connections within Atlanta's moneyed society in the first half of the twentieth century. The patron for the chapel at St. Joseph and the Rhodes-Haverty Building was J. J. Haverty, who founded the Haverty Furniture Company (which remains in operation today) and the Rhodes Haverty Investment Company. He is considered to be Atlanta's first serious art collector and was active in the Atlanta Art Association. This group bought the High House in 1926 in which the High Museum was established. He was also the regional director of the Civil Works Art Project during the Depression. The architect for the St. Joseph's Infirmary was Francis Abreu, who in 1938 married widow May Patterson Goodrum. The Goodrum marriage was short due to the early death of James Goodrum, who worked for the Trust Company of Georgia and managed the initial public offering of shares of the Coca-Cola Company (a corporation that, in the figure of Robert Woodruff, was to become a major supporter of Menaboni's work).

May Patterson Goodrum enlisted Shutze to design her home on West Paces Ferry Road in what is now Buckhead.⁷ Shutze contracted both Menaboni and Cox for mural work in this home, which features a classical exterior and a Chinese-inspired interior. Cox painted an amazingly dimensional scene of Chinese figures on canvas, which was then shipped to



Fig.1 - Archangel painted for St. Joseph's Infirmary Chapel, Atlanta, 1928

Atlanta and installed in the dining room. Elizabeth Dowling, in her book on Shutze, asserts that the architect gave Menaboni complete freedom on his murals in the breakfast room. The artist worked directly on the plaster ogee-curved and vaulted ceiling to create the illusion of a birdcage with an openwork bamboo trellis and vines. Birds and insects live within the beautiful space. For the wall niches that occupy each curved corner, he painted sixteen slightly humorous scenes of domestic life featuring oriental figures, flowers and birds. He also created four medallions featuring small still-life paintings (fig. 2). All of these areas were enhanced by an application of 18k gold leaf, which provided a much-needed sense of light in the one-windowed space.⁸ Although the wall areas around the niches and medallions are currently an opaque mid-value blue gray, the original finish is thought to have been a soft gray with a blue glaze or scumbled coat of thin paint. When the murals were repaired and refurbished in 1988 by Menaboni's young friend and fellow artist, Michael Collins, latex paint was applied over the original oil paint surface.⁹



Fig. 2 - Breakfast Room, Goodrum – Abreu House, Atlanta, 1930



Fig. 4 - Sidney Lanier Memorial, Washington Memorial Library, Macon, c. 1930s

Menaboni also completed several projects in Macon, Georgia, in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These include the design for the Al Sihah Temple (a stylized Egyptian Masonic Lodge) (fig. 3), a painted background for a bust of Sydney Lanier that memorialized the Macon-born poet in an alcove on the second floor of the original portion of the Washington Memorial library (fig. 4), and a dining room mural, as well as decorative painting in the living room and library, for the Shutze designed Michael Morris Home (fig. 5).

Despite the nationwide economic depression that spread after the stock market crash in 1929, Menaboni continued to receive lucrative contracts for work. In 1932, he painted an English-style landscape scene for the breakfast room of Glenridge Hall, a large home built for Thomas K. Glenn (fig. 6). Glenn, with Ernest Woodruff and Robert Strickland, helped found the Trust Company of Georgia (now SunTrust). He was also associated with the Georgia Power Company, Atlantic Steel Company, and the Continental (Cotton) Gin Company. While Glenridge Hall was being built in Sandy Springs, two more projects for the Glenn family were in progress: a second residence across the street from the Inman's new home and a beach house designed by Shutze. In 1933, Menaboni painted a mural in Spotswood Hall (Buckhead) and five panels for a branch of the C & S Bank on Cherry Street in Macon. Spotswood, built in 1913 for Shelby Smith, was purchased by Walter C. Hill in 1930 after an interim owner was forced to sell the property due to financial ruin. Hill initiated an expansion and renovation of the home and hired Shutze for the job. The new design included a central passage that led to grand entrances on both the front and back facades. At what was once considered the rear entrance, Shutze added a rotunda and engaged Menaboni for the decoration. Perhaps influenced by the Allyn Cox *chinoiserie* murals in the Goodrum House from several years earlier, Menaboni peopled the space with Chinese figures, as well as with the birds and insects that



Fig. 3 - Al Sihah Temple, Macon, 1926/27



Fig. 5 - Library Ceiling, Michael Morris House, Macon, c. 1930



Fig. 6 - Breakfast Room, Glenridge Hall, Sandy Springs, 1928/29



Fig. 7 - Rotunda, Spotswood Hall, Atlanta, 1933



Fig. 8 - *Chinese Man*, c. 1935



Fig. 9 - *Chinese Dancer*, 1938

were becoming increasingly present in his work (fig. 7). This stylized Chinese influence can also be seen in a proposed mural for an Atlanta restaurant, "Harvey's Chop House" (c. 1930s) (cat. 9), and in two paintings by Menaboni from the same period: *Chinese Man*, 1935 (fig. 8) and *Chinese Dancer*, 1938 (fig. 9).

The C & S bank project from 1933 was a series of five murals depicting scenes from Georgia and Macon history. These included Fort Hawkins, on the site along the Ocmulgee River that would eventually become the city of Macon (fig. 10); the *S. S. Savannah*, the first steamship to cross the Atlantic Ocean leaving from the port of Savannah (fig. 11); and Wesleyan College, distinguished as the first college in the world to grant degrees to women (fig. 12).¹⁰ Wesleyan College is now the home for three of the five murals.

Scrapbooks assembled by Menaboni's friend John Ridley¹¹ contain photographs of three murals from 1934: *Labor*, listed as being in Washington, D.C. (fig. 13); a painting commemorating the flight of General Balboa that



Fig. 10 - *Fort Hawkins*, Cherry St. Branch, C & S Bank, Macon, 1933



Fig. 11 - *S. S. Savannah*, Cherry St. Branch, C & S Bank, Macon, 1933



Fig. 12 - *Wesleyan College*, Cherry St. Branch, C & S Bank, Macon, 1933



Fig. 13 - *Labor*, Washington, D.C., 1934



Fig. 14 - *Palace of Government*, Tripoli, 1934



Fig. 15 - *Franciscan Mission 1533*, English Avenue School, Atlanta, 1934

was made for the Palace of Government in Tripoli (fig. 14), and a depiction of a Franciscan Mission painted for the English Avenue School on the west side of Atlanta (fig. 15). This last mural was identified by Douglas L. Fleming in his article "The New Deal in Atlanta," as being a Public Works Administration project.¹² Other PWA murals in Atlanta include a painting for the Howard School by Hale Woodruff, a well-known African American artist who taught at Morehouse College.¹³ A newspaper article from 1934 mentions an exhibition of Civil Works Administration commissions¹⁴ and refers to a group of paintings that Menaboni made for the Kingsberry School in Atlanta. This work is described as being focused on "historical and industrial subjects," with titles such as *Turpentine* and *Cotton*.¹⁵ Research suggests that Kingsberry was sometimes referred to as the English Avenue School due to its location on English Avenue. If Kingsberry and English are indeed the same place, a problem arises in considering the image of a Franciscan mission within the context of the Georgia industries of cotton and turpentine. It is interesting, however, to consider the unidentified proposal drawing depicting workers in a cotton field (fig. 16) as a possible study for the *Cotton* mural.

Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives gave artists multiple opportunities for federal and state-funded projects in government buildings such as schools, courts



Fig. 16 - *Mural proposal*, c. 1930s



Fig. 17 - Mural proposal: Whatsoever a Man Soweth, Lobby of Extension Building, University of Georgia, c. 1930s

and post offices. The Works Progress Administration commissioned local artists to paint murals in over a thousand post offices in rural areas, often at the rate of \$21 a week.¹⁶ The majority of these efforts followed the Social Realist style that was established, in part, by the great Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco, as well as the American painter, Thomas Hart Benton. The power of the common man, the strength of the masses working together on a common goal, and a general focus on agriculture and industry were hallmarks of the mural work from this period. Both female and male figures are depicted as muscular and strong, united in an equalizing effort towards a more perfect world—progress with a capital “P.” This influence can easily be found in Menaboni’s mural proposals from that era (fig. 17, cats. 1-6). We do not know if any of this work was realized, but it clearly displays Menaboni’s versatility and adaptation in seeking government work.



Cat. 6 - Detail



Cat. 4 - Detail



Fig. 19 - Entry Ceiling, Henry Grady Hotel, Atlanta, 1936

While competing for federal projects, Menaboni continued his work for Atlanta-area businesses and residential clients. In 1936, the Henry Grady Hotel, on Peachtree Street in downtown Atlanta, took advantage of its legal right to sell liquor and opened the South Pacific themed "Paradise Room." This bar and restaurant was described as "exotic [and] caressing as the atmosphere of the tropics ... gay, exciting as the native dances ... fragrant and romantic as the scented balmy night, [the restaurant endeavors] to transplant this atmosphere as authentically as possible [and offering] palatable delights to be found in the native rum drinks and dishes."¹⁷ Menaboni painted the ceiling and walls of the entrance to the hotel (figs. 19 and 20) and it is possible that he also utilized aspects of his proposal drawings that feature monkeys in a tropical environment (fig. 21 and cat. 10). Also in 1936, Menaboni completed a "playroom" mural for a Shutze designed home in Atlanta for Dan Conklin and his family. The room appears to be on a lower level of the house and, as it includes a full-service bar in one corner, is clearly a romp room for adults. The murals are silhouette-like, light colored, simplified shapes on a dark background. A sailboat floats on one wall and an image of a hunter aiming his gun at geese passing overhead is situated on the wall behind the bar. The design of the Conklin House, though retaining Shutze's classical touches, also reflects the aesthetics of the machine age and the art deco style.



Fig. 20 - Entry Wall, Henry Grady Hotel, Atlanta, 1936



Fig. 21 - Mural proposal: Monkey and Toucan in Foliage, n.d.



Fig. 22 - Flora and Fauna, R.J. Reynolds' Mansion, Sapelo Island, 1938



Fig. 24 - Circus-Themed Nursery, R.J. Reynolds' Mansion, Sapelo Island, 1938

When Shutze was hired to design an expansion for tobacco heir R. J. Reynolds' home on Sapelo Island in 1938, he once again turned to Menaboni. Over the course of three consecutive summers (1936-38), Sara and Athos lived in the mansion while he completed murals in the basement game room, a third floor ballroom, and the solarium and indoor swimming pool area. These murals ranged from flora and fauna (squirrels, monkeys, cardinals, palm trees) to pirates and circus themes (figs. 22-24). In the circus mural, R. J. Reynolds is depicted as the ringmaster and many of the faces of the surrounding figures (the strongman, the trapeze artist, the exotic dancer, et al.) were modeled on his friends from that period. It is reported that these characters were painted over by the millionaire's fourth wife in an attempt to erase the presence of the first wife's social circle.¹⁸ In one mildly bawdy image, a woman appears to be caught in the middle of a bathroom break, her skirt pulled up her thighs as she hovers over the toilet bowl (fig. 25). The natural humidity of the coastal island and the pool has forced several renovations of these wall paintings.



Fig. 23 - Pirates, R.J. Reynolds' Plantation, Sapelo Island, 1938

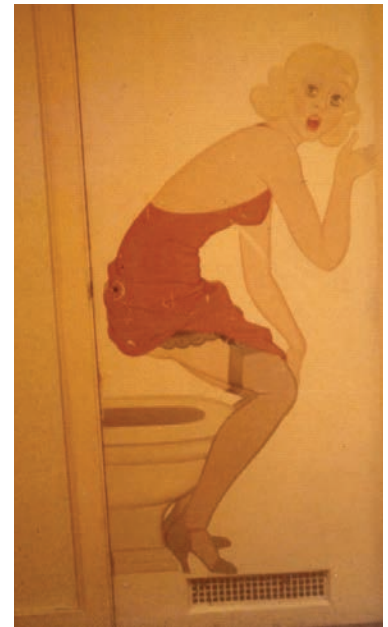


Fig. 25 - Bathroom Surprise, R.J. Reynolds' Mansion, Sapelo Island, 1938



Fig. 26 - Patterson-Carr Home, Atlanta, 1939



Fig. 27 - Patterson-Carr Home, Atlanta, 1939

In 1939, while Europe was entering into what would become World War II, Menaboni was working on a lovely scene of dogwood trees in bloom for the entry hall and stairwell of a Shutze-designed home (now known as the Patterson-Carr House) on Northside Drive in Atlanta (figs. 26 and 27). During the latter part of the year, he painted the mirrored panels for the Mirador Room at the Capital City Club in downtown Atlanta. Taking two months to complete, the work was finished near Thanksgiving, just in time for the club to host the premiere party for *Gone With the Wind* on December 15th. Shutze, who had designed the new supper and dance club in the 1912 building, had the idea for using mirrors to open up the space, and, of course, turned to Menaboni to realize his vision¹⁹ (fig. 28).

The fifteen Mirador panels followed a reverse painting technique that was popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, though has much earlier origins. This approach requires the artist to start with the highlights of his or her planned image and then work backwards. Sara described her husband's process in the following passage:



Fig. 28 - Mirador Room, Capital City Club, Atlanta, 1939



Fig. 29 - *Rolling Hills of Cherokee County, Georgia*, Mitchell St. Branch, C & S Bank, Atlanta, 1951

Probably Athos did not make sketches, for economy of time; I recall that he mentioned lots of native plants and birds, but kept secret his intention of surprising Shutze with the introducing of a non-native plant, a camellia bush in bloom, since Shutze loved and grew camellias. Also for economy of time, the Atlanta Glass Company sent the smallest glass panels to our studio, where Athos could paint them easier than having to go—as he did toward the last weeks—all the way into town to the Glass Company to work on the largest panels. Also, we had to work closely on a schedule with the Atlanta Glass Company, for after the painting was done, with thinned oil pigments, and before the paint was covered with liquid nitrate of silver, every painted area had to be coated [using artist's paint brushes of all sizes] with varnish, and this varnishing was to be my job as [his] assistant. When the varnish was tacky to the touch of a finger, each panel would be laid on a perfectly flat table at the Glass Company and the nitrate of silver poured over it from a pitcher. If I had failed to varnish any stem or leaf or whatnot, the nitrate would remove the oil paint. Fortunately, we had good working relations with architects and workers, and not one thing went wrong, and we met all deadlines with cooperation from everyone.

Athos started the project by making the outlines of the plan and bird subjects on life-sized brown paper, but scarcely any details. I perforated the brown paper, in order for him to transfer the design...onto the glass. The finishing touches were painted on first, instead of the normal procedure of painting in a basic color and gradually adding shadow and light and working toward the way finished art would look to an audience. To see how he was getting along, the artist rigged up a large mirror on the other side to look into—but he found this to be hard on his eyes, for he was looking through the glass he was working on, to another glass surface, and then back through his glass he was working on. He found it was more comfortable to occasionally walk around his glass to see what he had painted, and he discarded the mirror. I noted that he did not look often; Athos Menaboni simply knew what he was painting, whether backwards or forward or upside down.²⁰

The panel on loan from The Capital City Club for this exhibition features a Blue Jay perched in a Georgia pine with a morning glory vine and blossoms (cats. 15, 16). James Bryant's history of the Mirador Room suggests that the artist took a few liberties with this combination, placing the flowers unusually high in the pine tree, elongating the buds and showing different stages of the pinecones in the same composition.²¹

Income records for Athos and Sara reveal two payments for murals in the late 1940s for which we have yet to uncover photographic documentation. One was for the home of DeSales Harrison, the President of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Correspondence between Harrison and Menaboni suggests that the painting would depict cardinals and magnolias.²² In March 1947, Harrison paid Mr. Menaboni \$400 for this work. A second project, installed in 1948, was for a wealthy Florida realtor and his wife, Kenneth and Lucile Keyes. Their apartment, designed by Alfred Browning Parker, was in the then newly renovated Everglades Hotel in Miami. Newspaper articles mention the excitement around the proposed mural that was announced to be a painting of the Florida Everglades on or near a wall of mirrors. Mrs. Keyes had apparently been very impressed with the Mirador Room panels when she visited Atlanta.²³

Also in 1947, Shutze, in partnership with Warren Armistead, designed a new branch of the C & S Bank on Mitchell Street in downtown Atlanta. Several years later, in 1951, Menaboni was asked to paint a scene on the back wall of the main space. The result was *Rolling Hills of Cherokee County, Georgia*, a four hundred and fifty square foot mural completed in late 1951 (fig 29). Based on sketches, photographs, and real objects (such as branches from a pine tree), the landscape depicts a small boy and his dog in front of a landscape vista. Signature southern trees, the magnolia and the pine, frame the edges of the multi-part canvas. The boy is purported to be Mickey Lane (Mills B. Lane IV), the son of C & S Bank president, Mills B. Lane, Jr. Russ Clayton, in his essay about the painting, notes that Mickey "posed for a short period...[but] could not hold still, and continued to run back to see how he was being painted."²⁴

Fig. 30 - Menaboni and Sutton at work, Mitchell St. Branch, C & S Bank, Atlanta, 1951



A young Atlanta artist and graduate of the High Museum of Art School, Duff Sutton, Jr., worked with Menaboni on the large painting, which took three weeks to complete. In a recent interview, Sutton recalled that Menaboni had originally wanted the dog, like the boy, to be looking into the landscape. But Sutton, who was charged with finding an apt model, was unable to comply. The dog he photographed repeatedly turned to look at the camera, causing Menaboni to eventually accept the image of the curious animal whose head turns to observe the viewer. Sutton also explained their process. After the canvas was attached to the wall, sections were gridded and the basic composition was lightly sketched in charcoal. Menaboni painted the figures and the birds, while Sutton reports that he was tasked with leaves, pine needles, and sky (fig. 30).²⁵

The bank remained in operation for many years. After it closed the building was unoccupied long enough to fall into disrepair. The current owner, upon learning about Kennesaw State University's Menaboni collection, contacted the museum, and it was arranged for the painting to be removed from the walls and conserved. This work was completed in the summer of 2011 by the Durrett Studio in Marietta, under the direction of Freda Durrett Nichols.²⁶

In 1952 Menaboni produced a mural-sized painting for what was then known as the Ida Cason Gardens (later renamed Callaway Gardens). Near the entrance of the property was a



Fig. 31 - Painting, Entrance Lodge of Ida Cason Gardens (renamed Callaway Gardens), Pine Mountain, GA, 1952

lodge. Along the west wall of the dining room in the lodge, Menaboni painted a group of mallards, pintails, and canvas-backed ducks flying south over nearby Mountain Creek Lake (fig. 31). He was paid the handsome sum of \$1,000 for this work.²⁷ Additional income was provided by a 1953 project in Newberry, South Carolina, and a series of five large paintings of turkeys the artist made for the Albany branch of the C & S Bank (fig. 32).

Fig. 32 - Albany Branch, C & S Bank, Albany, 1955



Another big project outside of Atlanta was also completed in 1955, *St. Francis of the Piedmont* (fig. 33). Originally housed in the Lee Library of Chatham Hall, a private school in Chatham, Virginia, the painting was commissioned by Rector William Yardley as a tribute to Lillian Hensleigh, the school's longtime science teacher.²⁸ The mural portrays St. Francis, who blesses birds and animals native to the area. The landscape reflects the view south of the campus rectory.



Fig. 33 - *St. Francis of the Piedmont*, Chatham Hall, VA, 1955

St. Francis is a recurring subject for Menaboni. Knowing the artist's penchant for animals (he is reported to have nurtured dogs and birds of all kinds, as well as more exotic pets), it is fitting that he would identify with St. Francis, who famously loved animals and saw God in nature. The artist fashioned a small sculpture of St. Francis that was placed in a niche on his property (fig. 34), and revisited the subject of the saint and his followers, the Franciscan monks, on multiple occasions. This can be seen in the previously mentioned mural for the Atlanta school on English Avenue, and in a proposal drawing the artist made prior to his work for Chatham Hall, but which bears a strong compositional resemblance to the project in Virginia (fig. 35).

By this point in his career, Menaboni's illustrations of birds were quite well known. His book, *Menaboni's Birds*, with text by Sara Menaboni, had been published in 1950 to wide acclaim. In addition to supplementing his own income with his bird imagery, the artist was able to parlay this success to help others. One such example can be found in a series of plates that were created to benefit the Cerebral Palsy School and Clinic. Each featured a different bird. According to Taylor's book, these plates were so popular that the non-profit organization raised approximately \$190,000 for their programming.²⁹ In a further act of generosity, Menaboni designed and fabricated a mosaic for the Cerebral Palsy School's new building (now known as the Frazer Center). Dedicated to his mother, who had died in 1953, the artist produced *Earth, Sea and Sky*, a piece that was installed shortly after the opening of the facility in 1957 (cat. 19). The Center, funded in part by efforts led by Mrs. James N. Frazer, Mrs. Mills B.

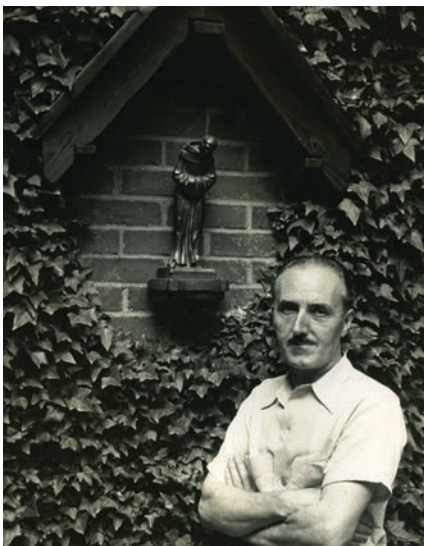


Fig. 34 - Athos Menaboni in his garden, Atlanta, n.d.



Fig. 35 - Mural proposal: St. Francis, n.d.



Fig. 36 - *Whatsoever a Man Soweth*, Emory Branch, C & S Bank, Decatur, 1958

Lane and others, originally utilized the mosaic as a room divider or screen, behind which was a discrete area for the porters to sit between calls to assist children in their wheelchairs. Menaboni made the seven panels that make up the screen by drawing the basic outlines of his overall composition and then carefully breaking Murano glass tiles into small pieces that could be glued to the plywood support. In an article publicizing the gift, Menaboni explained that he usually worked on one panel at a time, beginning at the top (or sky area) and moving down to the water and fish along the bottom edge. He broke the tiles with a pair of pliers and attached them with a casein-based glue while the panel was lying flat on his workbench. Once the glass was placed, darkened cement was quickly spread into the cracks with a kitchen spatula and brush. The work took about two and a half months to complete. Menaboni expressed the durability of the mosaic panels by saying, "You can wash them with the same mop you use to scrub the floor. They are not fragile and I don't think the children can hurt them. Of course if you hit them with a hammer, they might break."³⁰ Eventually the mural was relocated to a beautiful, light-filled assembly room that doubles as an indoor playroom for the school's children, and a reception desk was placed where the screen once stood.



Fig. 37 - *Whatsoever a Man Soweth*, Emory Branch, C & S Bank, Decatur, 1958



Fig. 38 - *Whatsoever a Man Soweth*, Emory Branch, C & S Bank, Decatur, 1958

Following the Mitchell Street mural, the Albany bank commission, and the Cerebral Palsy/Frazer Center collaboration, Mills B. Lane routinely turned to Menaboni to decorate new and expanded branches of the C & S Bank.³¹ One highly advertised project was in 1958, for the Decatur or Emory branch (figs. 36-38, also pp. 52-53). The mural, which took ten months to produce, is comprised of five sections. The painted imagery, which occupies a long central panel and two smaller rectangles on each end, was applied to a surface of eggshells. Two title panels that bear the inscription "Whatsoever a man soweth," and "that shall he also reap," are situated on either side of the center painting. The process was inspired by a fifteenth-century technique the artist discovered in a book on Renaissance methods and materials for artists. Utilizing two hundred and sixty-six dozen eggshells (reportedly saved for the artist by Herron's, one of his favorite restaurants), Sara said they spent hours breaking the shells into tiny fragments and removing the membrane before they could be glued to the fiberboard support. After creating this resilient base for his painting, Menaboni depicted a metaphorical narrative of a man sowing seeds and then harvesting his crop. A loving couple occupies the heart or middle section. It is tempting to see this composition as reflective of the Menabonis' own loving and creatively fruitful relationship.

Menaboni, like many artists looking for new challenges and methodologies, continued to expand his repertoire. After a trip to Japan in the spring of 1959 (fig. 39), he adopted the practice of painting on silk and other materials that required a thinner, more immediate application of paint. He was able to take full advantage of this new approach in a series of silk screens that were made for the boardroom at what was then called Lockheed Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (now Lockheed Martin Corporation) in Marietta, Georgia. Reminiscent of a traditional Japanese sliding screen, each of the five panels is divided into multiple segments with vertical and horizontal wood bars. Entitled *A Tree in Autumn with Birds* (cat. 18), the image of the tree is stylized and spreads across the entire length of the composition. In photographs, one can see the screens sited along one wall of the room, with a conference table in front. The table's surface is covered (in true *Mad Men* style) with ashtrays and small replicas of the airplanes produced by the company (fig. 40).



Fig. 40 - Board Room,
Lockheed Aeronautical Systems, Inc.,
Marietta, n.d.



Cat. 18 - Detail



Fig. 39 - The Menabonis in Japan, Spring 1959



Fig. 41 - Menaboni and Branch Manager in front of Whooping Cranes, Buckhead Branch, C & S Bank, Atlanta, 1961

The expansion of the Buckhead branch of the C & S Bank, which provided frontage on Peachtree Street and Pharr Road, became yet another opportunity for Menaboni. Using a beautiful African walnut veneer panel, he painted life size images of Whooping Cranes (fig. 41). These impressive panels are now in the collection of the Bank of America.

Mills B. Lane was not the only major patron of Menaboni's work during this period. Robert Woodruff, the Chairman of the Coca-Cola Corporation, was also a strong supporter. Menaboni designed the Woodruff family Christmas cards from 1941-84. Woodruff purchased paintings for friends and colleagues, and beginning in 1964 he also hired the artist to design and paint murals for the interior of his corporate plane (fig. 42). Originally named the Wind Ship (a play on Woodruff's middle name, Winship), the first Grumman Gulfstream turbo-prop featured the Georgia state flower (the Cherokee Rose) and bird (the Brown Thrasher). Fabric was provided to the artist, who made the paintings in his own studio. They were later laminated to the walls of the plane's passenger cabin. Menaboni's involvement continued into new iterations of the planes in 1968 and 1982. An article from 1964 notes the involvement of Mrs. Robert Woodruff in the initial designs,³² and letters from 1982 reveal a relatively high degree of involvement from then Coca-Cola Chairman, Roberto Goizueta. One cites Mr. Goizueta as having "really liked the neck banding of the killdeer contrasted with the white breast area of the bird." It continues: "Would it be possible to resituate one of the birds on the left side to play up that coloration on the killdeer? Mr. Goizueta's tastes run toward a sharp, but uncluttered interpretation of wildlife."³³ A later letter reveals that the Chairman returned to the Brown Thrasher for his new Grumman Gulfstream III and asks that the artist provide him with two sketches of the bird, one with a background of Georgia pine trees and one with "winter branches." Several months later, a choice is confirmed: the Brown Thrasher will be painted with a background of short-needle branches on both sides of the passage opening of the aft bulkhead.³⁴ A drawing on loan from the Menaboni collection in the Troup County Archives is possibly the sketch that was utilized for this project (cat. 7).



Fig. 42 - View of interior of Wind Ship, n.d.

The success of Menaboni's large bird paintings in the Albany and Buckhead C & S Bank buildings was replicated for a dazzling new retirement facility near Emory University, Wesley Woods. Designed by Chicago-based architect Charles Stade, a round tower of apartments is offset by a similarly organic and layered stack that houses the entrance and cafeteria. One of the early residents was a retired Emory professor, Thomas B. English. Menaboni, who had illustrated a book by English, was hired to paint two murals for the new lobby, a California Gull and a Blue Heron (fig. 43). He also contributed a design for a ten-foot high birdcage that was built near the same area (fig. 44). This was not the first time Menaboni had brought his beloved birds into a public setting. In a 1951 renovation of the Davison's Department Store Restaurant and Tea Room in downtown Atlanta, he also designed and populated a decorative birdcage. Both cages echo a bird environment at Valle Ombrosa, the artist's home.

A final C & S Bank commission came in 1969 at the North Avenue and West Peachtree branch designed by Menaboni's friend, Richard Aeck. The exciting new building, a cylindrical tower atop a stem that served to make the structure appear to float above the ground, was a dynamic part of the Atlanta skyline until it was demolished in 1993. Menaboni was asked to complete a mural that featured leaves and flowers typical in Georgia for a staircase area that extended through the core of the building. In a photograph from the newspaper, workers are shown installing the wallpaper-like canvas (fig. 45). The artist was also commissioned to produce a mosaic for the Commerce Club, which featured a dining room on the top floor of the twenty-one story structure. The Club was developed through the efforts of Mills B. Lane, Robert Woodruff, and then mayor, Ivan Allen. They were looking for ways to soothe a racially divided city and create unifying opportunities that would position Atlanta as a forward-thinking, modern metropolis. Utilizing the same Murano glass tiles from which the Frazer Center mosaic was made, the mural depicts the Atlanta skyline, echoing the actual view also visible to diners. Lane later asked Menaboni to create two editions of prints, one a Red Maple leaf and the other a Tulip Tree leaf. The originals were installed in the bank's lobby and the lithographs were a part of a special promotion for individuals who opened accounts at that branch. Each new customer received a print.



Fig. 43 - Menabonis with Blue Herons, Wesley Woods, Atlanta, c. 1964



Fig. 44 - Menabonis with birdcage, Wesley Woods, Atlanta, c. 1964



Fig.45 - Mural, North Ave. Branch, C & S Bank and Commerce Club, Atlanta, 1969



Fig. 46 - Detail of Mallards on Transom, Woodruff Room, Emory University, 1969



Fig. 47 - Curtain detail, Woodruff Room, Emory University, 1969

Robert Woodruff, in addition to being one of Atlanta's most important business leaders, was also a major donor to Emory University. The library, named in his honor, houses their Special Collections on the top floor of a building designed by Warner, Burns, Toan and Lunde in 1969. The Woodruff Room, on that same level, features a pair of mallards painted by Menaboni on the transom above the door leading to a balcony. Curtains over the floor-to-ceiling glass wall were devised by the artist and depict a field of reeds over which the ducks fly (figs. 46 and 47).

Born in 1895, Menaboni was nearing eighty by the mid-1970s. Though he continued to paint until his death in 1990, his work on murals and large-scale commissions diminished. With his blessing, earlier murals at the Goodrum House, Glenridge Hall, and the Reynolds Mansion, were retouched by Michael Collins. And the artist was present when Steve Tillander restored his work on the ceiling of the Rhodes-Haverty Building. Other mural conservation efforts were made after his death, in particular Jill Biskin's work on Spotswood Hall, the Patterson-Carr House, and the Albert Howell House.

Menaboni had a sense of his importance in the Atlanta market and this foresightedness combined with the organizational capacity of his friend John Ridley left us with scrapbooks and other material from which we continue to benefit. It was with great excitement and curiosity that we have explored the archives in Troup County, Emory University, the University of Georgia, and, of course, the amazing collection amassed for Kennesaw State University by our own Russ Clayton. We are happy to present what we have learned on these pages and in our gallery.

Teresa Bramlette Reeves

Endnotes

¹ As defined by the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a mural is a work of art that is applied to and made integral with a wall or ceiling surface; from the Latin *murus* (wall).

² *The Last Judgment* is a fresco, a process of painting in which pigments are melded with moist lime plaster.

³ Allyn Cox, son of American painter Kenyon Cox, is best remembered for a series of murals he painted in the U.S. Capitol and U.S. Department of State.

⁴ The Atlanta Cyclorama is an attraction that features a painting of the Battle of Atlanta that was produced by the studios of the American Panorama Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1886. Originally 50 feet high and 400 feet long, it was paired with a three-dimensional foreground in 1936.

⁵ Barbara Cable Taylor, *The Life and Art of Athos Menaboni* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press), p. 35. Taylor's original source: Agnes Fahy, "Painting the Sky," *Atlanta Journal*, June 10, 1928.

⁶ Taylor writes that the two large archangels (each approximately six feet tall) were placed on opposite sides of the altar. Removed in 1978 when a new facility was built, one now hangs at the entrance to the chapel in the new St. Joseph Hospital in north Atlanta. The second painting, originally thought to be damaged beyond repair, was eventually conserved and now is installed in the Chapel of Mercy International Centre in Dublin, Ireland. Taylor, p. 35.

⁷ This home is referred to as the Goodrum House, the Goodrum-Abreu House and the Peacock House (due to the onetime presence of peacocks on the property).

⁸ Elizabeth Meredith Dowling, *American Classicist: Philip Trammell Shutze* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 154.

⁹ Details regarding the mural's condition and make up are from a condition report prepared by Joanne Barry, Conservator, May 2010.

¹⁰ Information derived from the Wesleyan College website, www.wesleyancollege.edu

¹¹ Russell Clayton noted in a recent email that John Ridley organized Menaboni's photographs and ephemera at some point in the 1980s, a project that took several months. Ridley worked for Miller's Book Store, which also carried art supplies. Menaboni met Ridley while purchasing paint and they became good friends.

¹² The Public Works Administration built dams, bridges, warships, hospitals, schools, and other large-scale projects. The Works Progress Administration was also created by Roosevelt as a New Deal agency and focused on the construction of public buildings and roads, as well as producing visual arts, literacy and dramatic arts projects.

¹³ Douglas L. Fleming, "The New Deal in Atlanta," *GeorgiaInfo* (<http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/FDRarticle4.htm>); Other artists listed as having completed mural projects in Atlanta include: Mignon Breitenbucher Smith, a graduate of the High Museum School of Art (later renamed the Atlanta College of Art and now the Savannah College of Art and Design) and Wilmer Jennings, a former student of Hale Woodruff's at Morehouse College.

¹⁴ The Civil Works Administration, also established by Roosevelt, was primarily active during the winter of 1933. It is possible that the newspaper inaccurately reported the murals as being CWA projects. More than likely, they were WPA or PWA initiatives.

¹⁵ "CWA Murals at Museum of Art Range from Missions to Tar Baby," *The Atlanta Constitution*: July 8, 1934.

¹⁶ Caroline Cass, *Grand Illusions: Contemporary Interior Murals* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1988), p. 16.

¹⁷ AtlantaHistory.com (http://atlhistory.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=42&Itemid=28)

¹⁸ Geoffrey Steward, "The Art of Conservation," in *A Colorful Past: Decorative Arts of Georgia*, Ashley Callahan, Ed. (Athens: Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2009), p. 34.

¹⁹ The Capital City Club originally had a roof garden party space, the use of which was subject to the weather. After making the decision to add a supper and dance club, the membership funded the Mirador Room by installing slot machines throughout the building. These popular machines remained in service from 1936-1954. For a more in-depth discussion, please see James C. Bryant's book, *The Mirador Room: Memories of an Era 1939-1998* (Atlanta: Capital City Club, 1999).

²⁰ Taylor, pp. 46-47.

²¹ Bryant, pp. 106-7. In this series of paintings, Menaboni focused almost exclusively on Georgia plants and birds, including dogwoods, cotton, loblolly pines, bobwhites and many others.

²² Letter dated March 13, 1947 from DeSales Harrison to Mrs. Menaboni. In the collection of the Special Collections Division of the University of Georgia Libraries.

²³ "People are Saying," *The Miami News*, May 5, 1946. Kenneth and Lucile Keyes lived in Atlanta prior to the family's relocation to Miami in 1925.

²⁴ Russell Clayton, unpublished essay on the Mitchell Street C & S Bank mural, June 2011.

²⁵ Interview with Duff Sutton, Jr. by Russell Clayton and Matthew Harper, transcript provided by Matthew Harper, October 2011.

²⁶ Clayton essay, unpaginated.

²⁷ Income records in Special Collections at the University of Georgia Libraries.

²⁸ Lillian Hensleigh was a science teacher at Chatham Hall from 1926 until her death in 1951. Her legacy helped pay for the mural as well as endow other projects for the school. Income records located in Special Collections at the University of Georgia Libraries indicate the artist was paid \$1,500 for this work.

²⁹ Taylor, p. 52.

³⁰ Katherine Barnwell, "Menaboni's 'Earth, Sea and Sky' Is Glass," *Atlanta Journal Constitution Magazine* (Nov 15, 1957), pp 14-15.

³¹ It is interesting to note that the banker's mother, Mary Comer Lane, was a painter and was instrumental in founding the Savannah Art Club, thus establishing a legacy for supporting the arts.

³² "The Wind Ship: Company Plane Adjudged 'Flagship of the U. S. Industrial Fleet,'" *The Refresher*, September-October, 1964 (Atlanta, The Coca-Cola Company), pp. 27-29.

³³ Letter on Coca-Cola Company stationary dated June 25, 1982 from Jean Lusso to Athos Menaboni. Jean Lusso was an Interior Designer for the Coca-Cola Company. From the collection of Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), Emory University.

³⁴ Letter on Coca-Cola Company stationary dated August 19, 1982 from Jean Lusso to Athos Menaboni. From the collection of Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL), Emory University.

Catalogue



Cat. 1

Mural proposal: Mother Earth Bestowing Gifts to Chattanooga

c. 1930s

Mixed media on illustration board

10 1/8 x 34 1/8 in. (25.7 x 86.7 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 2
Mural proposal
c. 1930s
Mixed media on illustration board
10 x 34 1/4 in. (25.4 x 86.9 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 3
Mural proposal
c. 1930s
Mixed media on illustration board
10 1/8 x 34 1/4 in. (25.7 x 86.9 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 4
 Mural proposal: Hall of Legislation
 c. 1930s
 Mixed media on canvas board
 39 1/2 x 16 in. (100.3 x 40.6 cm)
 Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens
 Collection at the Troup County Archives



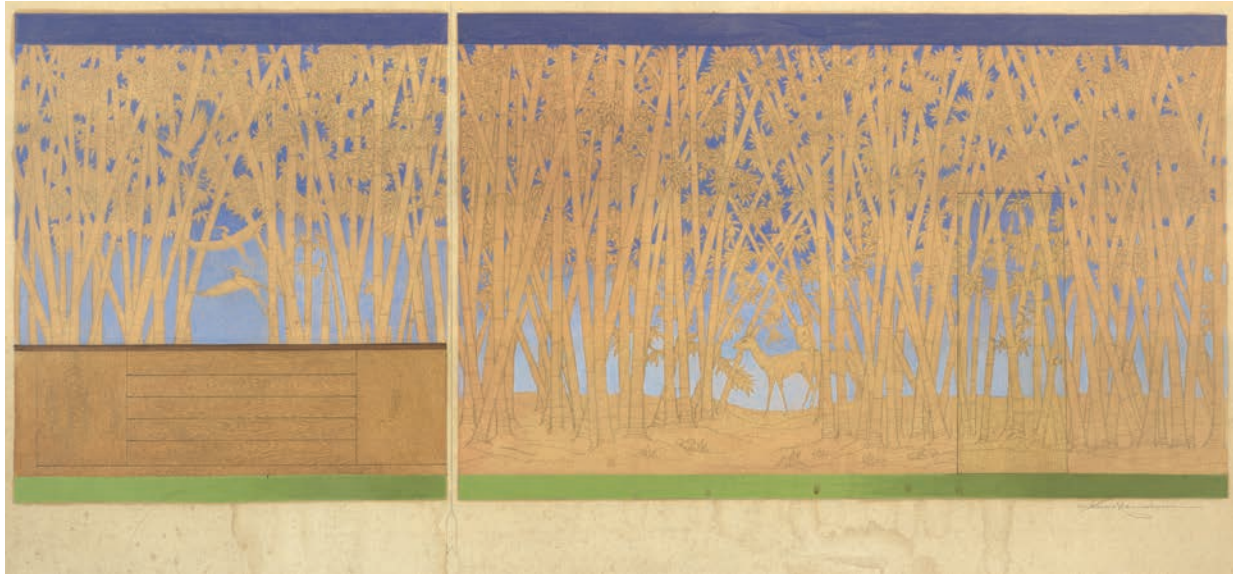
Cat. 5
Mural proposal: Whatsoever a Man Soweth, Lobby of Extension Building, University of Georgia
c. 1930s
Mixed media on illustration board
18 x 28 1/2 in. (45.7 x 72.4 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 6
Mural proposal: That Shall He Also Reap, Lobby of Extension Building, University of Georgia
c. 1930s
Pencil on paper
12 1/8 x 25 5/8 x in. (30.8 x 65.1 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 7
Proposal drawing: Brown Thrasher in Pine
n.d.
Pencil on paper
11 3/8 x 7 1/2 in. (28.9 x 19.1 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 8
Mural proposal
n.d.
Paint on illustration board
11 1/4 x 28 in. (28.6 x 71.1 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 9
Mural proposal: Harvey's Chop House
n.d.
Mixed media on illustration board
17 3/8 x 27 1/2 in. (44.1 x 69.9 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 10
Mural proposal
n.d.
Mixed media on paper
17 1/8 x 27 1/8 in. (43.5 x 68.9 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 11
Mural proposal
n.d.
Mixed media on illustration board
11 5/8 x 23 7/8 in. (29.5 x 60.6 cm)
Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 12

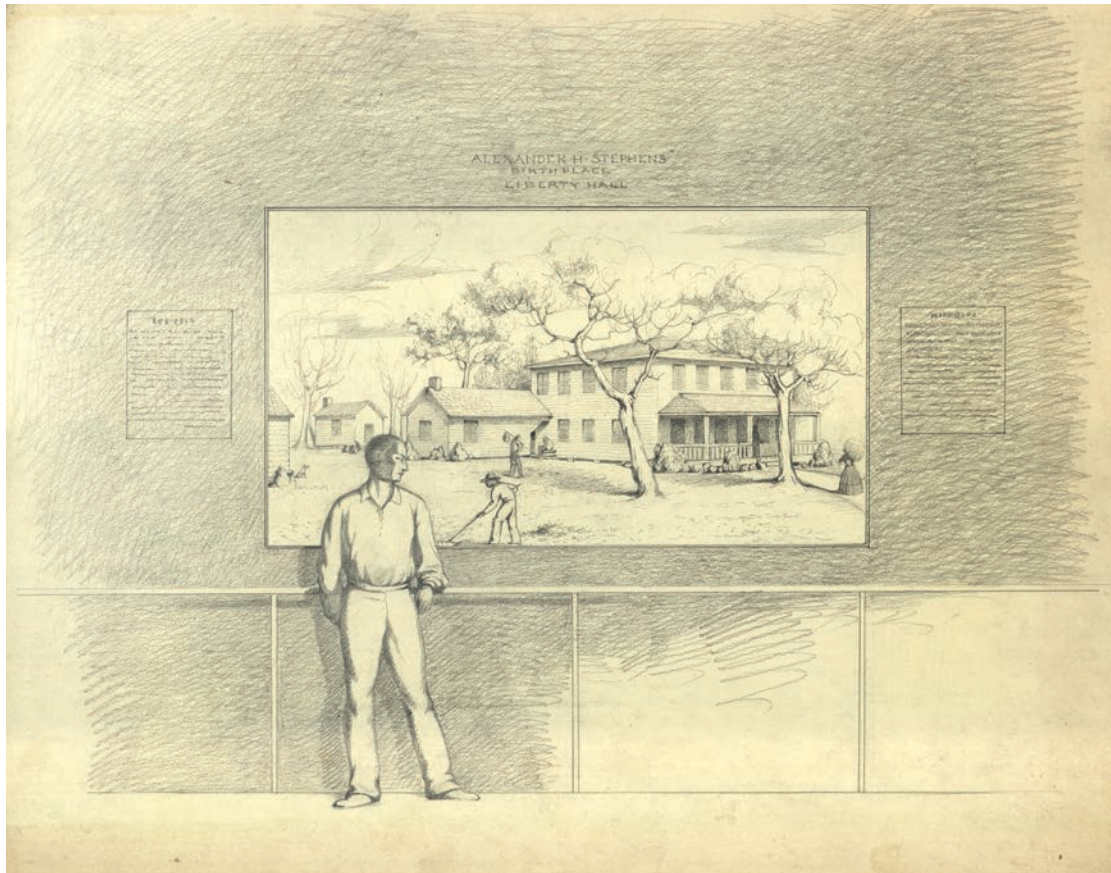
Mural proposal

n.d.

Mixed media on illustration board

11 5/8 x 22 1/2 in. (29.5 x 57.2 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 13

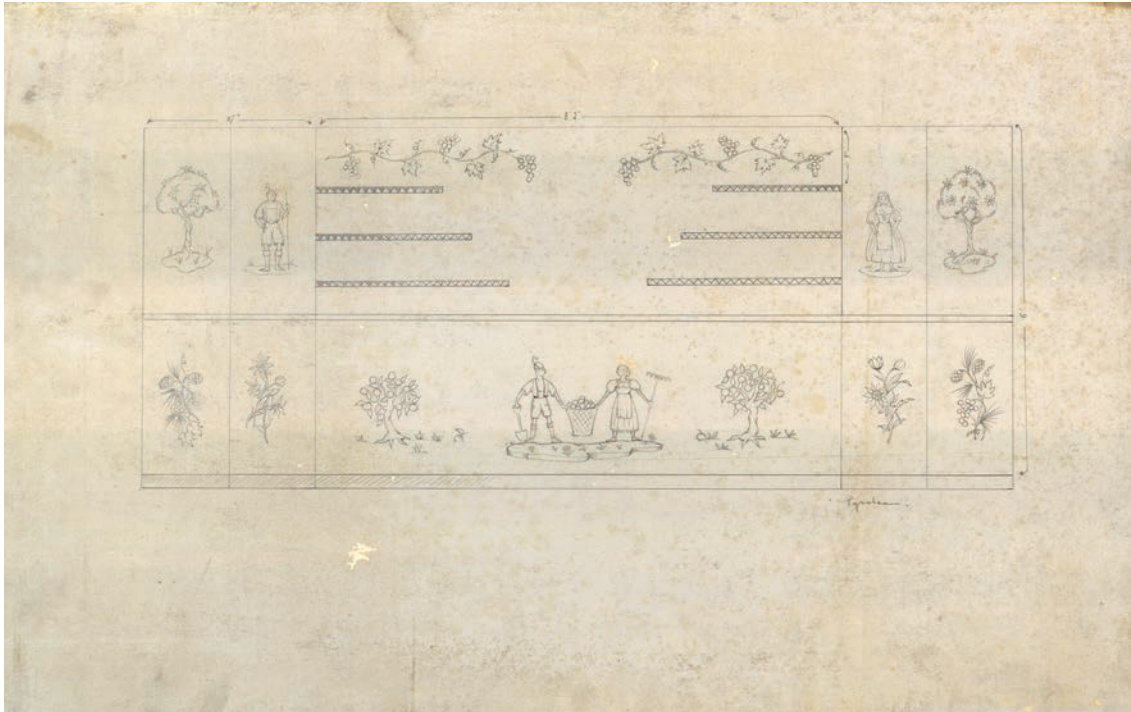
Mural proposal: Alexander H. Stephens' Birthplace, Liberty Hall

n.d.

Pencil on illustration board

17 1/4 x 22 1/4 in. (43.8 x 56.5 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 14
 Mural proposal: Tyrolean
 n.d.
 Pencil on board
 7 x 16 1/2 in. (17.8 x 41.9 cm)
 Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Cat. 15
Mirador Panel #4
1939
Oil on mirrored glass
54 x 120 in. (137.2 x 304.8 cm)
Capital City Club



Cat. 16
 Mirador Room Photo Panel #1
 n.d.
 Photographs on cardboard
 32 x 12 3/4 in. (81.3 x 32.4 cm)
 Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at
 the Troup County Archives



Cat. 17

Rolling Hills of Cherokee County, Georgia, detail

1951

Oil on canvas

150 x 432 in. (3.8 x 10.8 m)

The Orinda Corporation





Cat.18
A Tree in Autumn with Birds
c. 1959/60
Oil on silk
107 3/4 x 357 7/8 in. (273.7 x 909 cm)
Marietta-Cobb Museum of Art





Cat. 19
Earth, Sea and Sky
c. 1957
Glass tiles on aluminum framed plywood boards
78 x 168 in. (198.1 x 426.7 cm)
The Frazer Center



Related Imagery



Mural proposals

c. 1930s

Mixed media on illustration board

30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



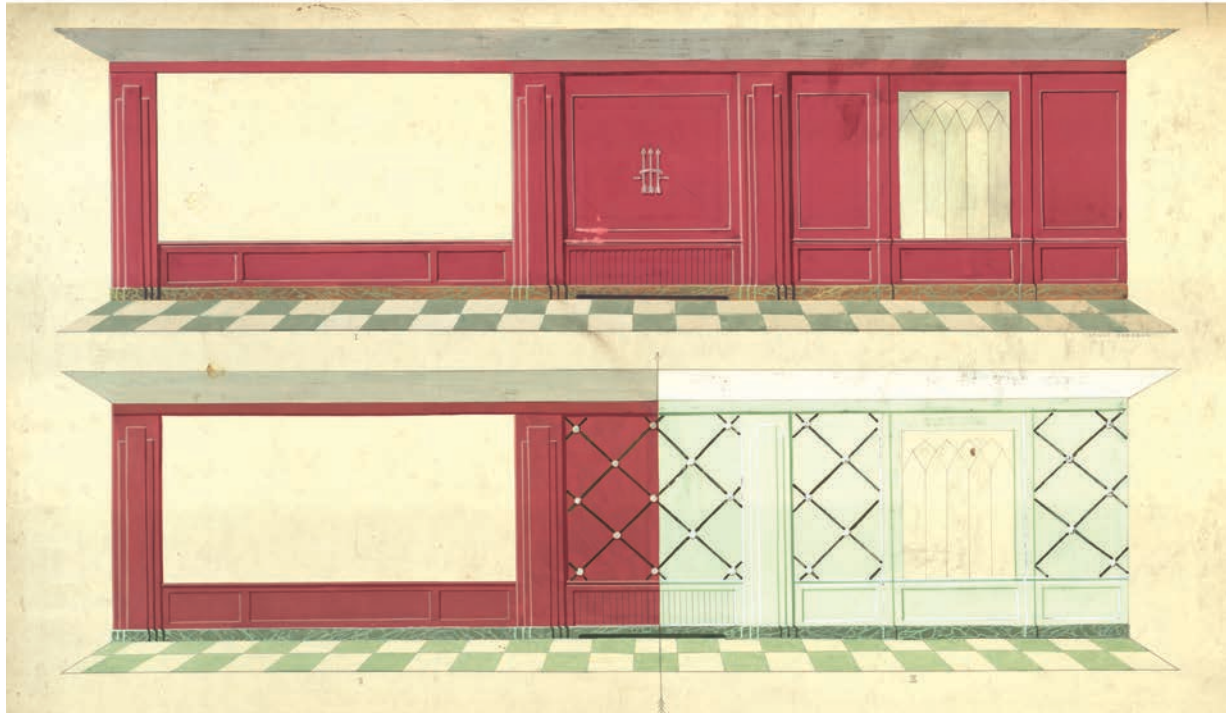
Proposal drawing

n.d.

Pencil on illustration board

12 3/4 x 16 3/4 in. (32.4 x 42.5 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



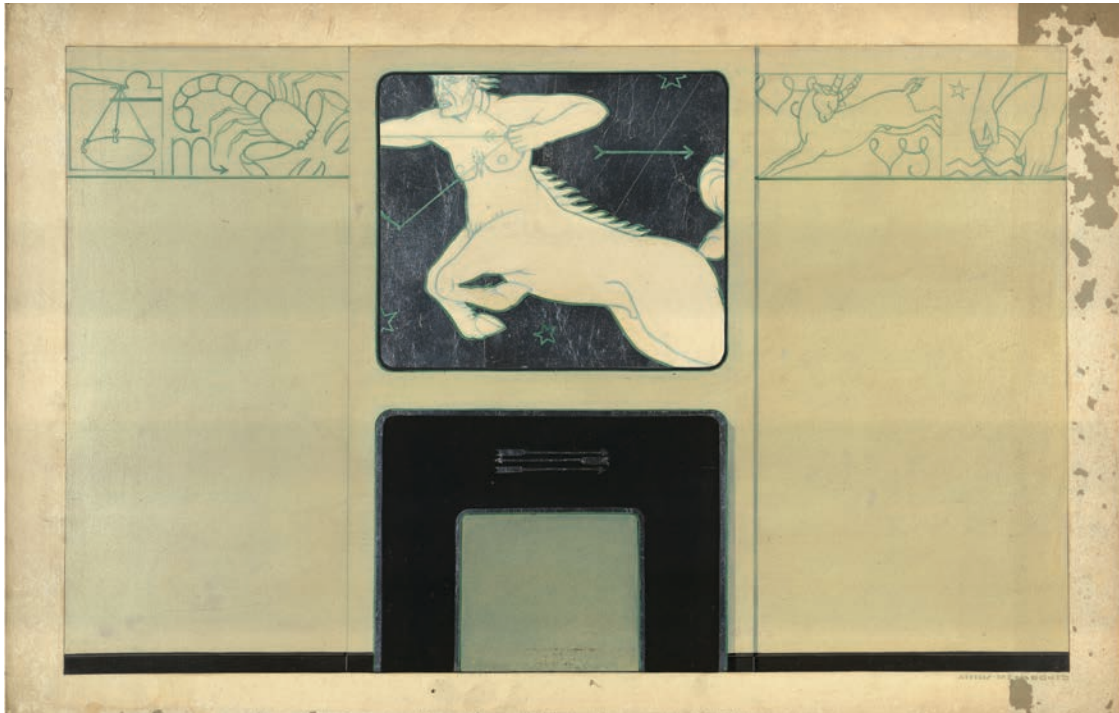
Mural proposal: Little Room of Dempsey Hotel in Macon

n.d.

Mixed media on paper

14 7/8 x 25 1/2 in. (37.8 x 64.8 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



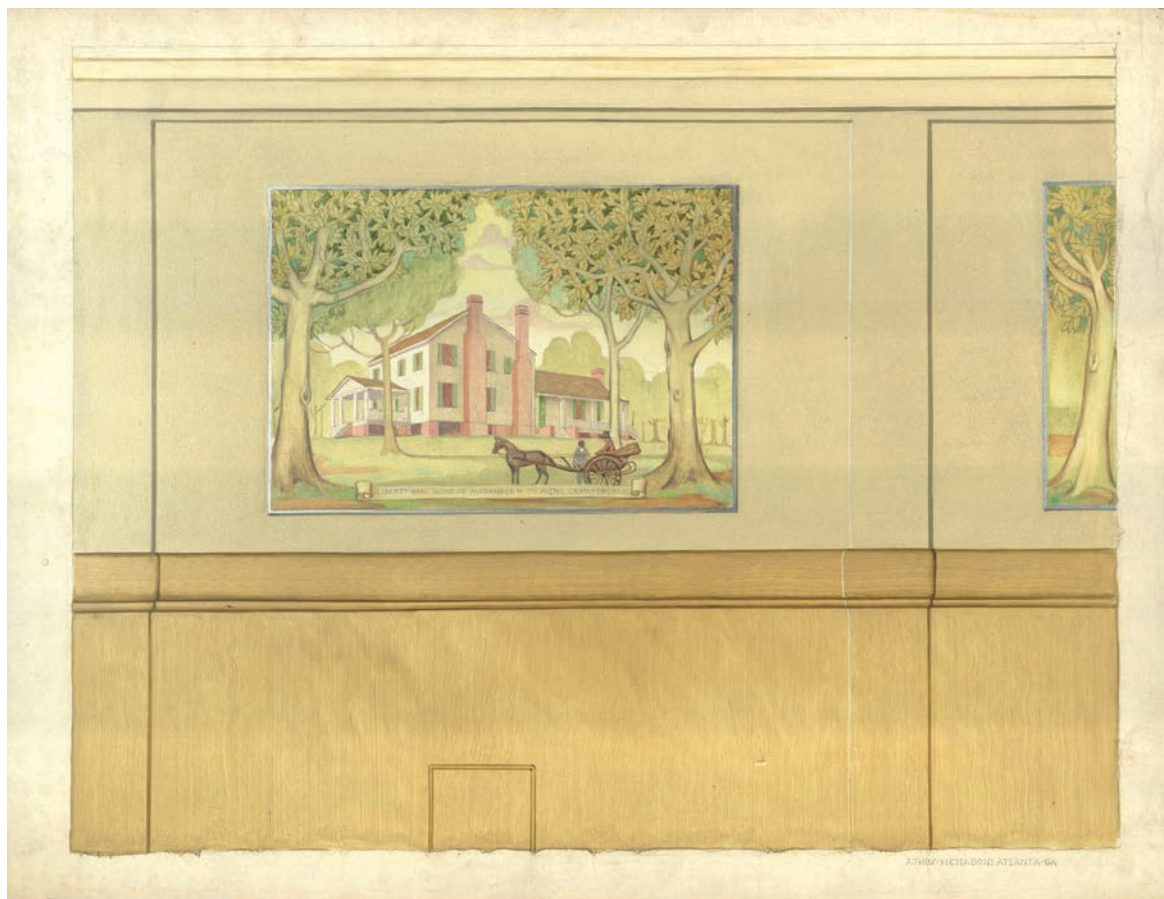
Mural proposal: Zodiac

n.d.

Mixed media on paper

16 7/8 x 26 in. (42.9 x 66 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Mural proposal: Liberty Hall

n.d.

Mixed media on paper

15 x 20 in. (38.1 x 50.8 cm)

Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens Collection at the Troup County Archives



Tyrolean Boy and Girl

c. 1930

Oil on illustration board

15 x 18 in. (38.1 x 45.7 cm)

Kennesaw State University, gift of Ron and Barbara Taylor, 2003.5.4.



Image of egg-shell mural from C & S Bank Emory branch brochure
1958

Ink on paper

4 3/4 x 30 in. (12.1 x 76.2 cm)

Kennesaw State University, gift of D. Russell Clayton, 2010.2.10.





Mirador Room Photo Panel #2
 n.d.
 Photographs on cardboard
 32 x 12 3/4 in. (81.3 x 32.4 cm)
 Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens
 Collection at the Troup County Archives



Mirador Room Photo Panel #3
 n.d.
 Photographs on cardboard
 32 x 12 3/4 in. (81.28 x 32.39 cm)
 Menaboni Collection of the Callaway Gardens
 Collection at the Troup County Archives



Panel from the Wind Ship

c. 1964

Oil on canvas, laminated to panel

34 1/2 x 49 in. (87.6 x 124.5 cm)

Kennesaw State University Foundation, gift of Sue Mullins Hodge, 2009.2.1.

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athos Menaloni



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