

Artist Resources – Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced *Teebow*; American, 1920-2021)



Thiebaud, 2010

Photograph: Max Whittaker/Sactown Magazine

[Sactown Magazine](#) profiles Thiebaud in 2010 in conjunction with his induction into the [California Museum's California Hall of Fame](#).

[Smithsonian Magazine](#) reviews Thiebaud's career trajectory in a [2011 profile](#).

Thiebaud [talks about his artistic influences and interests](#) with the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2011 at UC Davis, where Thiebaud is Professor Emeritus of Art and has become one of the most generous donors [of his own work and his own personal collection](#). “I’m a very basic American painter. I paint what I want to paint...often I feel I’m doing something I shouldn’t be doing. All of it is a way in which for me the kind of painter I admire works...what [painters] have to have, is to love making these little painted worlds.”

[Listen to Thiebaud](#) discuss his life as an artist and his affection for “painted worlds” in a 2000 lecture at the National Gallery of Art in DC, a subject to which he returned in 2015 for a [talk at Stanford University](#).

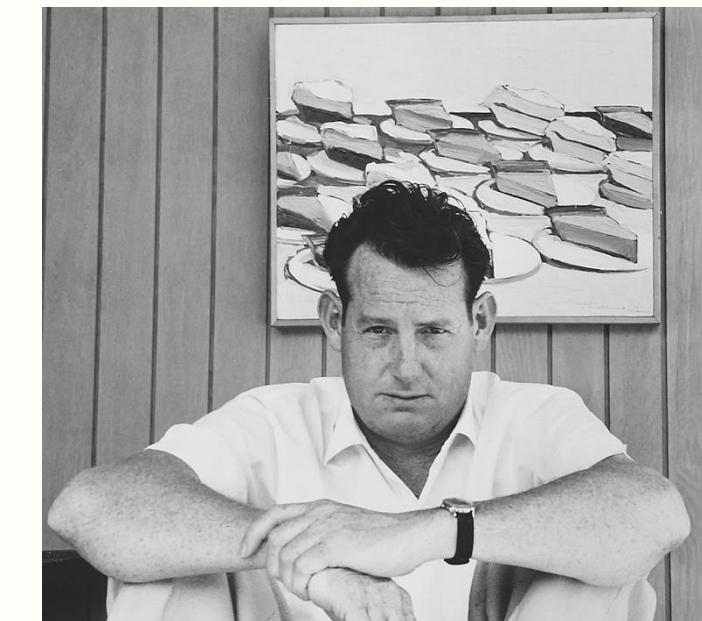
[Sactown Magazine](#) [talks with Thiebaud in 2018](#) about his dual careers as artist and educator, how UC Davis changed his life in 1959, and the magic yet universality of art. “You take something ordinary, a piece of paper, a canvas, and put things that come from the earth [on them], and things are brought into being so that we have a kind of duplicate, parallel history of the world through individual creations—I call them little painted worlds. We have a Van Gogh world...We have Picasso worlds, Michelangelo worlds, Rembrandt worlds that fortify and amplify and engage us in a whole other marvelous dimension we hadn’t counted on.”

The Laguna Art museum celebrated [70 Years of Painting](#) with Thiebaud in 2017, featuring lesser known figural series.

Thiebaud discusses his early years and self-taught skill as a cartoonist in [artist talk](#) in conjunction with the Morgan Library & Museum's 2018 exhibition [Wayne Thiebaud: Draftsman](#).

SFMoMA hosted Thiebaud for [two exhibitions in 2018](#), featuring his own work alongside his selection paintings by other artists.

The Crocker Art Museum is scheduled to open [an exhibition in celebration of Thiebaud's 100th birthday](#) in fall 2020..



Thiebaud, 1961

Photograph: Betty Jean Thiebaud/Wayne Thiebaud Foundation

Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)

Four Sundaes, 1963

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2025:108.1

Wayne Thiebaud began his artistic career as an Army illustrator before working briefly in Hollywood and becoming a long-serving professor at UC Davis. In the early 1960s, he began to explore desserts and confection shops as emblems of postwar American identity, nostalgia, and optimism. **Four Sundaes** is an early example of this subject, which became widely influential in the American Pop Art movement. The sundaes are set against a monochrome background, narrowing our focus on the thick whipped cream, melty ice cream, and juicy cherries on top.

On view February 4 – May 10, 2026





Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)
Courtland Reservoir, 2019-2020
Oil on canvas

Private Collection, San Francisco; L2021:170.1

“[Painting] is a wonderful combination of memory, imagination, and direct observation. A lot has to do with yearning. Primarily, what I’m interested in and always have been is this wonderful, personally involving search to find out all I can about painting, to be willing to take risks, and try things that don’t seem to be logical, and find out how my feelings and experiences as a boy growing up in America can be reflected in a painting.”

Bay Area artist Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced tee-bow) frequently returned to the geometric Sacramento River Delta as a subject of the atmospheric California landscapes he painted for over five decades. **Courtland Reservoir** features the artist’s characteristically vivid, candy-colored palette that captures how the late afternoon sun blankets the Delta. The painting was recently included a retrospective at Acquavella Galleries in Palm Beach, one of the last exhibitions of the artist’s work before his death on Christmas Day 2021 at the age of 101.

On view March 16 – June 19, 2022

Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)
River Bend Farms, 1996
Oil on panel

From the collection of Dominic Ng; L2021:58.1

Based in California for most of his career, Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced tee-bow) is known for his colorful cityscapes of the San Francisco Bay Area. **River Bend Farms** is part of a series on the Sacramento River Delta, a departure from the artist's earlier cityscapes. Thiebaud spent childhood summers at his grandfather's Northern California ranch and had a long teaching career at UC Davis. His experience on the ranch sparked an interest in the river and its relation to farming and agricultural patterns. In this example, the Sacramento River winds through a bright expanse of cultivated plots. The painting is both nostalgic for California summers and reflective of Thiebaud's decades-long observation of the landscape from his Sacramento studio.

On view June 23 – September 26, 2021





Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)

Nine Cupcakes, 2009

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:134.1

At 100 years young, Wayne Thiebaud continues to hone his legacy as one of the most important American painters and teachers of his generation. Early years as an illustrator, cartoonist, and graphic designer—careers and experiences he still reveres—eventually led Thiebaud to Sacramento City College and then UC Davis. He spent 30 years as a professor there (followed by 20 more after retirement) and began his professional career as a painter by taking full advantage of studio time offered by the university.

In this characteristic still life, Thiebaud displays a collection of **Nine Cupcakes** against a delicate monochrome background, adding dimension and weight through richly tinted shadow. He employs these effects to isolate his subject, creating what he describes as an “ultra clear, bright, air-conditioned atmosphere that might be sort of stirred up around the objects and echo presence...for this reason, uninterrupted single-colored backgrounds are used, and this allows the brush marks to be seen more clearly and play their role.” Thiebaud’s brush marks frost each cupcake in tangible sugary swirls and highlight the delicate ridges of each baking cup, creating an enticing package for the eyes and taste buds.

On view March 17 – June 20, 2021

Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)
Café Rose, 1962
Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:115.1

In his centennial year, Wayne Thiebaud (pronounced Tee-bow) still works in his Sacramento studio, experimenting with the dessert-filled pastels, evocative nudes, and the Bay Area vistas for which he is best known. Thiebaud began his artistic career as an army illustrator and cartoonist, working briefly as an animator for Disney, a freelance commercial artist, and a movie poster designer for Universal Pictures before completing an MFA and becoming a professor at Sacramento City College and UC Davis. Fearful of becoming an “employee of the art world,” Thiebaud has eschewed categorization of style and singularity of subject in search of creative freedom and versatility within his artistic practice. A reverential devotion to color, light, and the complexities of composition define his prolific output. **Café Rose** demonstrates the artist’s subtle explorations of shape and color, highlighting the formal potential of light and shadow as they play against the unadorned geometry and luminous surfaces of a small bud vase framed by salt and pepper shakers.

On view December 9, 2020 – March 14, 2021





Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)

River Ponds, 1998

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:29.1

Bay Area artist Wayne Thiebaud has eschewed categorization throughout his prolific seventy-year career, motivated by a desire “to steal,” in his words, “every kind of idea – western, eastern, and everything I could think of—atmospheric perspective... linear perspective, planal and sequential recessions.” Thiebaud began as a freelance cartoonist and illustrator in New York before becoming a painter at age twenty-nine. His early attraction to quotidian subjects, such as the offerings displayed in bakery cases and ice cream shops, earned him critical acclaim and commercial success. The landscapes surrounding his Sacramento studio – where the ninety-nine-year-old artist still works every day – and the cityscapes of San Francisco also serve as constant inspiration. **River Ponds** is a characteristic example of the artist’s bright visions of California. Flattened perspective and chromatic exaggeration demonstrate Thiebaud’s characteristic style, grounded in patient observations mediated through imagination and memory, which he describes as “playing with reality.”

On view August 5 – November 8, 2020

Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)

River Boats, 2001

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2019:123.1

Bay Area artist Wayne Thiebaud has eschewed categorization throughout his prolific six-decade career, motivated by a desire “to steal,” in his words, “every kind of idea – western, eastern, and everything I could think of – atmospheric perspective...linear perspective, planal and sequential recessions.” The artist further defines his vision as “many ways of seeing in the same picture – clear forms, hazy, squinting, glancing, staring and even a sort of inner seeing.” Though his earliest canvases of desserts and confection shops in the 1960s drew critical comparisons to the Pop Art movement, Thiebaud identifies his oeuvre in the lineage of the expressive and formal innovations of early twentieth-century European avant-garde. **River Boats** is a characteristic example of Thiebaud’s bright visions of quintessential West Coast landscapes. Its flattened perspective and chromatic exaggeration signal how his rendition of this pastoral setting is grounded in observations mediated through the artist’s imagination and memory. Despite their titular spotlight, the two river boats nearly become lost within the colorful panorama.



On view January 15 – April 19, 2020



Wayne Thiebaud (American, 1920-2021)

Dessert Cart, 2003

Oil on canvas

Private Collection; L2019:102.1

Thiebaud began his artistic career as an Army illustrator and cartoonist, working briefly as an animator for Disney, a freelance commercial artist, and movie poster designer for Universal Pictures before completing an MFA and becoming an art professor at Sacramento City College and UC Davis. In his early professional work as a painter in the 1960s, Thiebaud concentrated on depicting American food, especially sweet treats like pies, cakes, lollipops, and ice cream. **Dessert Cart** hearkens back to these panoplies of sugary fantasy, which were inspired by the endless color, assortment, and arrangements of bakery counter displays. Against the somber grey of the cart, the vivid display of carefully placed desserts tempts the senses. Thiebaud's thick, almost buttery application of paint captures the material essence of his subjects – frosting, cream, pudding – transforming the still life into a sumptuous offering of comfort and indulgence.

On view February 8 – May 13, 2020