



Photo: Francis Hills

A Living Legacy of Preserving Art

The holiday season now fast approaching is that time of year when Hollywood's better films are released. One that I particularly hope to catch is *The Monuments Men*, which features an all-star cast headed by George Clooney and Matt Damon. Clooney has not only directed and co-produced the film, but co-adapted its screenplay from the bestselling book published in 2009 by Robert M. Edsel and Bret Witter, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*.

The film and book tell the remarkable true story of a team of American and British art conservators, historians, and curators who worked fast, and effectively, to protect European artworks and monuments during and just after World War II. Clooney bears an uncanny physical resemblance to the man he plays, George Stout (1897-1978), who, before the war, had headed the groundbreaking conservation department at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum.

Stout and his fellow "Monuments Men" landed at Normandy in June 1944 and traveled alongside the Allied forces advancing through France and Germany. There they worked closely with local colleagues to rescue cultural treasures in cities like Caen, Maastricht, and Aachen, as well as in the repositories of stolen art the Nazis had created across western Europe. Arriving in Japan shortly after the war ended there, Stout undertook similar work before returning to Harvard in 1946.

Stout later pursued a distinguished career in Massachusetts directing the Worcester Art Museum and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, but has been best remembered in the U.S. today for helping to found the American Institute for the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC). Headquartered in Washington, D.C., this is the national service organization for conservation professionals who have sustained the Monuments Men's tradition of preserving works of art. As reported in this August's issue of *Fine Art Connoisseur*, AIC and its foundation led the way in helping artists and others stabilize artworks damaged by Hurricane Sandy last year, though most of its members apply their expertise under less dramatic circumstances, usually by repairing or masking the damages inflicted by time. Needless to say, preserving works of art and architecture is of huge significance to our civilization, indeed to our collective memory of all who have come before us, and of how we fit into their continuing story.

Among its many activities, AIC's foundation still administers the George Stout Memorial Fund, which offers awards that defray the expenses incurred by conservation students and recent graduates when they attend professional meetings. At AIC's bustling annual conference, the Fund's beneficiaries wear pins that say, "Thanks George!" There could hardly be a nicer way to honor Stout's ongoing impact, but this December, the new film highlighting his brave exploits may just go one better.

For details on the movie and book, please visit monumentsmen.com. For more on AIC, visit conservation-us.org. The next deadline for applications to the George Stout Memorial Fund is December 15. ■

George Stout attending the American Institute of Conservation's 2nd annual meeting at Cooperstown, New York, in 1974; photo: Dan Kushel



Conservator Renée Wolcott wearing her "Thanks George!" pin; photo: Andrew Pinkham

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