

# WAYNE THIEBAUD 100



Paintings, Prints, and Drawings



# THIEBAUD, SACRAMENTO, AND THE FANCY STUFF OF ART

Scott Shields

Much of what has made Wayne Thiebaud the artist he is today is traceable to Northern California and, more specifically, to the Sacramento region. Thiebaud first came to know the light, heat, agriculture, and middle-American ambiance of the latter in 1942, when Sacramento was much smaller and more rural, and he has lived in the city most of his life. The artist acknowledges, “Sacramento gave me something essential.”<sup>1</sup>

Thiebaud is not, however, a Sacramento native; he was born in Mesa, Arizona, on November 15, 1920. His parents, Morton J. and Alice Eugenia Thiebaud, named him Morton Wayne, after his father, and called him Wayne. In Mesa, both parents worked, his father as a mechanic, his mother for the telephone company. Less than a year after Thiebaud was born, the family moved to Long Beach, California.

Thiebaud has fond early memories of Long Beach, which he remembers as being “quiet [and] rather small in feeling,” with beautiful stretches of beach and a surrounding countryside of orchards and orange groves.<sup>2</sup> His father worked in various capacities as a mechanic, engineer, and inventor, and was a bishop for the Mormon Church, coming to the religion as an adult through his wife, a descendant of Mormon pioneers. Faith was an integral part of the family’s life, and Thiebaud participated in church activities. He also liked singing and playing the harmonica and guitar.

In the early years of the Great Depression, the Thiebauts relocated to Huntington Park, near Los Angeles. In 1931, they moved again to southern Utah,

settling first in Hurricane and then, with other extended family members, buying a farm between St. George and Cedar City. Thiebaud went to school first in Hurricane and then in St. George. He also did his fair share of chores: “I plowed, harrowed, dug, and hitched up teams . . . and planted and harvested alfalfa, potatoes, corn, . . . and I loved it,” he recalls.<sup>3</sup> Today, he acknowledges that his later agricultural landscapes have some foundation in this early experience with the land.

In early 1933, the Thiebauts lost their ranch and moved to St. George where, for a time, they lived in a hotel. Looking for work, Thiebaud’s father returned to California, hoping to get a job as part of the cleanup efforts following the March 10 Long Beach earthquake, which caused significant damage throughout Southern California. The family followed shortly thereafter and resettled in Long Beach, where Thiebaud spent an academic year at Alexander Hamilton Junior High School.

In 1935, Thiebaud enrolled at Long Beach Polytechnic High School. Though few of the school’s formal offerings interested him, he did like sports, music and theater, participating in Boy Scout activities, and









100. *Sunset Streets Study*, 2019. Oil on board, 14½ x 12 in. Courtesy of the artist

# WAYNE THIEBAUD 100

## Paintings, Prints, and Drawings

Celebrating the 100th birthday of one of America's most respected and beloved artists, *Wayne Thiebaud 100: Paintings, Prints, and Drawings* honors a lifetime of extraordinary achievements across many genres. Best known for his tantalizing paintings of desserts, Thiebaud has long been affiliated with Pop Art—his bright palette, consumerist imagery, and graphic presentation perfectly suited to the Pop Art moment—though his body of work is far more expansive, continuing to grow as the artist approaches his milestone birthday.

Born in Mesa, Arizona, Thiebaud grew up in Southern California and Utah. He spent much of his working career in Sacramento, teaching at Sacramento Junior College in the 1950s and then, beginning in 1960, at the University of California, Davis. After achieving widespread recognition for his nontraditional food still lifes in a 1962 exhibition at New York's Allan Stone Gallery, he began depicting people, doing so in beautifully realized figure studies and portraits on canvas. Across the decades, Thiebaud has explored various details of American life through his art—from urban views and rural landscapes to clowns and household items—all the time continuing to explore the food subjects that made him famous.

*Wayne Thiebaud 100* accompanies an exhibition of the same name, continuing a Crocker Art Museum tradition of hosting a Thiebaud exhibition each decade since according the artist his first solo show in 1951. In addition to the 100 paintings, prints, and drawings featured in the exhibition, this publication includes numerous other contextual paintings by Thiebaud, art by the masters who inspired him, and photographs of the artist with family and friends, taken over the course of his extraordinary career.



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**SCOTT A. SHIELDS**, associate director and chief curator at the Crocker Art Museum, holds an MA and PhD in art history from the University of Kansas. He has twenty-five years of museum experience in the Midwest and California. Having curated more than seventy-five exhibitions, he has been the primary or sole author of numerous exhibition catalogues, including the following Pomegranate publications: *Edgar Payne: The Scenic Journey*; *Armin Hansen: The Artful Voyage*; *E. Charlton Fortune: The Colorful Spirit*; *Richard Diebenkorn: Beginnings, 1942-1955*; and *Granville Redmond: The Eloquent Palette*.

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**ABOVE: *Self-Portrait (4 Hour Study)***, 1989. Oil on board, 11½ x 12 in. Collection of Paul LeBaron Thiebaud Trust

**FRONT COVER: *Pies, Pies, Pies***, 1961. Oil on canvas, 20 x 30 in. Crocker Art Museum, gift of Philip L. Ehlert in memory of Dorothy Evelyn Ehlert, 1974.12

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Includes 100 full-page reproductions of Thiebaud's paintings, plus more than 50 photos of the artist, other supplemental images, and illustrations that inspired his own work

Includes Chronology, Selected Publications, and Index

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