OMB No. 1024-0018

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

WHARTON ESHERICK STUDIO United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

1.	NAME	OF	PRO	PERTY
	1111111			

Historic Name:

THE WHARTON ESHERICK STUDIO

Other Name/Site Number:

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Street & Number: 1520 Horseshoe Trail Not for publication: Malvern (Tredyffrintlup) City/Town: Vicinity:___

State: PA

County: Chester Code: 029

Zip Code: 19301

CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property Category of Property Private: X Building(s): X Public-local: District: Public-State: Site: Public-Federal: Structure: Object:

Number of Resources within Property Contributing

Noncontributing buildings sites structures objects Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 5

Name of related multiple property listing:

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.	t
Signature of Certifying Official Date	
State or Federal Agency and Bureau	
In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date	
State or Federal Agency and Bureau	
5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION	
I, hereby certify that this property is:	
Entered in the National Register	
Determined eligible for the	
Determined not eligible for the	
Determined not eligible for the National Register Percent the National Register	
Removed from the National RegisterOther (explain):	
Signature of Keeper Date of Action	

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Commerce/Trade

Sub: Single Dwelling

Professional

Current: Recreation and Culture

Sub: Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and Early 20th Century

American Movements: Craftsman

MATERIALS:

Foundation:

Stone

Walls:

Stone, terra cotta, wood, stucco

Roof:

Shingle

Other:



Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Wharton Esherick Studio evolved over a 45-year span, beginning about the year 1913 when Esherick purchased an old farmhouse (c. 1830) near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, because he admired an old, wild, cherry tree outside the kitchen door. The following description was written by Charles Miller for Fine Homebuilding, Taunton Press, 1989.

By the time he outgrew the farmhouse barn and started to think about building his studio in the mid-1920s, Esherick's sculptural and architectural tastes had developed. He agreed with Frank Lloyd Wright that a house should appear to grow from its site, and be unencumbered by superfluous ornament. Esherick liked the look of the stone-enders in the near-by valley, so he chose sandstone for the studio walls.

Design and construction: The site is a mostly level bench on an otherwise steadily rising hillside. Esherick positioned the studio both to avoid the established trees and to take advantage of the steep dropoff on the downhill side. Here he placed a tiny kitchen that runs along the south wall. This galley-style room has its own exterior door, which opens to the west, for easy access to the main entrance to the studio. Above this original kitchen is a cantilevered bay that extends the groundfloor shop space and shelters the kitchen from weather and summer sun.

Two wooden portions of the kitchen walls are non-structural infill panels, which Esherick hinged, windows, siding, trim and all, so he could swing them open in good weather and secure them to the bay overhang.

This arrangement also allowed him to use the southeast corner of the kitchen as a shower. He would push the table (on rollers) out of the way, swing open the wall, and bathe under a shower head mounted on the wall.

On the workshop level, the kitchen-ceiling planks merged with a packed-earth floor to extend the shop space. In its original state, this level's main entrance was on the west side of the room. A set of double doors opened into Esherick's outdoor work area on the east side.

The first sign of construction was the rock-paved ramp that leads down the gradual slope to Esherick's outdoor workspace. Although he liked to do the heavy labor himself, Esherick knew it was unrealistic to try to build a stone and timber house without some help. So he hired a carpenter named John Schmidt and a mason named Bert Kulp. The three of them, along with Aaron



Coleman carrying the hod and Larry Hand on wheelbarrow, worked through the summer [1926] to build Esherick's studio, all without plans. Out of his appreciation for their help, Esherick carved them each a custom coat hook. Each one is a caricature of its intended user, and they protrude from the wall near the original front door.

Esherick's main role in this early construction phase was to supervise the work, and to select the stones for color and pattern (they are flecked with plum, gold and grey). Then Esherick or Kulp would trim the stones to fit before each stone was permanently placed in a layer of mortar. Kulp insisted on filling the joints flush with the faces of the stone. Each night, after Kulp had left, Esherick would cut back the mortar on the exterior side—an exercise by each one, every day. The outside edges look as though they'd been laid up dry, while the interior sides are mostly mortar and heavily textured plaster with the occasional rocky face peeking through.

Esherick must have gotten a deal on an old timber-framed building, and dismantled it for reuse in The floor of the second-level sleeping his studio. loft is carried by a pair of summer beams that are barely 6 ft. apart. Evidently, Esherick had joists of pre-determined length, so he just added another beam near the middle of the room to make his studio 6 ft. wider.... Crown up is the rule when it comes to setting beams and joists, but this is just the kind of rule that Esherick delighted in breaking. When it came time to place the 12 X 12 ridge beam, he let the sway backed timber hang crown down. The eave line arcs slightly in the opposite direction, giving the impression that the roof is cinched up in its middle. In addition, the stone walls are curved and battered, with the greatest amount of flare at the corners. combination of curved lines animates the overall composition. It's like the difference between the line made by a technical pen and a crow quill--one is static and flat, the other surges and dwindles and invites the eye to walk its length.

Esherick continued his investigation into curved lines in buildings when he put up a garage in 1927, but this time he broadened the lines into planes that twist as they move through space. The roof form on his two-car, log garage is an unusual gable--the roof peaks are offset at opposite ends of the building, and the roof planes rotate as they bend to conform to the rafters.

It's hard to look at the garage-roof framing without marveling at Esherick's uncanny ability to see an asset in what most people would perceive as a liability. He had enough straight trees to build conventionally



chinked log walls, and eight more with a warp. He split these down the middle and used them as rafters. The north-side rafters are crown out creating a convex plane. The south-side ones are crown in making a concave surface.

Although it's only a small garage, this little building with the offset gables changes its shape and attitude in surprising ways as you walk around it. It's always in proportion, but never symmetrical. Seen from the south, it stretches out like a covered bridge. From the northeast, it resembles a wayside church....

The staircase: In 1930, Esherick carved his most enduring piece of functional sculpture, the red oak staircase that spirals from his workshop to his bedroom loft. The staircase shaft twists as it rises, with a section that looks like the piston in a rotary engine. The three distinct planes are equal in width, and their angle of ascent corresponds to the rise of the treads. Two-thirds up the spiral another stringer intersects the shaft, and the stair straightens out to merge with the rectangular opening in the loft.

The treads are also red oak, carved with broad, quick strokes that give them faceted edgee to show off the heavily figured grain. Each one has a tenon about 2 in. wide and 7 in. deep. A mortise through the stair shaft receives each tenon, and the tread is locked in place by a single furniture bolt threaded through a nut held captive inside the tenon. Each bolt is driven horizontally, and bears against a rectangular cover plate to snug its tread against the column. The stair can be dismantled and it has been out of the house on two occasions, once to be displayed at the 1940 New York World's Fair, and again to New York for a show at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in 1959.

The dining room occupies the lower floor of the two-story addition that Esherick built in 1941. The top floor is a guest bedroom. Unlike the original studio, this portion of the building is wood frame, and it rests atop the stone walls that border the original entryway on the building's west side. It's clad in oak boards and battens and left unfinished to weather. The battens are held in place by nails driven through ½ in. steel washers. The washers are purely for looks, and they are arranged in tidy lines that look like rusty buttons.

Inside, the dining room is a feast of hardwoods. The roughsawn, cherry boards radiate across the west wall, then cross the ceiling in shiplapped pieces more than 20 in. wide. The floor is a mosaic of applewood and walnut, highlighted by a pair of lanky leg shapes that extend the room's length.



Esherick made the floor from a pile of discarded % in. lumber from Ed Ray's sawmill where he got much of his wood. Esherick cut out a shape to showcase the wood's best figure, then used it as a template for the neighboring pieces until the puzzle was complete. He then cut grooves in the edges of each board and reassembled them with splines to align and secure the many pieces.

Indoor plumbing: For 20 years, Esherick and his visitors used a covered privy to the east of the studio, with a splendid view to the south. But modern conveniences do have their advantages, especially during a Pennsylvania winter, so, in 1947, Esherick decided to add a formal bathroom off the workshop level.

The bathroom is cut into the uphill side, just to the north of the 1941 addition, so half of it is below grade. The exterior walls are made of terra-cotta blocks stacked vertically. Esherick turned the blocks on their sides two-thirds up the wall to form a sill for the thick, frosted, factory-glass windows. The mortar grooves in the edges of the blocks became trim details with horizontal lines.

It's a tiny room, and Esherick wanted a shower in it, so he let the slab floor do double duty--it's pitched to a drain in the corner that lets the entire floor work as a shower pan. When the room is used as a shower, a curtain is drawn along an arcing, galvanized pipe to keep the lavatory and the toilet from getting drenched. This arrangement works remarkably well. shower head protrudes from the ceiling, and it's turned on by a nearby, silver-painted, wooden handle attached to a valve mounted in the overhead joist space. corner, a few feet from the drain, a one-piece countertop and sink made of copper gleams below the shaving mirror. Esherick formed the sink and counter of wood, then had a metalsmith cover the raw framework with sheet copper sweat-soldered at the joints.

Above the ground-floor bathroom, Esherick added a kitchen that is now the main entry. This kitchen was minuscule, but it lasted 20 years until the next major addition.

Silo: The three-storied, cylindrical tower was added in 1966. The tower is a little like a teardrop in plan, with its pointed edge near the path to the current front door. The ground floor is a mechanical room. On the second level, Esherick added a new kitchen next to the 1941 dining room addition. The third floor contains a bathroom and a dressing room.



From the west, this austere pylon dominates the building with its shape and color. The silo's walls are awash with swirling patches of autumnal hues that mimic the dappled fall light. Esherick directed the masons who stuccoed the block walls to mix pigments into the mud as they applied the finish coat. The sculptor, then 79 years old, stood below and directed their trowels with his remarks, evidently using the patches of light and shadow cast by the adjacent trees in leaf as a guide.

Along with the silo, Esherick added a deck to the west side of the building. It sweeps away from the tower and back to the dining room with a plan that approximates a curve with a constantly tightening radius. The deck is supported by two stone and stucco columns that are much larger than structure demands. They anchor the elevation visually, and without their bulk, the composition would be incomplete.

The Kitchen: This too is a tiny room, but nearly everywhere there is an appliance or utensil within reach. The cherry countertop curves around into the dining room, wedding these two disparate spaces. The counter is finished with clear epoxy, and into it is inset a copper sink. Above it, hangs a chopping block that is shaped to match the sink. In use, the block rests on a small ledge at the top of the sink, expanding the usable counterspace.

The cabinets below have curved doors clad with cedar slats. Tiny racks on the inside of several doors store pot loads, an example of the thorough attention to storage space in the room. It's much like the galley of a ship with its curving wooden surfaces and hull-like walls. A pull on one of the cabinet doors and, click, a light goes on under the counter. Esherick used refrigerator door switches to control the lights, and he used them all over the house for cabinets, closets, and other dimly lit cubbyholes. The window above the sink looks out on the deck and to the valley beyond.

Kahn-Esherick Workshop: Thirty years after the hillside studio was begun, [Esherick] decided to build a separate shop. He found he had to have a building permit. He turned to his friend, the architect Louis Kahn, and together they worked on the plans. Both men had strong personalities, and they finally compromised on a plan that was essentially three joined hexagons and three diamond-shaped roof planes with sloping eaves.

Miller, Charles. Fine Homebuilding. The Taunton Press, Newton, CT June/July 1984. pp. 35-43.

The first hexagonal bay contained wall racks for holding seasoned lumber brought in from the wood rack to finish drying under heated conditions. middle bay was a great planer and a jointer. The central bay, used for shaping, cutting, and assembling, held the work benches, bandsaws, electric drills, and other power and hand tools. The third bay was used primarily for signing and finishing. Here, there were cabinets and benches and a vise able to turn six different directions for cutting wood blocks and for carving sculpture. Esherick did the final sanding and finishing there and had a little space for keeping his records. The one thing this hexagonal complex lacked was a right-angled corner to replicate a room in the average house, for which most of his furniture was destined.2

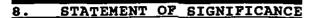
The woodshed, contemporary with the studio, is a simple four-sided enclosure for storing green lumber.

CONTRIBUTING

NON CONTRIBUTING

Studio-Residence Garage Kahn-Esherick Workshop Woodshed Outhouse Abandoned Road

² Hinkel, Susan R. "Wharton Esherick." American Woodworker, February 1990, #12, p. 39.



	dered the significance of this property in Nationally: X Statewide: Locally:					
Applicable National Register Criteria: A	B <u>X</u> C_X D					
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A	BC D E FG_X_					
NHL Criteria: 2, 4						
NHL Criteria Exception: 8						
NHL Theme(s): XVI. Architects X. Verns						
XXIV. Painting and Sculpture I. Second Generation						
Areas of Significance:	Architecture Art					
Period(s) of Significance:	1926-1956					
Significant Dates:	1926, 1927, 1930, 1941, 1947, 1956					
Significant Person(s):	Wharton Esherick (1887-1970)					
Cultural Affiliation:						
Architect/Builder:	Wharton Esherick					



State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

> As Wharton Esherick's studio was a peaceful retreat, high in the woods overlooking the Great Valley, so Esherick was something of a loner. His long and productive career is curiously resistant to description in art historical terms. Theodore Dreiser worked over the stage version of An American Tragedy in Esherick's kitchen; Spiral Pole, one of Esherick's finest abstract sculptures, was carved during a visit to Sherwood Anderson (who later asked that his friend be commissioned to design his tombstone.)

> When Ford Maddox Ford travelled half-way around the world in the mid-1930s, he broke his journey on a Pennsylvania hillside near Paoli, and described his friend Esherick's workshop as a kind of sanctuary for the human spirit In the course of his long and productive career, he developed a style that was uniquely his own. This style evolved, at least in part, out of his commitment to merging fine craftsmanship with creative design. Esherick was indeed an "artist-craftsman" in the truest sense of the term: he was a sculptor who applied the principles of modern sculpture to all his work, including furniture and architectural designs. In doing so, he bridged the gap between the fine arts and the decorative arts, thus realizing the most cherished goal of his predecessors like William Morris, who firmly believed that there should be no distinction between utilitarian objects and those made to be appreciated as works of art.1

Wharton Esherick lived with gusto; his life was rich in professional relationships, but not as rich in material assets. He didn't seem to notice.

Wharton Esherick's Studio is a building so essential to understanding his lifetime of achievement that a visit is required. He took forty years (1926-1966) to tame the hillside and the materials he used in designing the Studio to produce a work of art which his friend Louis Kahn described as "a splendid example of architecture by inclination." Esherick was aware of Frank Lloyd Wright's theories that a building should grow from its site in harmony with its surroundings. In constructing the Studio,

Esherick gave a slight curve to the stone foundations, thus creating the impression that the walls rise from the ground like a tree trunk. By constructing the lowest level of the building on the slope of a hill, he eliminated the need to excavate a basement. For many

The Wharton Esherick Museum, Studio and Collection. Published by the Wharton Esherick Museum, Paoli, 1984, p. 3.



years this lowest level doubled as a furnace room and a kitchen. The main floor of the structure was divided into two working areas, one for sculpting, the other for printing and furniture making. The interior was designed primarily to function as a practical, multipurpose studio. For example, the space reserved for sculpture has packed earth floor which anchored the large pieces of wood on which Esherick preferred to work. However, many of the architectural details and utilitarian objects with which he furnished his studio were decorative as well as functional. The andirons for a massive stone fireplace, and a bronze map of the property, which served as a furnace opening, were cast from Esherick's own designs. He also made rosewood latches for the entrance door, two hand-carved loading doors, and with a characteristic touch of good fun, carved coat pegs for the entrance hall. The coat pegs are humorous portraits of Esherick, the workmen who helped him construct the studio, and the bird that sang to them while they worked.2

When he designed the two-car garage (1927), the concept had an expressionist feeling. Expressionism was a European art movement in the 1920s, and he would have known about it because of his close association with the Hedgerow Theater in Rose Valley. avant-garde theater was presided over by Jasper Deeter, and was famous as a "training theater" for aspiring actors and actresses.

Although he was very much influenced by his contemporaries, Esherick was academically trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. At first, he worked as a graphic artist, but turned back to painting in a Neo-Impressionist style.

The turning point in his career came in 1919 when he joined the faculty of an experimental school for "organic learning" in Fairhope, Alabama. At that time, Fairhope was an artists' colony that attracted writers, painters, and craftsmen during the winter months. There, Esherick met Sherwood Anderson who became a life-long friend, and he also acquired his first set of carving tools. Hoping to make his painting more unique, and therefore more stable, he decided to carve frames that would complement the textures, colors, and subjects of his canvases.... Shortly after his return to Paoli, he turned to wood cuts and furniture design.3

People who came to the Studio were more interested in the furniture he had made. These pieces were often decorated with carved ornament that was closely related to the Art Nouveau designs used by Louis Comfort Tiffany. This impulse to produce

Ibid., p. 12.

Ibid. pp. 5-6.



hand-done works with great respect for the material is also rooted in the Arts and Crafts movement which swept England and America at the end of the 19th century. In the early 1930s, he also made several "cubist" pieces that may be part of his experiment with the Art Deco style.

At their most refined, Esherick's Deco interiors reveal a sculptor's sensitivity to material and form. exceptional example is the sculptural environment that he created for Judge and Mrs. Curtis Bok from 1935 to The entrance hall of the Bok residence in Gulph Mills, Pennsylvania, was dominated by a white pine staircase, dramatically set off against a black wall. The Philadelphia architect George Howe had designed an equally dramatic staircase in masonry for a Whitemarsh, Pennsylvania, home in 1932. Esherick's design, like Howe's, is a partially free-standing spiral. In another respect, however, the Bok staircase more closely resembles the Doylestown, Pennsylvania, staircases in Charles Sheeler's painting of the late twenties. Esherick emphasized the distinctive pattern of radiating angles on the exposed underside of the steps, just as Sheeler had done in transforming the interiors of eighteenth-century farmhouses into the subjects of his precisionst paintings. Despite these analogies, the Bok staircases would be singularly out of place in either a Howe interior or a Pennsylvania farmhouse. The glossy shine of the wood and the studied combination of sweeping curves and sharp angles are characteristic of Esherick's style, vintage 1935. metal railings that accentuate the curve of the stairs were added on Mrs. Bok's request. Esherick usually paid careful attention to practical details, but in this case an idea prevailed, and he conceived of the staircase as a spiraling architectural sculpture, undisturbed by concessions to safety.

Although the majority of Esherick's commissions during the thirties were for furniture and interior designs, he considered himself primarily a sculptor. Because of its diversity, his sculpture of this period defies any logical pattern of stylistic development....

By 1940, Esherick was known, not only as a sculptor, but also as a prominent figure among modern American craftsmen and designers. His first major undertaking of the forties was the interior of a Pennsylvania Hill House which was featured at the New York World's Fair of 1940. The model interior was designed by George Howe as an appropriate architectural setting for Esherick's works, among them the spiral staircase from his Paoli studio, a couch originally built for the Bok house, and an asymmetrical table with a black phenol top. Esherick chose the furniture for efficiency, durability, and aesthetic appeal. The couch, which doubled as a room divider, has a shelf around the back



that was used in lieu of side tables and deep drawers beneath the upholstered seat that provided ample storage space. The five-sided hickory table was also multi-functional, serving as a coffee table and a desk. The asymmetrical shape of the table can be compared to Danish and Swedish designs of the thirties that Esherick could have seen in either Europe or America. It should be emphasized, however, that unlike most modern Scandinavian furniture, his table is a unique hand-crafted piece. He chose a synthetic top, not only because it is heat-resistant and easy to clean, but also because its glossy black surface adds an interesting contrast of texture and color to the natural wood frame. Like the Bok staircase, the table and the couch were designed to generate a dynamic interplay of lines, angles, and curves. Both pieces are examples of what Esherick described as "free-form furniture", or furniture with "tree angles and tree forms. 114

In 1967, Esherick suffered a stroke, not severe enough to impair his mind or coordination, but enough to reduce his stamina, energy, and creative drive. He continued to work, but on a shorter schedule. There was still the warmth, the responsiveness, the jaunty sense of humor, but muted. One day he spoke to his doctor about what lay ahead; "I'm not afraid of dying," he said, "but I want to know what it is. What happens?"

The doctor thought a moment. "Well," he said, "Its like going out of a room into another."

"That's all right, then. I won't mind that. I just don't want to get my foot caught in the door."

His fear of a long, debilitating illness never materialized, and he worked productively until one week before his death. "Wharton was one of the few lucky artists," said a friend who came to pay his respects. "He finished his work".

Esherick's stature as an artist and craftsman was a widely recognized fact by the end of the 1930s. The Esherick Studio, now a museum, is like Henry Chapman Mercer's "Fonthill" in nearby Doylestown. They both belong to that rare variety of historic house which is a completed expression of one man's intensely personal fusion of fine craftsmanship with wild flights of the imagination. There are few museums in which a sense of the

⁴ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵ Hinkel, Susan R. "A Maverick's Mansion." Art and Antiques, May 1988, p. 114.

artist's character remains so vivid. Ford Maddox Ford's words were that visitors would sense Esherick's "benign if crusty presence in every room."

⁶ The Wharton Esherick Museum, Studio and Collection. Trustees of the Wharton Esherick Museum. Paoli, Pennsylvania, 1977, 1984, p. 4.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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The Wharton Esherick Museum, Studio and Collection. Published by the Trustees of The Wharton Esherick Museum. Paoli, Pennsylvania, 1977, 1984.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

	Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (3 requested.	6 CFR	67) has	; been
<u>x</u>	Previously Listed in the National Register. Previously Determined Eligible by the National Reg Designated a National Historic Landmark. Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey:	yister.	, 	
 Prima	Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: ary Location of Additional Data:	#		
	State Historic Preservation Office Other State Agency Federal Agency Local Government University			
	Other (Specify Repository):			

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 5.5 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

A 18 457950 4436950

Verbal Boundary Description:

That portion of land in Tredyffrin Township, Tract #1: Beginning in the Northeast corner on Horseshoe Trail, south 536.25 feet to right of way, thence west 450 feet to a point, thence north 530.2 feet to Horseshoe Trail, thence east through the center 450 feet to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the studio-residence, garage, woodshed, outhouse, and Kahn-Esherick workshop that have historically been a part of the original property along with the access road and including surrounding open space.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

Org.: National Park Service

Street/#: P.O. Box 37127

City/Town: Washington

State: D.C.

ZIP: 20013-7137

Telephone: (202)343-8266

Date:

