



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the William Christopher Papers, circa 1920s-circa 1973, in the Archives of American Art

Anna Rimel

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the
Smithsonian Institution Collections Care and Preservation Fund.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	William Christopher papers
Date:	circa 1920s-circa 1973
Identifier:	AAA.chriwill
Creator:	Christopher, William R, 1924-1973 (Artist)
Extent:	8.2 Linear feet
Language:	Collection is in English
Summary:	The William Christopher papers measure 8.2 linear feet and date from circa 1920s to circa 1973. Materials include biographical materials, correspondence, writings and notes, five diaries, subject/project files, printed materials, photographs, numerous sketches and eleven sketchbooks, and five short film reels containing amateur footage of New York City. The subject/project files include correspondence, printed materials, and two additional diaries about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the 1965 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

William Christopher donated his papers to the Archives of American Art in 1972.

Processing Information

Multiple accessions were merged and archivally processed and a finding aid prepared by Anna Rimel in 2015 with funding provided by the Smithsonian Institution's Collections Care and Preservation Fund. The Archives of American Art has implemented accelerated processing when possible to increase information about access to more of our collections. For this collection, accelerated processing included arrangement to the series, subseries and folder levels, adhering to the creator's original arrangement as much as possible. Generally, folder contents were simply verified with the original folder titles, but items within folders were not arranged further. All materials were rehoused in archival folders and boxes for long-term stability, but staples and other fasteners have not all been removed.

Preferred Citation

William Christopher papers, circa 1920s-circa 1973. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Use of original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center. Contact Reference Services for more information. Use of archival audiovisual recordings with no duplicate access copy requires advance notice. Glass plate negatives are housed separately and not served to researchers.

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Biographical / Historical

William Christopher was a painter, art instructor, and Civil Rights activist living and working in New York, New Hampshire, and Vermont. He was born in Columbus, Georgia on March 4, 1924, and served in the U. S. Navy from 1941 to 1943.

Aided by grants and scholarships, Christopher studied in France at the Sorbonne, Academie Julian, and the Ecoles d'Art Americaines between 1946-1948. While there, he also studied with Ossip Zadkine. He returned to New York and studied with Amedee Ozenfant and Hans Hofmann between 1948 and 1950.

Christopher's painting was greatly influenced by his time spent in Paris and New York, and his later involvement with the Civil Rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the march in Selma in 1965. His first U. S. solo exhibition was in 1952 at the Roko Gallery in New York, and he exhibited widely in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C. at the Nexus Gallery, the Boston Arts Festival, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Joan Peterson Gallery, Galeria Juana Mordo, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others. In 1964, Christopher was invited to present his paintings to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during the presentation of Dr. King's papers to Boston University. This is where Christopher met King.

Christopher moved to Hartland, Vermont in 1960, with his partner painter George Tooker. He remained there for the rest of his life. Christopher died in 1973.

Scope and Contents

The William Christopher papers measure 8.2 linear feet and date from circa 1920s to circa 1973. Materials include biographical materials, correspondence, writings and notes, five diaries, subject/project files, printed materials, photographs, numerous sketches and eleven sketchbooks, and five reels of motion picture films, consisting of amateur footage of New York City. The subject/project files include correspondence, printed materials, and two additional diaries about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the 1965 civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

Biographical materials include address books, annotated memorabilia, awards and certificates, curriculum vitae and resume materials, and identification materials. Correspondence is with friends and fellow artists, including actress Osceola Archer and Henry Crapo, galleries, and others. Writings and notes include eleven notebooks, miscellaneous undated notes and papers, annotated drafts and writings by William Christopher, and writings by others. There are five diaries written by William Christopher from the 1940s to the 1960s.

Subject files document miscellaneous projects in which Christopher was involved and/or interested, and include several about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. containing correspondence, printed material, and two diaries written by Christopher during his attendance of the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery.

Scattered personal business papers concern artwork sold and loaned and personal finances. Printed materials include clippings, exhibition catalogs and materials, magazines and programs, and posters. Photographs are of William Christopher, Henry Crapo, Margaret French, Charles Howard, Bernard Perlin, George Tooker, male models and figures, furniture, landscapes, buildings, and artwork.

Christopher's papers include over one hundred sketches and watercolors, eleven sketchbooks, an artwork by Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt, and one sketch by George Tooker. Also found among the papers are five film reels made by Christopher for an unfinished project, containing footage of New York City cityscapes and street scenes.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as 10 series:

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1940s-circa 1973 (0.5 linear feet; Box 1)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1947-circa 1973 (1.9 linear feet; Boxes 1-3)
- Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1947-1970 (0.4 linear feet; Box 3)
- Series 4: Diaries, circa 1940s-circa 1960s (0.2 linear feet; Boxes 3-4)
- Series 5: Subject Files, 1943-1972 (0.7 linear feet; Boxes 4, 9)
- Series 6: Personal Business Records, circa 1950-circa 1972 (0.3 linear feet; Box 4)
- Series 7: Printed Material, circa 1950s-circa 1972 (1.4 linear feet; Boxes 4-5, 9, OV12)
- Series 8: Photographs, circa 1920s-circa 1970s (0.7 linear feet; Boxes 6, 8, MGP 4)
- Series 9: Artwork and Sketchbooks, circa 1940s-circa 1970s (1.6 linear feet; Boxes 6-8, OV10-11, 13-18)
- Series 10: Unidentified Project, Motion Picture Films, 1961 (0.5 linear feet; FC 19-23)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Civil rights -- United States
Civil rights demonstrations -- Alabama -- Selma

Types of Materials:

Diaries
Drawings
Motion pictures (visual works)
Photographs
Sketchbooks
Sketches

Names:

Archer, Osceola
Crapo, Henry H.
French, Margaret
Howard, Charles, 1899-1978
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
Perlin, Bernard, 1918-
Selma to Montgomery Rights March (1965 : Selma, Ala.)
Tooker, George, 1920-2011
Von Mohrenschildt, Dimitri Sergius, 1902-2002

Occupations:

Painters

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, circa 1940s-circa 1973

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Biographical material includes five address books, annotated memorabilia, awards and certificates, curriculum vitae and resume materials, and identification materials, including passport, driver's licenses, operator's licenses, birth certificate, and membership cards.

Box 1, Folder 1	Address Book 1, circa 1940s
Box 1, Folder 2	Address Book 2, circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 3	Loose Material from Address Book 2, circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 4	Address Book 3, circa 1950s
Box 1, Folder 5	Address Book 4, circa 1950
Box 1, Folder 6	Address Book 5, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 7	Loose Material from Address Book 5, circa 1960s
Box 1, Folder 8-10	Annotated Memorabilia, circa 1951-1972
Box 1, Folder 11	Awards and Certificates, 1947-1972
Box 1, Folder 12	Curriculum Vitae, circa 1973
Box 1, Folder 13	Identification Materials and Licenses, 1945-1971

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1947-circa 1973

1.9 Linear feet (Boxes 1-3)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence includes invitations from friends, fellow artists, and galleries; medical correspondence with doctors after a series of heart attacks; letters from Harold McNeil Robinson, an African American youth who William Christopher helped finance school; correspondence with actress Osceola Archer; and with Henry Crapo, friend and colleague. Additionally, general correspondence includes friends and galleries, such as Margaret Cross, Gaspare D. Cruchi, and many others.

Box 1, Folder 14-17 Cards and Invitations, circa 1962-circa 1972

Box 1, Folder 18-20 Envelopes Received, circa 1959-1972

Box 1, Folder 21 Robinson, Harold McNeil, 1967-1968

Box 1, Folder 22 Crapo, Henry, circa 1950-1972

Box 1, Folder 23 Archer, Osceola (Adams), circa 1962-1972

Box 1, Folder 24 General, circa 1947-circa 1960s

Box 2, Folder 1-25 General, circa 1950-1973

Box 3, Folder 1-6 General, 1968-circa 1973

Box 3, Folder 7 Medical, 1957-1972

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Series 3: Writings and Notes, circa 1947-1970

0.4 Linear feet (Box 3)

Scope and Contents: Writings and notes include eleven notebooks, miscellaneous undated notes and papers, annotated poetry drafts and a story manuscript written by William Christopher. Also included are several writings by others, including an opera manuscript, "Mourning Becomes Electra," written by Marvin David Levy, and reviews and thesis by Henry H. Crapo.

Box 3, Folder 8	Notebooks 1-4, circa 1947-1970
Box 3, Folder 9	Notebooks 5-7, circa 1947-1970
Box 3, Folder 10	Notebook 8, circa 1959
Box 3, Folder 11	Notebook 9, 1963
Box 3, Folder 12	Notebook 10, circa 1947-circa 1970
Box 3, Folder 13	Notebook 11, circa 1947-1970
Box 3, Folder 14-16	Miscellaneous Notes, circa 1947-1970
Box 3, Folder 17	Poetry and Story by William Christopher, circa 1940-1963
Box 3, Folder 18-20	Writings By Others, undated, 1960-circa 1968

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Series 4: Diaries, circa 1940s-circa 1960s

0.2 Linear feet (Boxes 3-4)

Scope and Contents: Five diaries were kept by William Christopher from the 1940s to the 1960s. There are also two additional diaries in the subject files about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Box 3, Folder 21 Diary 1, circa 1940s

Box 3, Folder 22 Diary 2, 1948-1952

Box 3, Folder 23 Diary 3, circa 1960s

Box 3, Folder 24 Diary 4, 1962

Box 4, Folder 1 Diary 5, circa 1971

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Series 5: Subject Files, 1943-1972

0.7 Linear feet (Boxes 4, 9)

Scope and Contents: Subject files are found for miscellaneous projects and the Civil Rights Movement and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Christopher's files about King include correspondence, printed material, and two diaries Christopher wrote about his attendance of the march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Additional files relate to the Vestris Prize for Choreography, for which Henry Crapo was the sponsor and trustee of the Wasemaquia Charitable Trust Company, and Christopher, George Tooker, and choreographer Stuart Hodes, were judges. Other files relate to a Guggenheim proposed project, Veteran's Administration, Galeria Juana Mordo, Vincent Smith, and sculpture by Judith Brown. Files may contain correspondence, printed matter, drafts of writings and ideas, photographs, and clippings.

Box 4, Folder 2	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. , Correspondence, 1963-1972 Notes: Oversized materials housed in Box 9.
Box 4, Folder 3	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Diaries, circa 1963-1972
Box 4, Folder 4	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Diaries, 1965
Box 4, Folder 5	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Exhibition Placards, Photographs of Early Sculpture, circa 1965
Box 4, Folder 6	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Printed Material, circa 1965-1967
Box 4, Folder 7	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Clippings, 1964-1968
Box 4, Folder 8	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Newsweek magazine, 1968
Box 4, Folder 9	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Report on a Recent Trip to Alabama", 1965-1972
Box 4, Folder 10	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Magazines, circa 1963-1964
Box 4, Folder 11-12	Galeria Juana Mordo, circa 1970-1972
Box 4, Folder 13	Guggenheim (Proposed Project), circa 1970s
Box 4, Folder 14	NES Sketch Class, circa 1964
Box 4, Folder 15	Sculptures, Judith Brown, circa 1966-crica 1972
Box 4, Folder 16-17	Vestris Prize for Choreography, circa 1967-1972
Box 4, Folder 18	Veterans Administration, 1943-1971
Box 4, Folder 19	Vincent Smith, circa 1968

Box 9, Folder 1-3

Oversized Materials, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., circa 1960s

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Series 6: Personal Business Records, circa 1950-circa 1972

0.3 Linear feet (Box 4)

Scope and Contents: Scattered personal business records include one account ledger, loan agreements, financial correspondence, invoices and bills paid, receipts, price lists, an apartment lease, and a cursory draft of William Christopher's will.

Box 4, Folder 20	Account Ledger, circa 1960s
Box 4, Folder 21	Apartment Lease and Will Draft, circa 1950-circa 1970
Box 4, Folder 22	Invoices and Receipts, circa 1952-circa 1972
Box 4, Folder 23-24	Miscellaneous Business Papers, circa 1952-circa 1972

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Series 7: Printed Material, circa 1950s-circa 1972

1.4 Linear feet (Boxes 4-5, 9, OV12)

Scope and Contents: Printed material includes clippings, exhibition catalogs and materials, magazines and programs, and posters.

Box 4, Folder 25-29	Clippings, circa 1950-circa 1970
Box 4, Folder 30-34	Exhibition Catalogs, circa 1950s-circa 1960s
Box 5, Folder 1-5	Exhibition Catalogs, 1961-circa 1968
Box 5, Folder 6-7	General Exhibition Materials, circa 1952-circa 1965
Box 5, Folder 8	George Tooker Exhibition Materials, circa 1962-circa 1967
Box 5, Folder 9-21	General Printed Material, circa 1950-circa 1970s Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 9.
Box 5, Folder 22-25	Magazines, circa 1950-circa 1970
Box 5, Folder 26-28	Programs, circa 1950-circa 1960s
Box 9, Folder 4	Oversized General Printed Material, 1963-1965
Box OV 12	Oversized Posters, circa 1950s-1972

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Series 8: Photographs, circa 1920s-circa 1970s

0.7 Linear feet (Box 6, 8, MGP 4)

Arrangement: This series is arranged by subject. Glass plate negatives are housed separately and closed to researchers, but listed where they fall intellectually within the collection.

Scope and Contents: Photographs include original photographs, negatives, slides, and one glass plate negative. Images depict William Christopher and George Tooker; friends, including Charles Howard, Henry Crapo, Margaret French, and Bernard Perlin; male models and figures; furniture; landscapes and buildings; artwork; and several x-rays of William Christopher's head and chest.

Box 6, Folder 1	Photographs of William Christopher and Geoge Tooker, circa 1920s-circa 1972
Box 6, Folder 2	Photographs of William Christopher, 1945-circa 1967 Notes: Oversized materials housed in Box 8.
Box 6, Folder 3	Photographs of William Christopher, Friends, and Others- Unidentified, A-F, 1943-circa 1960s Notes: 1 glass plate negative housed in MGP 4.
Box 6, Folder 4	Photographs of William Christopher, Friends, and Others- H-Z, 1945-1971 Notes: Oversized materials housed in Box 8.
Box 6, Folder 5	Photographs and Negatives of Male Models, 1937-1949
Box 6, Folder 6	Photographs of Male Models, circa 1946-1950
Box 6, Folder 7	Photographs of Furniture, circa 1940s-circa 1950s
Box 6, Folder 8	Photographs of Landscapes and Buildings, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 9	Photographs of Teaching, Models, circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 10-18	Slides and Photographs of Artwork, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 19	X-Rays of William Christopher, 1952
Box 8, Folder 1	Oversized Photographs of William Christopher, Friends, and Others, 1945-1971
Box MGP 4	Glass Plate Negative, circa 1943-circa 1960s 1 Glass negative

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Series 9: Artwork and Sketchbooks, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

1.6 Linear feet (Boxes 6-8, OV10-11, 13-18)

Scope and Contents: Artwork and sketchbooks consists of over one hundred sketches and watercolors and eleven sketchbooks. Works by others include a piece by Dimitri Von Mohrenshildt and a sketch by George Tooker. eleven sketchbooks.

Box 6, Folder 20-25	Paintings, circa 1948-1950 Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 8, OV10-11, 13-18.
Box 6, Folder 26	Artwork by Dimitri von Mohrenshildt, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 27	Sketch by George Tooker, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 28-32	Sketches, undated, circa 1940s-circa 1953 Notes: Oversized material housed in Box 8, OV10-11, 13-18.
Box 6, Folder 33	Sketchbook 1, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 34	Sketchbook 2, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 35	Sketchbook 3, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 6, Folder 36	Sketchbooks 4-5, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 7, Folder 1	Sketchbook 6, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 7, Folder 2	Sketchbook 7, circa 1947
Box 7, Folder 3	Sketchbook 8, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 7, Folder 4	Sketchbook 9, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 7, Folder 5	Sketchbook 10, "Dr. King and Lonesome Road", circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 7, Folder 6	Sketchbook 11, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Box 8, Folder 2-5	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1949
Enlarge 10	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Enlarge 11	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Enlarge 13	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Enlarge 14	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s
Enlarge 15	Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

Enlarge 16 Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

Enlarge 17 Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

Enlarge 18 Oversized Paintings and Sketches, circa 1940s-circa 1970s

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Series 10: Motion Picture Films, circa 1961

0.5 Linear feet (FC 19-23)

Scope and Contents: Motion picture films consists of five film reels made by William Christopher for an unidentified and unfinished project. Footage consists of city views, particularly bridges, cityscapes, and street scenes.

Item FC 19 Amateur footage of New York City, circa 1961

Item FC 20 Amateur footage of New York City, circa 1961

Item FC 21 Amateur footage of New York City, circa 1961

Item FC 22 Amateur footage of New York City, circa 1961

Item FC 23 Amateur footage of New York City, circa 1961

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