



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William Dawson

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with William Dawson
Date:	1990 April 11-23
Identifier:	AAA.dawson90
Creator:	Dawson, William, 1901-1990 (Interviewee) Blum, Betty (Interviewer)
Extent:	173 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Audio: Oral history interview with William Dawson, 1990 April 11-23, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

These interviews are part of the Archives' Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and others.

Biographical / Historical

William Dawson (1901-1990) was a self-taught painter and sculptor from Chicago, Illinois. Dawson was born in 1901 in Huntsville, Alabama, came to Chicago in 1923, and after retiring from a career as a janitor and porter, he began sculpting and painting. He died July 1, 1990.

Scope and Contents

An interview of William Dawson conducted 1990 April 11-23, by Betty Blum, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Dawson speaks of his childhood in Alabama; coming to Chicago in 1923; working as a porter and janitor; the beginnings of his art career after retiring in 1965; making carvings from found objects; the process of discovering and creating forms; his first exhibition at the Lincoln Park Public Library; his first sales to collectors, including Phyllis Kind and Roger Brown; gaining exposure through collectors and eventually getting discovered; the beginning of his work in painting; his exhibition at the Corcoran in 1982; work methods; and inspirations and ideas.

General

Originally recorded on 3 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 58 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- African American artists
- Art, American
- Sculptors -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews
- Self-taught artists -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Brown, Roger, 1941-1997
- Kind, Phyllis, 1933-2018

Occupations:

- Folk artists -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews
- Painters -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews