



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Noah Purifoy Papers, 1935-1998, bulk 1971-1998, in the Archives of American Art

Rayna Andrews

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was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Noah Purifoy papers
Identifier:	AAA.purinoah
Date:	1935-1998 (bulk 1971-1998)
Creator:	Purifoy, Noah, 1917-
Extent:	1.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of African American assemblage artist Noah Purifoy measure 1.2 linear feet and date from 1935 to 1998 with the bulk of the material dating from 1971 to 1998. The collection contains biographical material; correspondence; writings on Purifoy and art; material related to the California Arts Council; material related to other professional activities, including commissions and exhibitions; printed material; and scrapbooks.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Noah Purifoy donated the papers to the Archives of American Art in 1998.

Processing Information

The collection was minimally processed and a finding aid prepared by Rayna Andrews in 2021 with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Noah Purifoy papers, 1935-1998. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

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Biographical / Historical

Noah Purifoy (1917-2004) was an African American sculptor, assemblage artist, and arts administrator in Los Angeles and Joshua Tree, California.

Born in Snow Hill, Alabama, Purifoy attended Alabama State Teachers College (now Alabama State University) and Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University). In 1953, Purifoy enrolled at the Chouinard Arts Institute (now CalArts) as the first full-time African American student. He earned his bachelor's of fine arts degree in 1956, just before his 40th birthday.

Purifoy co-founded the Watts Towers Art Center in Los Angeles, California and he, along with artist Judson Powell, organized the exhibition *66 Signs of Neon* as a way to interpret the 1965 Watts Riots.

In 1989, Purifoy moved to the Mojave Desert, just outside of Joshua Tree, California. He spent the remainder of his life creating the Noah Purifoy Outdoor Sculpture Museum, which is composed of large-scale assemblages in the desert constructed entirely from found objects. The museum is open to the public and maintained by the Noah Purifoy Foundation.

Scope and Contents

The papers of African American assemblage artist and arts administrator Noah Purifoy measure 1.2 linear feet and date from 1935 to 1998 with the bulk of the material dating from 1971 to 1998. The collection contains biographical material, including an award, diplomas, and resumes; correspondence with arts institutions and artists; writings on Purifoy and art; material related to the California Arts Council, including drafts for the Artists-in-Education Summer Workshop and Conference; material related to other professional activities, including a commission from the Getty Center and exhibitions; and printed material, including clippings, exhibition catalogs, and magazines. Also included are two scrapbooks, which contain photographic material, correspondence, printed material, as well as selected writings and other materials documenting Purifoy's career as an artist and arts administrator.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as seven series.

- Series 1: Biographical Material, 1939-1953, 1980-circa 1987 (Box 1; 3 folders)
- Series 2: Correspondence, 1971-1979, 1992-1998 (Box 1; 3 folders)
- Series 3: Writings, 1974, circa 1990s, undated (Box 1; 4 folders)
- Series 4: California Arts Council, 1976-1980 (Box 1, OV 2; 0.1 linear feet)
- Series 5: Other Professional Activities, circa 1967-1977, 1994-1998 (Box 1; 0.1 linear feet)
- Series 6: Printed Material, 1939, 1966-1998 (Box 1, OV 2; 0.2 linear feet)
- Series 7: Scrapbooks, 1935-1938, 1957-1997 (Box 1, OV 3; 0.5 linear feet)

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

African American artists
African American sculptors

Types of Materials:

Scrapbooks

Names:

California Arts Council
Watts Towers Art Center

Occupations:

Arts administrators -- California -- Los Angeles
Assemblage artists -- California -- Joshua Tree
Assemblage artists -- California -- Los Angeles
Sculptors -- California -- Joshua Tree
Sculptors -- California -- Los Angeles

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical Material, 1929-1953, 1980-circa 1987

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: The biographical materials series contains an award, two diplomas, and a photocopy chronology of Noah Purifoy's career originally labeled resume.

Box 1, Folder 1 Award of Recognition, 1980

Box 1, Folder 2 Diplomas, 1939-1953

Box 1, Folder 3 Resume, circa 1987

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Series 2: Correspondence, 1971-1979, 1992-1998

3 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series consists primarily of letters Purifoy received from arts institutions and other artists. Also included is one letter from Purifoy to "Sue."

Arrangement: This series was originally compiled into a binder without any discernable order. The archivist has arranged them alphabetically.

Box 1, Folder 4 California Afro-American Museum, 1994

Box 1, Folder 5 Pollock-Krasner Foundation, 1993-1994

Box 1, Folder 6 Correspondence, 1971-1979, 1992-1998
Notes: Includes certificate of insurance and release form for use of Purifoy's work *Flossie* in the movie *Waiting to Exhale*.

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Series 3: Writings, 1974, circa 1990s, undated

4 Folders (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: Writings includes a lecture, inventories, a tribute to Purifoy, and other writings on Purifoy and his art.

Box 1, Folder 7 Art in the Community Lecture, 1974

Box 1, Folder 8 Inventories, circa 1998
Notes: Inventories created by Noah Purifoy of collection materials.
 Inventories do not correspond to the arrangement of materials
 presented in this finding aid.

Box 1, Folder 9 Tribute to Noah Purifoy, undated

Box 1, Folder 10 Writings on Purifoy and His Art, circa 1990s

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Series 4: California Arts Council, 1976-1980

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 2)

Scope and Contents: This series contains draft material related to the Artists-in-Education Summer Workshop/Conference and a position paper Purifoy wrote; staff lists; and printed material related to California Arts Council (CAC) policies and program.

Box 1, Folder 11	Alternatives in Education Program: An Evaluation Study of Nine Project Sites, 1979
Oversize 2	Appointment to California Arts Council Certificate, 1980
Box 1, Folder 12	Artists-in-Education Summer Workshop/Conference Outline and Schedule Drafts, 1997 Notes: Complete text can be found in conference program in folder 16.
Box 1, Folder 13	Position Paper, Outline and Memoranda, 1976 Notes: Full position paper can be found in scrapbook, folder 31.
Box 1, Folder 14	Proposal, Pilot project or Pilot Study for Pre-School Children, circa 1976
Box 1, Folder 15	Staff and Members of the California Arts Council, circa 1976
Box 1, Folder 16	A Summary of Artists-in-Education Summer Workshop/Conference, 1977
Box 1, Folder 17	Workshop Draft, circa 1977 Notes: Complete workshop text can be found in workshop program in folder 16.

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Series 5: Other Professional Activities, circa 1967-1977, 1994-1998

0.1 Linear feet (Box 1)

Scope and Contents: This series contains material related to a commission for the Getty Center, selected Purifoy exhibitions, and a fellowship application.

Box 1, Folder 18 Getty Center Commission Research, 1994
Notes: Includes artist statement, correspondence, and bibliography.

Box 1, Folder 19 National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship Application, 1977
Notes: Additional application materials can be found in scrapbook, folder 31.

Box 1, Folder 20 Noah Purifoy: Outside and in the Open (1997-1998) Retrospective Exhibition, 1994-1998
Notes: Material removed from binder. Also includes correspondence, printed material, loan form, and lists.

Box 1, Folder 21 Visitor Comments, Watts 66: Signs of Neon Sculpture Exhibit, University of California, circa 1967
Notes: Comments from students and community members at University of California, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Francisco.

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Series 6: Printed Material, 1939, 1966-1998

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 2)

Scope and Contents: Printed material consists of clippings, exhibition materials, a "graduate book" from the State College at Montgomery, Alabama, and magazines.

Box 1, Folder 22	Clippings, 1966-1969, 1994-1998 Notes: Material removed from binder.
Box 1, Folder 23	Exhibition and Event "Brochures", 1989-1998 Notes: Material removed from binder. Includes announcements and catalogs, as well as some correspondence.
Box 1, Folder 24	Exhibition and Event Catalogs, 1966-1971
Box 1, Folder 25	Exhibition and Event Catalogs, 1976-1998
Oversize 2	Oversize Exhibition Catalog, Junk art: 66 Signs of Neon, circa 1966
Box 1, Folder 26	The Graduates Book, The State College at Montgomery, Alabama, 1939 May
Box 1, Folder 27	Magazines, 1967, 1993-1997 Notes: Includes <i>Untitled</i> magazine published by Joined for the Arts, <i>Arts Magazine</i> , <i>The International Review of African American Art</i> , and <i>Eye on the Arts</i> .
Box 1, Folder 28	Magazines, Watts Summer Festival Magazine, 1967-1970
Box 1, Folder 29	One to One: Quarterly Report on Aspects of Creativity, 1967
Box 1, Folder 30	Press Release, 1993

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Series 7: Scrapbooks, 1935-1938, 1957-1997

0.5 Linear feet (Box 1, OV 3)

Scope and Contents: This series includes two scrapbooks. The Join for the Arts photograph scrapbook contains primarily photographs, as well as a list of current programs and an inventory created by Noah Purifoy. The second scrapbook consists primarily of correspondence and printed material, but also includes some photographs, writings, certificates, and other material documenting Purifoy's career. Correspondence originally in envelopes attached to scrapbook pages has been removed from envelopes and placed between pages.

Oversize 3 Join for the Arts Photograph Scrapbook, 1957-1968, 1993
Notes: Scrapbook pages removed from binding. Also includes inventory created by Noah Purifoy.

Box 1, Folder 31	Scrapbook, 1935-1938, 1966-1997
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