



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Charles W. and Frances White Letters and Photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961, in the Archives of American Art

Rayna Andrews

Funding for the processing of this collection was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation. Funding for the digitization was provided by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson
Date:	1956-1961
Identifier:	AAA.willimel
Creator:	White, Charles (1918-1979) Williamson, Mel
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1956 to 1961. The collection includes twenty-eight letters written by Charles and Frances White to Melvin (Mel) and Lorraine Williamson shortly after their arrival in California. Approximately half of the letters are written by Charles, the other half by Frances, and two letters are written jointly. Most are signed from "Chas & Fran." Also included in the collection are photographs that Charles and Frances sent the Williamsons of their home and Charles' studio, and printed material including clippings and exhibition brochures.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson were donated to the Archives of American Art in 2019 by Lisa Rosenburg, Melvin and Lorraine Williamson's daughter.

Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds the Charles W. White papers, the Lucinda H. Gedeon research material on Charles White, and an oral history interview with Charles W. White conducted by Betty Hoag, March 9, 1965.

Available Formats

The collection was digitized in 2021 and is available on the Archives of American Art website.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Rayna Andrews in 2019 with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation and digitized in 2021 with funding provided by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and the Alice L. Walton Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961.
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

Painter, printmaker, and educator, Charles W. White (1918-1979) was a prominent figure in the Chicago Black Renaissance and became one of the most celebrated and influential African American artists of the twentieth century. Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, White lived and worked throughout the country, settling in California in 1956. He taught at the Otis Art Institute from 1965 until his death. White's artwork was primarily figurative and depicted African American history, socio-economic struggles, and human relationships.

Charles and Frances Barrett White (1926-2000) married in 1950. They relocated to Los Angeles in 1956. Frances Barrett White was a social worker and educator who spent her early years in New York City. In 1994, she published a book, *Reaches of the Heart: A Biography of Charles White*.

Melvin Williamson (1923-1995) was an artist, author, and the art director of Viking Press. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago before moving to New York.

Lorraine Rosen Williamson (1926-2018) was an educator and a docent at the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York City.

Scope and Contents

The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1956 to 1961. The collection includes twenty-eight letters written by Charles and Frances White to Melvin (Mel) and Lorraine Williamson shortly after their arrival in California. The letters refer to financial and personal struggles, as well career triumphs and current events. In addition to their shared Chicago background, both the Whites and Williamsons were interracial couples. The letters include references to racial and social dynamics, especially comparing California to New York. Approximately half of the letters are written by Charles, the other half by Frances, and two letters are written jointly. Most are signed from "Chas & Fran."

The collection also contains photographs, negatives, and slides depicting Charles and Frances with friends, their home, and Charles' studio. Many photographs include explanatory notes. Also included are clippings and exhibition brochures for Charles White's 1958 exhibition at ACA Gallery, as well as Anton Refregier's *Recent Paintings* exhibition.

Arrangement

This collection is arranged as one series.

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 painters
- Interracial marriage

Names:

- White, Frances Barrett
- Williamson, Lorraine, 1926-2018

Occupations:

- Art directors -- New York (State) -- New York
- Educators
- Painters -- California -- Los Angeles
- Printmakers -- California -- Los Angeles

Container Listing

Series 1: Charles W. and Frances White Letters and Photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961

0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

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Arrangement: The letters appear first and are arranged chronologically. They are followed by the photographic material, then the printed material. The name that appears first in the folder title indicates whose handwriting the letter is written or signed in.

Available Formats: Series has been digitized in entirety.

Box 1, Folder 1	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 October 15
Box 1, Folder 2	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 October 29
Box 1, Folder 3	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 November 13 Notes: Typed letter with postscript in Frances White's handwriting.
Box 1, Folder 4	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 December 25
Box 1, Folder 5	Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 February 3
Box 1, Folder 6	Charles White to Melvin Williamson, 1957 February 4
Box 1, Folder 7	Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 February 25
Box 1, Folder 8	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 March 18 Notes: Includes photograph.
Box 1, Folder 9	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 May 5 Notes: Includes extended postscript in Charles White's handwriting.

Box 1, Folder 10	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 June 5
Box 1, Folder 11	Frances White Postcard to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 June 17
Box 1, Folder 12	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 July 30
Box 1, Folder 13	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 November 17
Box 1, Folder 14	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 January 12 Notes: Typed, signed in Frances White's handwriting.
Box 1, Folder 15	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 February 12
Box 1, Folder 16	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 March 24
Box 1, Folder 17	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 April 22
Box 1, Folder 18	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 May
Box 1, Folder 19	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 October 27
Box 1, Folder 20	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 January 18
Box 1, Folder 21	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 February 15
Box 1, Folder 22	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 April 29 Notes: This majority of this letter is in Charles White's handwriting. Frances' handwriting begins on the bottom of the 6th page and continues through the close of the letter at the top of the 8th page.
Box 1, Folder 23	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 July 24
Box 1, Folder 24	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 September 17 Notes: Includes announcement for Charles White exhibition at the Pacific Town Club.
Box 1, Folder 25	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 March 25
Box 1, Folder 26	Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 April 17?
Box 1, Folder 27	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 May 8
Box 1, Folder 28	Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 June 20
Box 1, Folder 29	Photographs and Negatives of Charles and Frances White, Friends, Home, and Works of Art, 1957-1961

Notes: Many photographs include notes on the back written in Frances
White's handwriting.

Box 1, Folder 30

[Slides of California, 1960 December](#)

Box 1, Folder 31

[Printed Material, 1956-1958](#)

Notes: Includes clippings and exhibition brochures for Charles White's
exhibition of prints and drawings at ACA Gallery, as well as
an exhibition brochure for the Anton Refregier *Recent Paintings*
exhibition at ACA Gallery.

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