



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the Ellis Wilson papers, 1922-1959,
bulk 1940s, in the Archives of American Art

Rayna Andrews

Funding for the processing of this collection
was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

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Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Ellis Wilson papers
Identifier:	AAA.wilselli
Date:	1922-1959 (bulk 1940s)
Extent:	0.2 Linear feet
Creator:	Wilson, Ellis, 1899-1977
Language:	English .
Summary:	The papers of African American painter and illustrator Ellis Wilson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1922 to 1959, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1940s. The collection includes certificates, correspondence, printed material, and photographic material. The bulk of this collection is composed of photographs.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The Ellis Wilson papers were loaned for microfilming in 1970 and subsequently donated by Ellis Wilson.

Separated Materials

Exhibition catalogs and news clippings were transferred to the Smithsonian Institution Libraries after microfilming.

Available Formats

The collection is available on 35 mm microfilm reel 3 at the Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan. Researchers should note that the arrangement of the material described in the container inventory does not reflect the arrangement of the collection on microfilm.

Processing Information

The collection was processed and a finding aid prepared by Rayna Andrews in 2018 with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation.

Preferred Citation

Ellis Wilson papers, 1922-1959, bulk 1940s. 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.

Biographical / Historical

Ellis Wilson (1899-1977) was an African American painter and illustrator. He was born in Kentucky and studied at the Kentucky Normal and Industrial Institute, and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He later worked as a commercial artist in Chicago before moving to New York in 1928. Wilson was employed by the Federal Arts Project, sponsored by the Works Progress Administration, from 1935 to 1940, and was also involved with the Harlem Artists Guild. During World War II he worked in an aircraft engine factory and was commissioned to create triptychs for military chaplains. In 1944 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and traveled throughout the Southern United States. He later traveled to Haiti. He continued to paint until his death in 1977. In 1985, his painting *Funeral Procession* (circa 1950) was featured on an episode of *The Cosby Show*.

Scope and Contents

The papers of African American painter and illustrator Ellis Wilson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1922 to 1959, with the bulk of the collection dating from the 1940s. The collection includes certificates, correspondence, printed material, and photographic material. The bulk of this collection is composed of photographs.

Papers include certificates, professional correspondence, printed material and clippings, and scrapbook pages. The scrapbook pages include clippings of reviews and reproductions of Wilson's work, exhibition invitations and catalogs, and correspondence, including a letter of congratulations from Alain Locke.

Photographic material makes up the bulk of this collection. This series includes three photos of Ellis Wilson taken by Carl Van Vechten.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in two series.

- Series 1: Papers, 1927-1951 (Box 1; 3 Folders)
 - Series 2: Photographic Material, 1922, 1942-1948, 1959, undated (Box 1; 5 Folders)
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Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

African American artists
Painting, American -- New York (State) -- New York

Types of Materials:

Photographs
Scrapbooks

Names:

Locke, Alain, 1885-1954
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964

Occupations:

Illustrators -- New York (State) -- New York
Painters -- New York (State) -- New York

Container Listing

Series 1: Papers, 1927-1951

3 Folders (Box 1)

Papers include certificates, correspondence, and clippings, printed material, and scrapbook pages. Scrapbook pages include clippings, exhibition invitations and catalogs, and correspondence, including a letter of congratulations from Alain Locke.

Box 1, Folder 1	Certificates, 1935, circa 1945
Box 1, Folder 2	Correspondence, 1938-1951
Box 1, Folder 3	Clippings and Scrapbook Pages, 1927-1945

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Series 2: Photographic Material, 1922, 1942-1948, 1959, undated

5 Folders (Box 1)

Photographic material includes photographs and negatives of Ellis Wilson and his work. This series includes three photos of Ellis Wilson taken by Carl Van Vechten.

The photographs are arranged in the order in which they were microfilmed.

Box 1, Folder 4	Photographs and Negatives of Ellis Wilson and Others With Works of Art, 1922, 1945-1948, 1959, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Photographs of Works of Art, undated
Box 1, Folder 6	Photographs of Works of Art, 1942-1944, undated
Box 1, Folder 7	Photographs of Works of Art, 1948, undated
Box 1, Folder 8	Photographs of Works of Art, 1942, undated

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