

Shaping Canons and Building Legacies:
Collectors and the History of African American Art

An Honors Paper for the Department of Art

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Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
E.T. Williams, Collecting, and the History of African American Art.....	1
Introduction	1
From Victorian England to Twentieth Century America: Rethinking Writing About Collecting	7
An <i>Ebony</i> Bachelor of the Year-turned-Banker: Contextualizing Williams’s Activist-Collecting	12
E.T. Williams’s Multifaceted Approach to Activist-Collecting.....	17
A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement: Williams’s Dispersal of His Collection	17
The Quest to Break A Barrier: E.T. Williams’s Management of the Romare Bearden Estate ..	19
Determination and Dissemination: E.T. Williams’s Acquisition and Dispersal of the Hale Woodruff Estate	26
An Art Collector and Jazz Musician Meet in the Hamptons: E.T. Williams’s Support of Claude Lawrence	33
“You Really Have to Pay to Play”: E.T. Williams’s Board Membership.....	36
Conclusions.....	41
Bibliography	47
Images	52
Appendixes	56
Appendix A: Catalog of E.T. Williams’s Collection	56
Appendix B: Annotated Finding Aid of E.T. Williams’s Papers.....	59

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Robert Dunacnson, <i>Recollections of Italy</i>	48
Fig 2: Romare Bearden, <i>Duke Ellington & Louis Armstrong</i>	49
Fig. 3: Hale Woodruff, <i>By Parties Unknown</i>	50
Fig. 4: Daniel Dorsa, <i>Lyn and E.T. Williams in their Manhattan home between two works by Claude Lawrence: left, “Yard — An Ode to Charlie Parker” and “At the Hop,”</i>	51

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E.T. Williams, Collecting, and the History of African American Art

Introduction

The fact that the surviving family of W.C. Handy lived in the Fordham Hill housing co-op in the Bronx was probably of little consequence to the co-op's owner, E.T. Williams, Jr. As a successful banker and real estate investor, Williams regularly rubbed elbows and crossed paths with other trailblazing African Americans like the former CEO and Chairman of American Express Kenneth Chenault and trial lawyer Johnnie Cochran. However, when he learned that the personal papers of the famous composer, who is also known as the "Father of the Blues," had fallen into the hands of Handy's neglectful descendants, Williams felt inclined to intervene. Worried that the papers the composer left behind were not being properly cared for, Williams alerted the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and encouraged curators to visit the Handy family's apartment. The experience of facilitating the donation of Handy's papers illuminated to Williams the importance of being proactive with regard to the preservation of one's legacy and African Americans' collective history. He therefore began gradually sending the Schomburg cartons of his personal papers in the early nineties.

I came across Williams's personal papers after being lured to the Schomburg in search of primary documents relating to African American art and people who collected it. While Williams is among the first search results when one types "art collecting" into the Center's catalog, most of his papers actually relate to his business endeavors. The papers are held in a total of ninety-three boxes that range from personal correspondences

sent during Williams's tenure as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia and India, financial documents from his career in business, to "letters of appreciation" from Barack Obama and other luminaries.¹ Only three of those boxes contain files related to Williams's involvement in the arts. Despite this ratio, the finding aid for the papers refers to Williams first and foremost as an art collector. While these three boxes purport to pertain solely to Williams's "art collecting," the documents themselves point to the interconnectedness of his participation in the arts and the large amounts of wealth and social capital that he was able to amass throughout his life. The papers also consist of fascinating correspondences that prompt many questions about Williams's unique involvement with the arts.

After sifting through the three boxes, I came to learn that Williams and his wife, Auldlyn are not collectors of African American art in the conventional sense. They participate in a number of activities that fall outside of the purview of the conventional definition of "collecting." Williams's inability to fit within traditional conceptions of collecting demonstrates the need for an expansion of how scholars understand collectors of African American art and their roles. By expanding how we understand collectors' work and impact, I argue that scholars can begin to recognize the long-overlooked agency that collectors of African American art exercise in preserving African American art history and integrating the genre into the canon of American art.

Because this method draws heavily from the archive, which does not give a complete picture of Williams's collecting, I use a holistic approach to understanding Williams. This methodology is also necessitated by the fact that Williams's collecting

¹ Heather Lember, "Guide to the E.T. Williams papers," 2015, accessed via <http://archives.nypl.org/scm/21196>.

practice expands beyond the mere acquisition of objects that is documented in the archive. This holistic approach includes analysis of the primary documents from Williams's archive, a 2019 interview I conducted with Williams, information gleaned from magazine and newspaper articles about him and his wife, and the contents of their collection (Appendix A and B). Since learning about Williams's collection in 2018, I have worked to learn about the provenance and current whereabouts of approximately 117 works from the collection (Appendix A). The appraisal documents and correspondences in Williams's archive were integral to my ability to start consolidating information on his art collection. I have therefore created an annotated version of the archive's finding aid in order to give insight into the nature of the contents of the archive (Appendix B).² By drawing from a variety of sources, this holistic methodology sets out to tell a story of one of the many influential actors in the development of the canon of African American art.

The archive is presented to users without any contextualizing information. It therefore portrays E.T. Williams as solely embarking on a crusade to integrate African American artists' work into museum collections from which they have typically been excluded. This project does not endeavor to disprove that this is what Williams is doing. Rather, it aims to use a holistic analysis of the archive and other existing information about him to expand and complicate how we understand collectors of African American art in the context of the development of the genre. This analysis will in turn challenge traditional narratives of African American art history that tend to leave out discussions of those who have gone to great lengths to preserve and elevate the canon.

² It is also important to note that by recording and making accessible the contents of the archive, I aim to contribute to existing knowledge about the practices of collectors of African American art.

A few terms are key to understanding Williams's relationship with art. First, I use the term "activist-collector" to better encompass his prolific number of donations, management of artists' estates, and memberships on museum boards. This term separates Williams's activities from conventional definitions of collecting which are centered on the acquisition of objects.³ By placing the words "activist" and "collector" together, I aim to expand conventional understandings of a collector's motivations, which are typically understood as being driven by a self-interested obsession with gathering objects. The word "activist" instead inscribes Williams's collecting with a desire for political change. While "activist" connotes more conventional and confrontational forms of protest, in this project, it specifically refers to the longstanding fight within the context of museums to see increased representation of African American artists and greater efforts to preserve their work that would otherwise be overlooked and left out of the canon of American art.

I argue in this paper that Williams's activism stems from a deep interest in preserving African American history and culture in reaction to the historic exclusion of such artifacts from the collections of major museums. His efforts parallel those of nineteenth and early twentieth century "race men" like Alain Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois who advocated for the advancement of Black Americans through a variety of means in addition to the political, such as the increased vibrancy of Black cultural production.⁴⁵ Williams's arts involvement is a modern-day version of such activism as his efforts to celebrate the accomplishments of race extends to the collecting and dispersal of art,

³ An important example of scholarship that centers the accumulation of objects in its definition is G. Thomas Tanselle's 1998 article, "A Rationale of Collecting." In his article, Tanselle defines collecting as "the accumulation of tangible things" in an effort to provide a definition that makes everyone a collector of sorts (5).

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art." New York: Crisis Publishing Co., 1926.

⁵ Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000): 4.

overseeing of artists' estates, and maneuvering onto multiple museum boards. In the same way that the race men of a century ago advocated for the close link between the political struggle for equality with all aspects of cultural life, Williams is in his own way "race-ing" collecting and creating a close link between his personal politics and arts philanthropy.

Another term relevant to Williams's efforts is "African American art," defined in this project as art produced by Black people in the United States. Central to this definition is the fact that traditional analyses of African American art often privilege artists' identities over their working method, style and period. It is important to recognize this privileging because it serves as the driving force for Williams's ethos as an activist-collector. As I will discuss further in this project, Williams's "race-ing" of collecting primarily entails his support of African American artists, regardless of style or prominence.

Furthermore, while the archive is centered on the life of E.T. Williams and this project is centered on his activist-collecting, his wife Auldryn has played an integral role in the building of the couple's collection. She graduated with a degree in art from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, worked as an interior designer, and volunteered at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Therefore, when I refer to E.T. Williams and his actions as an activist-collector, I am also implicitly referring to Auldryn Williams as she plays an active role in her husband's collecting project.

Undergoing a holistic mode of analysis with these terms and definitions in mind is necessary because of the narrow focus of conventional literature about African American art. Scholars like Sharon F. Patton tend to center artistic production in their discussions of

the development of the genre. Furthermore, artistic production is usually portrayed as having occurred in reaction to slavery, discrimination and other forms of oppression African Americans have faced for centuries. While this portrayal largely rings true, it is incomplete, as it neglects to take into account the labor of people like the E.T. Williams who have gone to great lengths to preserve the genre, thereby ensuring its continued existence. Dissecting E.T. Williams's activist-collecting in conjunction with analysis of the contents of his collection can broaden art historical discussions and simultaneously supplement scholarly understandings of the development of African American art history. If we understand collectors as having the power to shape art historical canons, then studying Williams can augment discussions about the efforts to preserve African American art and integrate it of the canon of American art.

To advance my argument, I first discuss the limitations of Williams's archive and its finding aid and how existing literature on collecting and African American art can help move past these shortcomings and aid in characterizing the unique nature of Williams's activist-collecting. Following this literature review is an analysis of Williams's biography, press accounts about him and his collecting, and the contents of his collection. In the next section, there will be analysis of the different tenets of Williams's activist-collecting practice including the dispersal of his collection, his management of several artists' estates, and his membership on the boards of several museums and arts organizations.

From Victorian England to Twentieth Century America: Rethinking Writing About Collecting

This project is situated at the intersection of preceding art historical literature on collecting, artists' biographies, the history of African American art, and scholarship on collectors of work by African American artists in sociology. It draws inspiration from scholars like Elizabeth Stillinger, who wrote about the lives and impact of early twentieth century American antique collectors. The work of Julie Codell, who wrote a monograph on Victorian era artists' biographies, has similarly informed this project and its handling of E.T. Williams's biography. Scholarship that attempts to define African American art is also integral to this project because such definitions are central to understanding Williams's motivations to collect and the implications of studying him. Finally, Patricia A. Banks's sociological study of collectors of African American art in New York and Atlanta provides a useful starting point for my own work as it is a rare example of writing about African American collectors that exists outside the catalogs commissioned by those collectors.

Before considering the literature that will be useful for this project, it is important to first consider the existing writing on Williams's collecting and its shortcomings. The "Creator History" section of the finding aid for Williams's archive contains perhaps the most detailed description of Williams's biography. After reading the "Creator History," however, it became clear that it was curated to emphasize certain aspects of his life. The beginning of the short biography details accomplishments in his early life. Williams was born in Brooklyn in 1937 and was an accomplished student who excelled in high school and college. After graduating from Brooklyn College, where he was president of the campus's NAACP chapter, Williams joined the Peace Corps and taught in Ethiopia and

India. In 1963, he was able to attend the March on Washington and stood on stage behind King as he gave his “I Have A Dream Speech.” While the archivist who created the finding aid devoted some attention to Williams’s long and prosperous career in finance and real estate, they concluded with a paragraph about his art collecting and service on the boards of many cultural institutions and foundations. This confounding mismatch is further compounded by the the fact that about three percent of the papers in Williams’s collection consists of records of his collecting. The emphasis on his dedication to social causes and arts patronage and the simultaneous deemphasis on his wealth and career exemplifies how the archive tells an incomplete story of Williams’s involvement in the arts. The archive’s incompleteness and lack of contextualizing information justify the need for closer study of E.T. Williams and his collecting.

Elizabeth Stillinger’s book, *The Antiquers*, is an example of writing that can aid in understanding and discussing E.T. Williams’s collecting practices. *The Antiquers* examines the network of collectors in Depression era America and their attempts to amass American antiques. Many of collectors she considered, like H.F. DuPont, Ima Hogg, and Electra Havemeyer Webb, eventually formed independent museums: The Winterthur Museum, Bayou Bend and the Shelburne Museum, respectively. These collectors and institutions donations determined the boundaries of American decorative arts. The issue of collection dispersal is one that features prominently in E.T. Williams’s papers. *The Antiquers* therefore proves to be a useful model for helping me understand the movement of artworks through a collector’s possession into institutions’ collections and the impact of these practices. Given my interest in understanding how collectors can do the same with regard to the canon of African American art, Stillinger’s work is once

again an important point of reference as this project interrogates the intentional ways in which collectors inscribe themselves, their tastes, and their preferred artists into the canon of African American art.

Although it does not deal directly with collecting and is set in nineteenth century Britain, Julie Codell's monograph, *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain ca. 1870-1910*, is useful for this project because of her discussion of how artist biographies very intentionally "[circulated] and [distributed] knowledge" at a time that interest in art was spreading beyond the upper echelon of collectors and connoisseurs.⁶ According to Codell, studying these biographies is necessary because of "the fundamental importance of biography to art history as a discipline [and] the role of biography in shaping broad cultural meanings and beliefs."⁷ Because of its focus on artists' biographies and the intentionality that comes with the crafting of these biographies, Codell's work provides an example of how to broach discussing such intentionality in relation to the image of E.T. Williams conveyed in his archive.

Sharon Patton's 1998 textbook, *African American Art*, follows in the footsteps of other twentieth century scholars like James A. Porter, Samella Lewis, and David C. Driskell and attempts to present an inclusive history of African American art. Patton argues that there is a close connection between African American art and the sociopolitical circumstances surrounding its production. Her chapter on colonial and post-Revolutionary art, for example, argues that whether an artist was free or enslaved dictated to what extent they adopted European aesthetics into their artistic practice.⁸ Her

⁶ Julie F. Codell, *The Victorian Artist: Artists' Lifewritings in Britain, ca. 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 26.

⁷ Codell, *The Victorian Artist*, 3.

⁸ Sharon F. Patton, *African American Art History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 47.

description of later periods follow suit as she writes in a proceeding chapter that African American Abstract Expressionist artists like Norman Lewis failed to achieve the same critical acclaim as their White counterparts because art world dynamics that rewarded African American artists who more explicitly alluded to their Blackness.⁹ Patton's argument is important primarily because it is incomplete. This project aims to move away from the tendency to solely define African American art in relation to the larger struggle against White supremacy. Such definitions overlook the labor of patrons and collectors who work to preserve and elevate the genre. Prior to the publication of this textbook, Patton wrote an introductory essay to a catalog of scholar, artist, and collector David Driskell's collection of African American art that addressed the long history of collectors like Driskell in the United States.¹⁰ Patton's awareness of this history and her decision to largely omit it from her textbook demonstrates the need to merge discussions about collecting and African American art history in order to better understand the latter.

Patricia A. Banks's 2010 book, *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class* is yet another important reference point for my own writing on collecting. In this monograph, Banks argues that upper-middle class Black Americans use engagement with Black art to cultivate their racial identity.¹¹ Banks embarks on this study with the goal of contributing to understandings of the relationship between what she calls "high-class cultural consumption" and African American identity.¹² She defines the Black upper-middle class as consisting of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals who

⁹ Patton, *African American Art History*, 180.

¹⁰ Sharon F. Patton, "A History of Collecting African American Art," *Narratives of African American Art and Identity: The David C. Driskell Collection* (College Park, Md.: The Art Gallery and the Department of Art History and Archaeology, University of Maryland; San Francisco: Pomegranate, 1988): 45-52.

¹¹ Patricia A. Banks, *Represent: Art and Identity Among the Black Upper-Middle Class* (Routledge: New York, NY, 2010): 4.

¹² Banks, *Represent*, 2.

tend to hold advanced degrees. Though she makes this distinction, Banks's argument aims to make broader commentary on the cultural consumption of all middle-class Black Americans. Her study touches on a range of activities when forwarding this argument, including collecting. To gather evidence, Banks interviewed participants in their homes in New York and Atlanta between 2003 and 2004. Banks's discussion of how members of the Black upper-middle class use collecting and other forms of Black cultural consumption to reinforce and stay in touch with their Blackness is useful for my own speculation as to why E.T. Williams came to amass a prolific amount of artwork. Banks's work provides one potential lens through which one can understand his activist-collecting as her interview subjects appear to be similarly invested in the preservation of African American art for future generations. Banks's argument about Black members of the upper middle class's conspicuous consumption also aligns with this project's argument about the intentionality with which patrons and collectors like Williams are able to shape African American art history.

Though they each broach various topics within the realm of art, the aforementioned scholars have made important contributions that will help me build upon their work and articulate the complexities surrounding E.T. Williams's activist-collecting. At the same time that these scholars have helped fill necessary gaps in scholarly discourses, Patton and Banks's scholarship show the necessity for a study of this kind that challenges conventional understandings of African American art history.

An *Ebony* Bachelor of the Year-turned-Banker: Contextualizing Williams's Activist-Collecting

While the archive at the Schomburg provides some insight into E.T. Williams's life and collecting, certain aspects of his biography gleaned from press accounts of his and his wife's lives, and my interview with him and can aid in moving past the interpretation of his collecting as solely working to integrate African American artists into the White-dominated canon of American art.

The couple was featured on the pages of *The New York Times* for the first time in 1963 when the paper announced their engagement. In addition to highlighting their respective professional accomplishments, the brief article also makes note of E.T.'s Native American and free Black ancestry.¹³ About one month later, news of the engagement was published in the "Society" section of *Jet*, an African American weekly news and entertainment magazine. The few sentences dedicated to the couple emphasize their social status by referring to Auldlyn as a "debutante-schoolteacher" and to E.T. as the one-time *Ebony* Bachelor of the Year.¹⁴ In 1964, Williams married Auldlyn, who was described as a similarly well-connected member of Black society and schoolteacher from Baltimore. *The New York Times* published another article on the occasion of their wedding in May of 1964 that shied away from describing their social lives and instead focused on their service-oriented professions.¹⁵ Though they differ in nature and were published before the couple began collecting art, these announcements indicate that the Williamses long possessed social capital that in turn play a significant and oft-overlooked role in their art patronage.

¹³ "Auldlyn Higgins, Graduate of Fisk Will Be Married," *The New York Times*, December 8, 1963.

¹⁴ "Society: Weddings," *Jet*, January 16, 1964, 38.

¹⁵ "Audlyn Higgins, Alumna of Fisk, Baltimore Bride; Teacher Wed to Edgar Williams Jr., Officer in the Peace Corps," *The New York Times*, May 24, 1964.

The Williamses' decision to start collecting art in the late 1960s was initially a consequence of Audlyn Williams's previous study of art at Fisk University and the couple's friendships with artists. It was also perhaps a result of their tacit understanding of collecting and other forms of consuming art as hobbies of the upper class and thereby markers of status. During the early days of their marriage, Williams was a volunteer at the Baltimore Museum of Art while her husband, who was a manager at Maryland National Bank, made an effort to hang up art on the bank's walls.¹⁶ They would also collect work by their friends who were artists. E.T. Williams began to rise up the ranks at Chase Manhattan Bank in the 1970s. Many of the important executives at the bank, like David Rockefeller, collected art and developed an important art collection that is now owned by J.P. Morgan and Chase. Williams's advancement at the company meant that the couple gradually gained the financial means to follow the lead of those around them. They initially started collecting limited edition prints by prominent Black artists and eventually original works.¹⁷ They also began to cultivate relationships with important curators and museum directors, thus laying the groundwork for the prolific number of donations they would undertake in later decades. These donations, in turn, serve to establish the Williamses as philanthropists and work in conjunction with the aforementioned articles to solidify their legacy as significant members of Black society.

In a *New York Times* profile of E.T. Williams and his wife published in November of 2018 for the newspaper's "Show Us Your Wall Column," Audlyn Williams shares her experience of roaming the halls of the Baltimore Museum of Art in the 1960s and observing the impact of the Cone sisters, whose collection serves as the basis of the

¹⁶ Strugatch, "Filling Their Lives With Art," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/22/arts/design/show-us-your-wall-et-lyn-williams.html>.

¹⁷ Strugatch, "Filling Their Lives With Art," *The New York Times*.

Museum's modern art collection and as an inspiration to her and her husband. The Cones were prominent members of Baltimore society thanks to their father's grocery business and eldest brothers' successful textile business.¹⁸ Williams mentions that she and her husband were inspired by the Cones' ability to "[join] the personal circles' of the artists they championed," as the sisters were close friends with Gertrude and Leo Stein who introduced them to Henri Matisse and Paul Cézanne. By citing the Cones as an influence, the Williamses reveal how their own collecting is not simply informed by a need for racial justice. Rather, they are also interested in achieving justice by cultivating their own social status and connections with people in the art world as the Cone sisters did. Though Auldlyn Williams does not say it explicitly, the Cone sisters' mass donation of their collection to the Baltimore Museum of Art also inspired the Williamses, whose patronage is similarly driven by a desire to both amass and disseminate works of art.

Close analysis of the Williamses' collection starting in the 1980s reveals a marked shift as the couple began to buy and manage the estates of major African American artists and donate works from their collection en masse to various museums around the United States. This shift was a conscious one, as E.T. Williams described how he and Audlyn had a shared goal of creating a "major collection" of African American art once they had the financial means to do so.¹⁹ In addition to making a more concerted effort to collect, the Williamses also sought to integrate themselves into the exclusive and moneyed world of museums, knowing that doing so would give them another avenue through which they could advocate for Black artists. They achieved this through their prolific number of gifts

¹⁸ Karen Levitov, "A Collection of Collections," in *Collecting Matisse and Modern Masters: The Cone Sisters of Baltimore* edited by Karen Levitov (The Jewish Museum of New York and Yale University Press: New York, NY and New Haven, CT, 2011), 14.

¹⁹ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

to major institutions and E.T.'s consequent membership on the board of some of those same museums.

When looking at the catalog documenting Williams's collecting, which primarily documents the works he acquired while attempting to amass a major collection, it becomes evident that Williams prefers figurative works by major African American artists like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden (Appendix A). At the same time, he is also a supporter of self-taught artists like Claude Lawrence and Thornton Dial, whose works are highly abstract. The fact that Williams's taste is almost entirely informed by shared identity of the artists in his collection speaks to the likelihood that his collecting is not informed by stylistic concerns.²⁰ The catalog also reveals the prolific number of donations Williams has made since the 1980s, indicating that merely studying his purchase of art by African American artists is not sufficient.

While the need to work both with and against Williams's archive and press accounts about him and his wife is an important motivation for embarking on a close study of his activist-collecting, it also worth noting how Williams stands out from other collectors of African American art. For example, civil servant and collector Paul R. Jones donated the bulk of his massive collection to the University of Delaware and the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa with the primary intent of having the works in the collection used as teaching tools.²¹ As will be discussed in the following section, Williams's donations have been far more widespread, indicating that he is more

²⁰ While it is not uncommon for collectors of African American art to have varied tastes, many have explicitly stated that they have particular agendas when acquiring works for their collections. The Joyner/Giuffrida Collection for example, was created with the intent of remedying the historic overlooking of Black abstract artists. Other collectors, like Samella Lewis, have stated their interest in collecting and supporting the work of women artists.

²¹ "A Lasting Impact: A Gift from the Heart," *University of Delaware*, February 14, 2001, <http://www1.udel.edu/PaulRJonesCollection/impact.html>.

interested in ensuring the preservation of his works by diversifying their placement. The types of institution to which Williams donates, which are bigger and more well-known than the museums at the Universities of Delaware and Alabama, also reveals his intent to see the objects enter the canon of American art. Williams also has not shown his work in a travelling exhibition or published a catalog of his collection like other collectors, like former professional basketball player Grant Hill.²² Whereas Hill has been able to build a legacy for himself as an important patron of African American art through exhibitions and a catalog of his collection, Williams's legacy is more steeped in his activist-collecting. Like Hill, he is aware of how he can use his societal influence to build a legacy. However, through the dispersal of his collection, management of different artists' estates, and his membership on the boards of different museums, Williams has used his influence for the more "activist" purpose of sustaining the legacies of the artists whom he supports and ensuring that they earn as much critical recognition as their White peers. While these factors set Williams apart, it is important to study him in particular because doing so has broader implications for how scholars understand collectors of African American art and the history of the genre. Studying Williams can add dimension to the history of African American art because scholars tend not to recognize that African American art history is shaped by those who have worked to preserve and elevate it.

²² Grant, Hill, *The Grant Hill Collection of African American Art* ed. by Alvia Wardlaw (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

E.T. Williams's Multifaceted Approach to Activist-Collecting

A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement: Williams's Dispersal of His Collection

Although it is by no means a complete record of Williams's collection, the catalog I created to document the artworks in Williams's collection presents ample evidence of Williams's extensive track record of donations (Appendix A). The earliest documented donations took place in 1987. During that year, Williams gifted multiple works by Hale Woodruff to the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Brooklyn Museum. Williams acquired Woodruff's estate in 1987 under the condition that he would donate most of the works to museums. There is very little information about the donations he made in the years after 1987, save for a partial gift donation of a Robert Duncanson painting, *Recollections of Italy* (fig. 1), to the Wadsworth Atheneum in 1991. Williams's donation activity spiked, however, in 1997 with the beginning of the Woodruff Portfolio Project, which was a concerted effort to disseminate reproductions of Woodruff's Atlanta Period prints. Outside of this project, which will be discussed later in this section, Williams made several partial gift donations of work by Edward Bannister, Romare Bearden, Joshua Johnson, Hughie-Lee Smith, and Alma Thomas. Since then, Williams has given many gift or partial gift donations to a wide variety of art and cultural museums in the United States.

The fact that Williams chose to disseminate the contents of his collection while he and his wife are still living, on the surface, appears to be a demonstration of his commitment to seeing works by African American artists enter collections from which

they have typically been excluded. However, the fact that this dispersal has largely been achieved through partial gift donations begs further inquiry. Under United States tax law, donors are able to pay a percentage interest in a work of art while receiving tax deductions for the same percentage of the work's value.¹ In this arrangement, museums are supposedly allowed to show the work of art for an amount of time that is equivalent to the interest paid on it, but oftentimes, the art remains in the home of the collector. If Williams were undertaking a wholly philanthropic endeavor by donating works from his collection, one wonders why he would opt for this mutually beneficial donation method rather than simply gifting works of art.

Raising this line of questioning is not meant to suggest ulterior motives on the part of Williams. Rather, it is meant to shed light on the multifaceted nature of his activist-collecting. At the same time that Williams's concern with the lack of African American representation in museum collections drives his collecting practice, his involvement in the arts is also closely intertwined with his concerns over wealth and status. In the period of time between his the waves of donations in 1987 and 1997, Williams wrote letters to several museums imploring them to consider accepting partial gifts of works by Bearden, Johnson, and Woodruff.² In these letters, Williams cited "the depressed real estate market and its impact on me" as providing the impetus to sell these works.³ He also argued that museums should accept his offer because he was offering the works "for half the price they would bring at any gallery" and that buying the works

¹ Stephanie Strom, "The Man Museums Love to Hate," *The New York Times*, December 10, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/10/arts/design/10stro.html>

² E.T. Williams memo draft, c. 1991, Box 1, Folder 3, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

³ E.T. Williams memo draft, c. 1991, Box 1, Folder 3, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

would be a worthwhile investment at a time when African Americans were beginning to question the racial makeup of major museums' collections.⁴ Williams's open acknowledgement of how these donations could be in service of the larger fight for integration and benefit him at the same time demonstrates the importance of considering the role that his background as a financier plays in his quest to guarantee the preservation of African American art and to facilitate its entry into the canon of American art.

The Quest to Break A Barrier: E.T. Williams's Management of the Romare Bearden Estate

After the death of Romare Bearden, who was among the most prominent twentieth-century African American artists, E.T. Williams was named the executor of the artist's estate and began to serve as a financial adviser to Nanette Bearden, the artist's widow.⁵ Williams was friendly with the Bearden family and an avid patron of the artist's work. In fact, he sold the Bearden family a few apartments at his Fordham Hill housing co-op in exchange for twenty-five collages by the artist.⁶ Williams's papers at the Schomburg contain extensive documentation of the families' relationship. For example, in a 1987 letter from Williams to Romare Bearden's wife, Nanette, Williams promises that several Bearden works that he bought from the family "[would] be given to arts

⁴ E.T. Williams memo draft, c. 1991, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵ E.T. Williams to Kenneth R. Page, March 16, 1988, Box 2, Folder 6, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁶ Williams, E.T., interview with Kinaya Hassane, phone interview, April 1, 2019.

institutions, keeping in mind the museums that have been most helpful to you throughout your career.”⁷

In his book, *Our Kind of People: Inside America's Black Upper Class*, Lawrence Otis Graham characterizes E.T. Williams as having successfully straddled the color line throughout his career and life as a patron of the arts. This assessment aligns with how Romare Bearden viewed himself as an artist. He melded political engagement with his artistic practice, as seen in his involvement with the founding of the Studio Museum in Harlem, an institution meant to be “the nexus for artists of African descent, locally, nationally, and internationally and for work that has been inspired and influenced by black culture.”⁸ Bearden was also a member of the artist group Spiral, which sought ways for artists to engage with the Civil Rights Movement. However, Bearden also actively combated any notions of racial essentialism that were applied to his oeuvre and craved to break free of being labeled solely as an African American artist. Bearden received formal artistic training and attended the Sorbonne in Paris. He could therefore eschew critics’ designation of his usage of African and African American aesthetics as “primitive.” His wife worked tirelessly after his death to ensure that his legacy was not hindered by outsiders’ racialized pigeonholing.

Given both Bearden and Williams’s efforts to balance racial pride and race neutrality, it is fitting that after the artist’s death in 1988, Williams was named the executor of his estate. Williams was therefore copied on several terse letters between the artist’s widow, Nanette Bearden, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Studio

⁷ E.T. Williams to Nanette Bearden, November 23, 1987, Box 2, Folder 6, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁸ “Fact Sheet | The Studio Museum,” *The Studio Museum in Harlem*, <https://www.studiomuseum.org/fact-sheet>.

Museum. In 1989, Nanette Bearden launched an effort to realize her husband's dream of being the first African American artist to have an individual exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She initially reached out to the Museum writing that she had "[discussed] a possible retrospective at the Metropolitan with E. Thomas Williams Jr."⁹ She went on to write how both she and Williams "feel that the timing is right in light of the many political and social changes taking place in our city."¹⁰ In this letter, Bearden strategically mentioned Williams, who had established himself through his collecting as an advocate for more representation of African American artists in museum collections and exhibitions. He was also, at this point, strategically increasing his stature in the museum world by leveraging his way onto the boards of important museums like the Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum through his gifts to their collections.¹¹ Nanette Bearden's invocation of Williams's name helped therefore bolster her justification for the desire to see her late husband break this particular racial barrier.

Although the Met expressed interest in putting on the Bearden retrospective exhibition, Nanette Bearden encountered a significant roadblock when the the Met alerted her to the Studio Museum's plans to also hold a similar exhibition around the same time. The Studio Museum also asked that the Met change the dates of their proposed exhibition in order to mitigate the conflict. Incensed by this development, Bearden wrote to Nancy Lane, a board member at the Studio Museum, "Your demand that the Metropolitan Museum of Art mount a show during a period of your choosing is clearly designed to

⁹ Nanette Bearden to Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, September 29, 1989, Box 2, Folder 6, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

¹⁰ Nanette Bearden to Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, September, 29, 1989.

¹¹ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane, phone interview, April 1, 2019.

discourage the Metropolitan from taking interest in the project.”¹² She went on to berate the Studio Museum for trying to supercede the Met, writing that it was her husband’s dream to have a solo exhibition at the Met. In the same letter, Bearden vowed that she would not lend any of her husband’s work to the Studio Museum’s show and that she would try to encourage sponsors to pull their support of it.¹³

E.T. Williams’s support for Nanette Bearden’s cause was made explicit in another letter to Michael Brenson at The New York Times that he wrote in 1991. In this letter, Williams again lauds Brenson for “bringing to [the art world’s] attention the work of great Americans who happen to be of African descent” in his latest review.¹⁴ Williams went on to lament the fact that the exhibition featured in Brenson’s review (which was centered on the work of Henry Ossawa Tanner and held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art) was not traveling to New York. Williams asked, “When has a major New York museum had a retrospective of an important black American artist save the Brooklyn Museum and Jacob Lawrence?” He then directly referenced Nanette Bearden’s struggle to convince the Studio Museum to allow the Met to be the first museum to hold a posthumous retrospective of her husband’s work: “Romare Bearden’s retrospectives should be at the Metropolitan — America’s foremost collagist at America’s foremost museum. However, it will begin at the Studio Museum before travelling.”¹⁵ In this letter, Williams echoes Nanette Bearden’s belief that Romare Bearden’s outstanding artistry ought to be recognized in the nation’s premier art museum.

¹² Nanette Bearden to Nancy L. Lane, 21 September, 1989, Box 2, Folder 6, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

¹³ Nanette Bearden to Nancy L. Lane, 21 September, 1989.

¹⁴ E.T. Williams to Michael Brenson, 13 March, 1991, Box 1, Folder 3, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

¹⁵ E.T. Williams to Michael Brenson, 13 March, 1991.

Williams expressed a similar sentiment when asked about the debacle. He justified his and Nanette Bearden's push to have the exhibition at the Met because they "felt [Bearden would get] much greater exposure at the Met."¹⁶ He also said that because of the Met's stature and importance, "[the exhibition] would have continued to improve the visibility of his work on the international scale."¹⁷ Despite Williams's express beliefs that Bearden deserved to be exhibited at the Met for the sheer quality of his work, his and Nanette Bearden's justification was primarily driven by their belief that the exhibition ought to happen because the Museum had yet to hold such a major exhibition for a Black artist. While the quality of Romare Bearden's work is discussed in vague terms, neither Williams nor Bearden's widow used the artist's innovative usage of collage and jazz-inspired compositions to convince the readers of their letters (fig. 2). Rather, they both hinged their argument on Bearden's racial identity. The sidelining of discussions about the quality of an artist's work and the foregrounding of their racial identity is a recurring theme in Williams's advocacy of African American artists and hallmark characteristic of his activist-collecting.

The intricacies of this conflict are evidence of the need for more complex analyses of collectors and their actions. Without considering how Williams had been asserting himself as an important patron before the issue of the retrospective arose, then we cannot fully understand why Nanette Bearden would mention him in her letters. By invoking Williams's support in her initial letter to the Met, Bearden alluded to Williams's careful and strategic process of increasing his status in the world of museums. The conflict also harkens to the way in which money underlies interactions between museums

¹⁶ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

¹⁷ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

and collectors. Because of their small acquisition budgets, museums ultimately rely on private collectors for the basis of their own collections and must cultivate positive relationships among those collectors whose works they covet. This power dynamic flows both ways as artists and collectors greatly benefit from the way that the value of an artist's work accrues value in the marketplace by being exhibited at a prestigious institution. Nanette Bearden explicitly acknowledged this dynamic when she threatened to convince sponsors to pull out of the exhibition and to refuse to lend work to the Museum. Williams also acknowledged it when he justified his and Nanette's battle by arguing that it would give Bearden more "exposure," thereby increasing market value of the artist's work. Taking into account the aspects of the situation that have less to do with the outward crusade to break a longstanding racial barrier helps shed light on the aspects of a collectors' actions that are more informed by money and status.

Nanette Bearden eventually lost her fight to dissuade the Studio Museum from holding the first retrospective of her husband's work. The introductory essay in the catalog for the Studio Museum's exhibit "Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987" proudly claims the title and also functions as a highly self-aware defense of the Studio Museum's choice to against the Bearden family's wishes. For instance, director Kinshasha Holman Conwill cites Bearden's time spent living in Harlem, from which he drew much artistic inspiration, as a "fitting" reason for the Studio Museum to host the exhibit.¹⁸ Conwill also cites how "Bearden's art and the history and concerns of the Museum are also closely linked to an African American experience that is complex in its connotations — triumph, loss, joy, possibility, and ultimately,

¹⁸ Kinshasha Holman Conwill, "Introduction," in *Memory and Metaphor: The Art of Romare Bearden 1940-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

transformation.” This therefore justifies, in Conwill’s eyes, the claiming of Bearden “as our own.”¹⁹ By asserting a claim over Bearden’s artwork and legacy, Conwill and her rhetoric contrasts the desires of both Romare and Nanette Bearden. Conwill portrays the relationship between the Studio Museum’s history, Romare Bearden’s art and the African American experience as inextricable. The Bearden family, however, viewed Romare as representative of what an African American artist could achieve beyond serving on the vanguard of the Civil Rights Movement and hoped that by having the landmark exhibition at the Met, they could write him into history as such.

In 2009 and 2010, Williams, who sat on the Advisory Board of the Romare Bearden Foundation, was in correspondence with Phil Kline at the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina. Williams was hoping to facilitate the merging of the Bearden Foundation with the Mint. The conditions of this merger included the potential publication of a catalogue raisonné of Bearden’s work, the “[creation of] opportunities to enhance the work of Romare Bearden on an international basis through publications and an exhibition,” and the transfer of “the Foundation’s art work to the Mint Museum.”²⁰ It is likely that Williams tried pursuing this route of having the Foundation merge with the Mint because of his and Nanette Bearden’s failure to convince the Met to hold a solo exhibition of the artist’s work. Given the preexisting relationship between the Bearden family and the Mint Museum, which is located in the artist’s hometown, it is logical to presume that efforts to increase critical appreciation of his work would be more successful at the Mint than a larger and more prestigious institution. Williams subtly acknowledges the difference in prestige between the Mint and the Met through the long

¹⁹ Conwill, 4.

²⁰ E.T. Williams to Phil Kline, c. 2009-2010, Box 3, Folder 1, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

list of conditions he stipulates in his letter to Kline. While Williams and Nanette Bearden could only strongly suggest that the Met hold the retrospective of Bearden's work, they could be more demanding of a smaller regional museum when trying to accomplish similar goals like giving the artist international exposure.

A holistic analysis allows scholars and audiences to move away from interpreting Williams's management of Romare Bearden's estate as a straightforward effort to see that an African American artist gets his due appreciation. By taking into account Williams's social status and influence, one can observe how the situation exemplifies the role that collectors play in pushing political agendas that in turn craft particular narratives of African American art history. This more balanced interpretation does not necessarily require a value judgement to be made about the actors involved. It does, however, give greater insight into how the history of African American art is malleable to the desires of influential collectors and families.

Determination and Dissemination: E.T. Williams's Acquisition and Dispersal of the Hale Woodruff Estate

While his duties as the executor of the Bearden estate mainly entailed fighting to preserve the artist's legacy by pushing for exhibitions and overseeing the operations of the artist's foundation, Williams's management of the Woodruff estate largely took form in the Woodruff Portfolio Project, which occurred between 1997 and 2014. The origins of the project stem from E.T. Williams's friendship with Hale Woodruff, whom he had met through Sigma Pi Phi (also known as the Boulé), which is an elite Black men's

organization.²¹ Seven years after the artist's death in 1980, Williams heard about the sale of Woodruff's estate through an art dealer. Though Williams was competing with other well-known collectors of African American art like comedian Bill Cosby, he was able to buy it because Woodruff's widow Theresa wished to sell the artist's estate to the person who would ensure that most of the works would be distributed, rather than held privately.²²

The estate consisted of several paintings by the artist, which Williams donated to various museums. It also contained the original linoleum covered woodblocks used to make nine linocuts from the artist's Atlanta Period series. The Williamses' possession of these original woodblocks (which were created between 1931 and 1946), combined with the glaring absence of Woodruff's work in major museum collections, prompted E.T. Williams to commission Robert Blackburn, a leading African American printmaker, to make reproductions of the works using the original blocks. Williams then collaborated with June Kelly Gallery in New York to gift the resulting 300 reprints to major art museums around the United States.²³ By taking on the process of posthumously reproducing and donating Woodruff's Atlanta Period prints, Williams was able to assert the artist's place in the canon of American art. Williams could also ensure that Woodruff's legacy as a politically-active educator could live beyond the original woodblocks and in the collections of museums where they could be used as teaching tools.

²¹ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

²² Glenna Batiste, "The art of Hale Woodruff is donated to Schomburg library," *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY), December 28, 1996.

²³ "E.T. Williams remembers acquiring Hale Woodruff's estate," Online video, 4:51. <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/e-t-williams-41>.

In addition to being a practicing artist, Woodruff taught art at what is now known as Clark Atlanta University and established the art school at there. During his tenure at the university, he worked to “create an environment that could support and help to advance the careers of other African American artists, particularly as segregationist policies stifled their potential.”²⁴ Woodruff also put on exhibitions of Black art at the University “to present quality work by black artists in a professional venue.”²⁵ Through these exhibitions, Woodruff established cash prizes for artists and presented the opportunity for prize winners to have their work accessioned into the University’s permanent art collection.²⁶

As an educator, Woodruff also took the opportunity “to impart a sense of cultural and social responsibility in students” while simultaneously continuing to develop their artistic aptitude.²⁷ His belief in the intrinsic link between art and racial politics was a result of the challenges Woodruff faced while teaching art to Black students in the Deep South in the throes of the Great Depression and in a department that was severely underfunded. This hardship directly resulted in his introduction of printmaking to his students because the medium’s reproducibility made it more accessible.²⁸ His efforts have had a lasting impact on Clark Atlanta University’s art department and are featured prominently in scholarly biographies about him, indicating how his activism is remembered in conjunction with his artistic achievements.

²⁴ Amalia K. Amaki, “Introduction,” in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, ed. Amalia K. Amaki (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 13.

²⁵ Mary Parks Washington, “Hale Woodruff: Artist, Teacher and Mentor,” in *Hale Woodruff, Nancy Elizabeth Prophet and the Academy*, ed. Amalia K. Amaki (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 88.

²⁶ Washington, “Hale Woodruff: Artist, Teacher and Mentor,” 88.

²⁷ Amaki, 28.

²⁸ Bearden and Henderson, 204.

Woodruff also incorporated the medium of printmaking into his own artistic practice. His observations and experiences of life in the segregated South inspired the prints' subject matter, thus leading to the production of the Atlanta Period prints which portray abstracted scenes of poverty, lynchings and rural life. Woodruff's melding of art and activism was not lost on E.T. Williams when he made the decision to begin the Woodruff Portfolio Project as he was aware of the intersection of art and politics in Woodruff's career as an artist and educator. Williams said during our interview, "As a teacher himself, we were certain that [Woodruff] would be happy that [this project] happened."²⁹ To Williams, his advancement of Woodruff's legacy as a politically-engaged artist went hand-in-hand with his own mission of canonizing the artist as an important figure in American art.

After commissioning Robert Blackburn to create the posthumous reprints, Williams initially had reservations over how the posthumous reprints would be received. To assuage such concerns, Williams invited the Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Whitney Museum of American Art to see them.³⁰ The curator, according to Williams, was exceedingly impressed and deemed the prints museum quality.³¹ Over the course of the Woodruff Portfolio Project, the set of linocuts were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the National Gallery of Art and several other leading institutions.³² At many of these museums, Williams's

²⁹ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

³⁰ Although the Portfolio Project began in 1997, the position of Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints was created at the Whitney in 2004, with Carter E. Foster taking the post (http://artdaily.com/news/12071/Whitney-Museum-Appoints-Carter-Foster-Curator-of-Drawings#.XNGe_S-ZPfY). Williams did not give an exact timeline on when this interaction with the curator occurred, but evidence suggests that Foster expressed his approval of the Woodruff reprints.

³¹ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

³² "Brooklyn Museum," accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/search?keyword=hale+woodruff>.; "Search the Collection

donation represents the first time Woodruff's work was accessioned and the linocuts are oftentimes still the only representation of the artist in their collections. This dearth of representation therefore presented an opportunity for Williams to increase Woodruff's stature in the history of American art.

The opportunism that underlies the Woodruff Portfolio Project is yet another instance in which Williams consciously forgoes concerns about the formal qualities of an artist's work for the sake of "race-ing" collecting. For example, although he mentioned with pride that the Chief Curator at the Whitney Museum was thoroughly impressed with the posthumous reprints of Woodruff's work, there is very little discussion on Williams's part of the actual content of the works, which are highly political. While the brochure that was sent along with each set of prints to institutions receiving the works acknowledges Woodruff's "[usage of] the Georgia landscape, culture, and history as subjects for his commentary on the conditions of African Americans in the rural South," Williams's own reflections on the Project do not go beyond mentioning Woodruff's teaching career and consequent decision to take up printmaking (fig. 3).³³ What was most important to Williams in the execution of this project was that the work of an African American artist was gaining due critical acclaim and being disseminated and preserved in museums' collections.

Williams's goals of extending Woodruff's artistic legacy and marking him as an important African American artist are also intertwined with the collector's personal

| The Metropolitan Museum of Art," accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#!?q=hale%20woodruff>.; "Hale Woodruff: Selections from the Atlanta Period 1931–1946 | MoMA," The Museum of Modern Art, accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/portfolios/62889?locale=en>.; "Giddap," The National Gallery of Art, accessed November 25, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.170352.html>.

³³ "Hale Woodruff: Selections from the Atlanta Period, 1931–1946," c. 1997, promotional brochure, *Marshall Arts, Ltd.*

ambitions. By orchestrating this mass donation of Woodruff's prints and attaching his name to this project, Williams was able to prop up his and his wife's reputation as dedicated patrons of African American artists. Williams's facilitation of the Bowdoin College Museum of Art's (BCMA) acquisition of the Woodruff Portfolio in 1997 and 2004 is an instance in which this goal was realized. When embarking on the Portfolio Project, Williams gave several sets of the reprints to his friends and permitted them to donate them to institutions of their choice and gave them the freedom to decide what would go on the credit line for the donation.³⁴ Despite the leeway granted to the Williamses' friends, Williams's name remained attached to each donation. The set of prints that were initially donated to the BCMA in 1997, for example, were donated by Kenneth and Kathryn Chenault, who are friends of the Williams family (both Kenneth Chenault and Williams are members of the Boulé, the aforementioned Black men's elite organization to which Woodruff also belonged). Kenneth Chenault is also a graduate of the Bowdoin College Class of 1973. Although the credit line for the prints reads, "Gift of Kenneth and Kathryn Chenault," correspondences surrounding the donation underscore Williams's involvement.³⁵ Contained in Williams's papers at the Schomburg is a letter of receipt from then-director Katharine J. Watson to the Chenaults, on which Williams was copied. The letter also acknowledged that the physical works were forwarded by Williams to the Museum.³⁶ The promotional brochure in the prints' object file at the BCMA does not mention Williams by name. However it does mention that "this

³⁴ "E.T. Williams remembers acquiring Hale Woodruff's estate," Online video, 4:51. <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/e-t-williams-41>.

³⁵ "Blind Musician, Hale Aspacio Woodruff," *Bowdoin College Museum of Art*, <http://artmuseum.bowdoin.edu/Obj13661?sid=27317&x=35633>.

³⁶ Katharine J. Watson, "Katharine J. Watson to Kenneth and Kathryn Chenault," July 30, 1997, E.T. Williams Papers, 1952-2011.

reprinting was made possible by Elnora Inc.,” an investment company Williams inherited from his father.³⁷ By emphasizing his involvement in the project, and by granting other collectors the ability to write personalized credit lines when donating the reprints rather than acknowledging him, Williams demonstrated an understanding of the power collectors have in crafting the history of African American art and their ability to write themselves into it.

Williams showed this awareness of the credit line as a battleground for collectors’ efforts to shape their own legacies within the context of African American art history. Shortly before he embarked on the Woodruff Portfolio Project, Williams drafted a letter in 1994 to the Studio Museum specifying how the Museum should write the credit line for objects purchased or gifted from his collection:

“It would be most appreciated by us — though I know it is not normal custom — to list us on our collection that you purchased ie Purchased from the collection of E. Thomas Williams Jr. and Audlyn Higgins Williams rather than just saying a Museum Purchase. It would be good for viewers to know that it is from the collection of a black family...”³⁸

After sending this letter, the Studio Museum began explicitly labelling the Williams’s donations as such, a change that is currently reflected on the Museum’s website.³⁹ The reasoning behind insisting that an institution to break convention on something as seemingly minor on the credit line of a recent acquisition is at first rather opaque. It is especially so when considering the fact that the Williamses are not particularly well-known as “a black family” outside of elite Black or art world circles. However, the act of

³⁷ “Hale Woodruff: Selections from the Atlanta Period, 1931-1946,” c. 1997, promotional brochure, *Marshall Arts, Ltd.*

³⁸ E.T. Williams draft letter to the Studio Museum, 18 May, 1994, Box 2, Folder 1, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

³⁹ “*Homage to Duke, Bessie and Louis* by Romare Bearden,” *The Studio Museum in Harlem*, <https://www.studiomuseum.org/collection-item/homage-to-duke-bessie-and-louis>.

writing to the Studio Museum is significant in and of itself because of the couple's recognition of their ability to build their own legacy through a donation in addition to supporting that of an artist.

An Art Collector and Jazz Musician Meet in the Hamptons: E.T. Williams's Support of Claude Lawrence

In 2017, Williams was profiled by the East Hampton Star in an article titled, "A Collector Who Gave an Artist a Legacy." While the author purports in the byline to tell "a story about African-American art and Sag Harbor's African American community," the article itself dedicates very little space to Williams's history as an activist-collector.⁴⁰ Instead, it focuses on the origins of the Williamses' relationship with Claude Lawrence, an itinerant jazz musician who briefly lived in Sag Harbor. After crossing paths, Williams was tasked with dispersing Lawrence's work after the artist learned he was terminally ill. Lawrence told Williams, "I'm dying. I have lesions on my spine, and what I want most of all is a legacy, which I don't have. Maybe you can give me the legacy."⁴¹ Williams promptly bought what was left of the artist's collection with plans of donating most of it. The first donation was precipitated by a visit from an unnamed curator at the Met, who was visiting the Williamses' Manhattan apartment to view works by Thornton Dial. The curator subsequently became curious about the works by Lawrence that were on the wall (fig. 4). This encounter led to the Met's acquisition of the artist's work. Since the Met acquired some of Lawrence's art, Williams has worked with a great deal of success, to

⁴⁰ Mark Segal, "A Collector Who Gave an Artist a Legacy," *The East Hampton Star*, June 8, 2017, <https://easthamptonstar.com/Arts/2017608/Collector-Who-Gave-Artist-Legacy>.

⁴¹ Segal, "A Collector Who Gave an Artist a Legacy," *The East Hampton Star*.

enter the nearly 400 pieces of Lawrence's work into the collections of major institutions throughout the United States.

Lawrence's desire to make a name for himself as a fine artist and Williams's fervent dedication to fulfilling that hope illustrate yet another instance wherein the collector demonstrates his awareness of his ability to insert an artist, who would have otherwise been overlooked, into the canon of African American art. Meanwhile, Segal's article and its narrow focus on the relationship between Lawrence and Williams speaks to how collectors themselves are likewise entered into collective understandings of the history of African American art. Since beginning this mass donation project, Williams has hired an archivist to catalogue the artist's work and record oral histories with the still-living artist. He is also looking for an art dealer who could publicize Lawrence and his work.⁴²

When asked why he decided to take up Lawrence's cause, Williams drew a comparison between Lawrence and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Williams recalled how in the 1980s, when Basquiat was an art world star but his work was not yet selling at today's astronomical prices, he had very little interest in the artist's highly abstract work. However, the record-breaking sale of Basquiat's 1982 *Untitled* painting in 2017 alerted Williams to the consequences of overlooking abstract Black artists. This motivated Williams not only to buy and donate Lawrence's work, but also to sell Lawrence's art to fellow collectors of African American art at a reasonable price.⁴³ So while Williams demonstrates his commitment to ensuring that this self-taught African American artist does not fall victim to art history's tendency to overlook such artists, his justification for

⁴² Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

⁴³ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

supporting Lawrence also reveals Williams's awareness that he can both write Lawrence into the history of African American art while standing to gain financially from such efforts.

Williams's quest to see Lawrence repeat Basquiat's posthumous commercial success appears to do more with Lawrence's racial identity than with Williams's strong belief in the quality of the artist's work. While he mentioned in passing that Lawrence's work is in part inspired by his career as a jazz musician and is abstract like Basquiat's, Williams discusses little else about Lawrence's artistry.⁴⁴ Aside the Met curator's serendipitous "discovery" of Lawrence's work, there exists very little art historical legitimization of Lawrence's artistic talents. Williams's support of Romare Bearden and Hale Woodruff was at least partially and implicitly propped up by the existing art historical literature that argued that the artists were among the best African American artists working in the twentieth century. Meanwhile, while Williams's hiring of an archivist is an attempt to create the sort of literature that canonized Bearden and Woodruff, there exists no such literature justifying Williams's endeavor to enter Lawrence into the collections of leading American museums. This effort to provide the artist with a legacy is therefore especially illustrative of Williams's unconventional practices as an activist-collector which center on artists' African American identities.

The unconventional nature of Williams's support of Lawrence is heightened when one considers the dynamic between collectors and museums that would allow Williams to donate the work of an unknown, self-taught artist en masse. As was the case in the Bearden situation, museums rely heavily on their relationships with donors to acquire blue chip works of art. Given Williams's extensive donation history, and the deductions

⁴⁴ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

that can be made about the contents of his collection (Appendix A), it is reasonable to assume that museums would be willing to accept work by Lawrence from Williams because they do not want to alienate him and stymie the possibility of receiving work from him by far more prominent African American artists. It is also likely that Williams is aware of this dynamic and willing to work it to his advantage. Williams's awareness, combined with his determination to integrate African American artists, regardless of stature, is another prominent feature of his activist-collecting practice.

“You Really Have to Pay to Play”: E.T. Williams’s Board Membership

Another important tenet of Williams's art patronage was his membership on the boards of the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Museum and the Schomburg Society of Black Art and Culture.⁴⁵ Discussions of museums in art historical scholarship tend to focus on the impact of curatorial decisions rather than the work of museums boards. These entities, however, are integral to the operations of museums and are meant to help steer the museum in accordance with its mission. Museum boards are also supposed to be “the connective tissue that links the museum and its mission to the community it serves.”⁴⁶ Given the power boards have over a museum's operations, Williams saw membership on these boards as an efficient avenue for increasing the racial diversity of museum collections and exhibitions.

⁴⁵ According to the finding aid for his archive, Williams also sat on the boards of the Romare Bearden Foundation, the Printmaking Workshop, the Central Park Conservancy, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Boys Club of New York Inc., Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Woodlawn Cemetery, and Boys Harbor Inner-City Youth Project.

⁴⁶ Robert Stein, “Museum Board Leadership 2017: A National Report,” *American Alliance of Museums*, 2017, <https://www.aam-us.org/2018/01/19/museum-board-leadership-2017-a-national-report/>.

In my interview with him, Williams described how he and his sister, Joanne Williams Carter, became the first brother-sister duo to be on a museum board after joining the board of the Brooklyn Museum. Their membership was made possible by multiple gift donations that Williams made to the Museum. “You really have to pay to play,” Williams remarked when reflecting on the process of joining museum boards.⁴⁷ He was also able to join the board of the Museum of Modern Art after being asked to do so by David Rockefeller, whose mother Abigail established the Museum and who knew Williams from Chase Manhattan Bank. Williams recalled that he would advocate for African American artists by mentioning certain artists during board meetings or encouraging curators and members of the museum’s staff to see work by those artists at different galleries.⁴⁸ According to Williams, he was able to convince the Museum of Modern Art to buy its first works by Abstract Expressionist Norman Lewis. He also convinced the Museum to purchase their first work by Elizabeth Catlett from June Kelly Gallery.

Williams’s membership on different museum boards gave him license to express his opinions about African American representation and broader art world matters outside of board meetings. Williams wrote a letter in 1988 to the Guggenheim Museum upon learning that they were not including Romare Bearden in their exhibition titled “Aspects of Collage: Assemblage and the Found Object in the 20th Century.” Williams used the letter as an opportunity to upbraid then-director Peter Lawson-Johnston for “institutional racism on the part of the Museum” after learning that Bearden, whom Williams called

⁴⁷ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

⁴⁸ Williams, E.T, interview with Kinaya Hassane.

“one of America’s foremost collagists,” was being left out of the exhibition.⁴⁹ In 1989, Williams wrote to Michael Brenson, an art columnist at The New York Times, in response an article Brenson wrote recognizing the recent accomplishments of African American artists such as Melvin Edwards, Martin Puryear, Benny Andrews and Romare Bearden. He wrote that “recognition of black artists by their peers is long overdue” and expressed his hope that “the major museums of New York, namely the Metropolitan, Brooklyn, Modern, Guggenheim and Whitney will lead in acquiring and exhibiting the works of this important art sector in America.”⁵⁰ He also wrote to Governor Mario Cuomo in 1991 to express his displeasure with a proposed \$28.3 million budget cut for the New York State Council on the Arts.⁵¹ Each of these instances implicitly demonstrate how Williams felt empowered to voice his opinion because of his increasing stature. Though he knew that a single letter was not going to necessarily change Governor Cuomo’s mind or automatically grant African American artists more critical acclaim, Williams’s decision to write these letters indicates his awareness of his ability to write directly to the most powerful people in politics and the arts and command at least a small amount of their attention. His awareness of his own status in the art world is integral to his quest to see that African American art and artists are better represented in museum collections and is a fundamental aspect of his activist-collecting.

Though it is not a museum, the Souls Grown Deep Foundation and Williams’s involvement on its board serve as apt examples of how collectors use their wealth and influence to the trajectory of African American art history. The Souls Grown Deep

⁴⁹ E.T. Williams to Peter Lawson-Johnston, 7 March, 1988, Box 2, Folder 6, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁵⁰ E.T. Williams to Michael Brenson, 29 March, 1989.

⁵¹ E.T. Williams to Mario Cuomo, March 22, 1991, Box 1, Folder 3, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

Foundation was founded by Atlanta-based scholar and collector William Arnett, who was inspired to study and write about African American artistic traditions in the South.⁵² Arnett's curiosity about African American folk art resulted in the publication two volumes of *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art* in 2000. A decade later, the Souls Grown Deep Foundation was founded with the intent of transferring the work Arnett and his sons collected to "leading art museums by means of gift-purchases."⁵³ In 2018, the Board of Trustees (on which E.T. Williams sits with actress Jane Fonda) released a three year strategic plan through which the Foundation would continue making donations while expanding to "[support] research, educational, and scholarly initiatives" and "realize positive economic and social outcomes for the artists in its collection and their communities."⁵⁴

Despite being deeply entrenched in the New York art world, Williams and his wife were involved with the High Museum in Atlanta and learned about Arnett's efforts and visited his warehouse to see and purchase the work of Thornton Dial. Arnett asked Williams to be on the board of his foundation and from there, the group began making partial gift donations of work by the self-taught artists they supported, including the quilters of Gee's Bend, Alabama. In his individual activist-collecting practice, Williams has made concerted efforts to see that his work by artists of choice is kept in the care of represented in museum collections, receives critical and scholarly attention. The Souls Grown Deep Foundation has accomplished similar goals through its donations and its support of several exhibitions and publications featuring artwork collected by the group.

⁵² "About Souls Grown Deep Foundation," *Souls Grown Deep Foundation*, <http://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/foundation>.

⁵³ "About Souls Grown Deep Foundation," *Souls Grown Deep Foundation*.

⁵⁴ "About Souls Grown Deep Foundation," *Souls Grown Deep Foundation*.

Williams's involvement with the organization is therefore yet another means through which he is able to exert influence over the development of African American art history.

In *Our Kind of People*, Lawrence Otis Graham lauds Williams for being able to move smoothly between Black and White worlds. He attributes such ease to Williams's membership on the boards of several prestigious (and predominantly White) arts institutions while simultaneously supporting traditionally "Black" causes through his membership on the boards of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Boys Harbor Inner-City Youth Project in Baltimore. Williams's ability to maintain a foot in both worlds is essential to his activist-collecting practice as his comfort in elite White settings contributed to his ability to convince people in those contexts of the merits of African American art. Though he discussed it in a very casual manner, his ability to convince the other members of the board and acquisitions committee at the Museum of Modern Art to buy works by African American artists in the late eighties and early nineties is groundbreaking. A 2018 report by Artnet News demonstrated how acquisitions and gifts of work by African American art still only makes up 2.3 percent of 30 museums' total acquisitions.⁵⁵ The continued stagnation that comes at a time when African American artists appear to be making great strides in the realm of museums makes Williams's accomplishment all the more astounding. It also highlights how such an accomplishment would not have been possible without his deliberate navigation of elite White spaces that made his activist-collecting all the more effective.

⁵⁵ Julia Halperin and Charlotte Burns, "African American Artists Are More Visible Than Ever. So Why Are Museums Giving Them Short Shrift?" *Artnet News*, September 20, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/market/african-american-research-museums-1350362>.

Conclusions

E.T. Williams's expansive career as an activist-collector challenges the boundaries of traditional definitions of art collecting. Through his numerous donations, management of different artists' estates, and membership on the board of several high-profile arts organizations, he has advanced his personal mission of increasing the representation of African American artists in museum collections. His actions, however, are not significant for this fact alone. Williams's actions demonstrate the ability of collectors to shape the canon of African American art in a manner that ensures the canon's continued existence and its integration into the broader canon of American art. Conventional art historical approaches to studying African American art tend to focus on artistic production. Accounting for the labor of collectors like Williams, who go to great lengths to preserve African American artistic traditions and work to see these traditions become a part of the history of American art, can enrich the study of African American art.

While the aforementioned examples of Williams's activist-collecting at work are very different in nature, each is representative of the various strategies he has employed to achieve the same underlying goals of preservation and integration. With regard to his management of the different artists' estates, each mode of advocacy that Williams took on was tailored to his perception of the artists' legacies. During his management of Romare Bearden's estate, Williams tried to ensure that the first posthumous retrospective of his work was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art rather than the Studio Museum in Harlem because of the artist's own efforts to produce racially-conscious work while

maintaining a somewhat de-raced artist persona. With the Woodruff Portfolio Project, tailored his efforts so that they dovetailed with Woodruff's legacy as an educator and politically engaged artist. Finally, his efforts to provide Claude Lawrence with a legacy by donating his artworks and hiring an archivist to catalog his oeuvre are in line with the artist's explicit wish to avoid dying in obscurity. Each of these strategies, in addition to the others enumerated in this project, are in service of the preservation of African American artistic traditions, which have long been overlooked and therefore are at the risk of being lost. Williams's work has also worked to elevate such traditions into the traditionally exclusive genre of American art. Such efforts are significant because the expansion of the genre signifies the expansion of the definition of who is American. The inclusion of African American art in the canon of American art is thereby recognition of African American identity as inherently American.

It is important to study Williams's activist-collecting because he has primarily worked to see that work by African American artists is entered into museum collections. Museums exist in the United States as places wherein cultures are "celebrated" and for most Americans, their conceptualization of certain canons are formed by museums and their curatorial choices.¹ As Carol Duncan argued in her essay, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," museums in Western civilization have been since their founding serve as "ceremonial monuments" to the dominant cultures they represent. She also argues that museums have the intrinsic power "to control the representation of a community...[and] to define and rank people." Williams's activist-collecting is a direct response to how museums, as Duncan describes, have tended to exclude and devalue

¹ Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1991): 90.

work by non-white artists. While many collectors of African American art, as Patricia Banks describes in her monograph, will collect art in their homes in response to this traditional exclusion, Williams takes this response further through his activist-collecting and seeks to upend museums' traditional celebration of white European and American artists.

In considering future work to build upon the argument set forth by this paper, it may be necessary to wait until the public learns of Williams's plans for his estate. As the incompleteness of the catalog of his collection suggests (Appendix A), there are many works that have yet to be accounted for because they are most likely being held privately by Williams. The dispersal of the works will likely create a record of them in museum collection databases, allowing future scholars to gain a deeper understanding of the extent of Williams's activist-collecting. Furthermore, Williams's archive does not contain papers dated past 2011, suggesting that he still possesses many of the correspondences that document his more recent donations.

Future studies of Williams's activist-collecting could also explore his relationship to galleries, as this study largely focused on his interactions with artists and museums. In addition to buying some of his works from galleries and encouraging his colleagues on museum boards to visit galleries in downtown Manhattan to learn more about African American art, Williams has overseen the exhibition of Claude Lawrence's work in various galleries.² As mentioned previously, he has actively sought gallery representation for Lawrence. Such an effort indicates that while Williams's activist-collecting is in

² Brooke Williams, "Fairytale do come true, or the overnight sensation of painter Claude Lawrence (that was 30 years in the making)," blog post, *This Is Authentic*, March 24, 2015, <http://thisisauthentic.com/2015/03/fairytales-do-come-true-or-the-overnight-sensation-of-painter-claude-lawrence-that-was-30-years-in-the-making/>.

response to non-profit museums' failure to critically recognize African American art, he appears to see engagement with galleries as a necessary component to achieving his larger goal.

More exploration and historicization of Williams's activist-collecting is also necessary to fully comprehend it. While this project portrays Williams's activist-collecting practice as somewhat idiosyncratic, it is in reality the synthesis of multiple roles in the art world including that of the collector and the art dealer. As he mentioned in our interview, he was partially motivated to buy Lawrence's works so that he could sell them to his friends and family for a reasonable price. There is also documentation in his personal papers of his sale of works of art to family friends like the Chenault family.³ Such actions, when considered in the larger scheme of his activist-collecting practice, can be likened to late nineteenth century opposing portrayals of the entrepreneurial dealer and the ideological dealer.⁴ Williams's activist-collecting practice appears to mimic those of ideological dealers, who were concerned with the "historical position" of the artists whose work they sold just as Williams is concerned with the status of the artists whom he supports in relation to the historical tendency to overlook work by African Americans. Such actions contrasted those of entrepreneurial dealers, who were more concerned with an artist's individuality. Additional scholarly research can be done to dive deeper into the connection between the role Williams has played since the twentieth century and those of other art world participants in other chronological and geographical contexts.

³ "Bill of Sale of *Noah's Ark* by Romare Bearden to the Chenault Family," Box 1, Folder 1, E.T. Williams Papers 1952-2011, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library.

⁴ Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-siècle Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 49.

It would also be useful to contemplate yet another overlooked actor in the development of African American art history: the art advisor. While E.T. Williams portrays his foray into the arts as largely unmediated, aside from the interactions he and his wife had with curators and scholars during the early days of their collecting, there are other collectors of African American for whom this is not the case. Bill and Camille Cosby, for example, tapped accomplished scholar, artist and collector David Driskell to advise their collection. Driskell's recollection of his experience advising the couple includes anecdotes about Bill Cosby establishing that he was "the buyer, the entertainer who brings the resources" and Driskell was merely "the expert" whose choices Cosby could reject.⁵ As more prominent African Americans follow in the footsteps of the Cosby family and take up art collecting, it will be important to begin interrogating the role of art advisors, as their employers become public advocates for the genre of African American art.

This project could also serve as a counterpoint for future studies of African American collectors who do not restrict their collecting to African American art. While the motivations of those who exclusively seek out work by Black artists are rather transparent, it is worth interrogating what drives collectors who are Black but choose not to focus on one genre. Such questioning could build off of this paper's discussion about collecting, social capital and the problematic nature of conventional ideas about African American art history. Whereas Williams can be regarded by some as undertaking a valiant and worthwhile cause in response to the traditional overlooking of African American artists, could collectors who choose not to do so be similarly regarded because

⁵ "David Driskell Delivers Inspirational Talk," *International Review of African American Art*, 2014, <http://iraaa.museum.hamptonu.edu/page/David-Driskell-Delivers-Inspirational-Talk->.

of their inherent rebuke of the notion that all African Americans must constantly serve as advocates for the entire race?

By studying collecting and its relationship to African American art, particularly at a moment when artists in the genre have made great strides in the mainstream art world, not only scholars are challenging existing and conventional thought on the subject. We are also working in tandem with people like E.T. Williams and contributing to the project of building a more complete and inclusive history of American art.

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Images



Figure 1. Robert Duncanson, *Recollections of Italy*, 1864, 20 ½ x 39 in. (52.1 x 99.1 cm), oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum.



Figure 2. Romare Bearden, *Duke Ellington & Louis Armstrong*, c. 1970, 24 x 17 cm, mixed media collage, exhibited at ACA Galleries in Spring 2000. Photographer: Larry Qualls.



Figure 3. Hale Woodruff, *By Parties Unknown*, 1938, block print, University of California, San Diego.



Figure 4. Daniel Dorsa, Lyn and E.T. Williams in their Manhattan home between two works by Claude Lawrence: left, "Yard — An Ode to Charlie Parker" and "At the Hop," 2018, photograph, *The New York Times*.

Appendixes

Appendix A: Catalog of E.T. Williams's Collection

This catalog is a synthesis of information gleaned from E.T. Williams's archival papers, online museum collection databases, and indexes with information on where images of work from Williams's collection appear. The information included in the catalog is title of the work, artist, creation date, medium, dimensions, how the work entered the collection, when it entered the collection, when it left the collection, current location, accession number, collection, exhibitions, provenance, and any additional notes. Much of this information for many of these works is not publicly accessible. The catalog is also far from comprehensive as it is safe to assume that there are many works that Williams owns privately and has yet to donate. More complete information will perhaps only be made available after the contents of his estate are dispersed. Because the catalog is incomplete, I have attached an editable version for future researchers that can be accessed on disk held in the George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives at the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library at Bowdoin College. The catalog can also be viewed online on the Bowdoin Digital Commons: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu>. The version shown below is a sample of the full version with basic information about the works of art that could be documented thus far:

1	Title	Artist	Date Created	Medium	Dimensions
2		Charles Alston			
3	The Fabulists Garden #2	John Bankston	2004	Watercolor, acrylic, colored pencil on paper	29 x 41 in.
4	Untitled Landscape	Edward Bannister	1878	Oil on canvas	19 1/2 27 1/2 in.
5	Bronze Castings	Richmond Barthe			
6	Black Lives Matter 2	Jo-Anne Bates			
7	Back Porch Serenade	Romare Bearden	1977	Collage with color inks and pencil on fiber board	6 x 9 in.
8	Before the First Whistle	Romare Bearden	1973	Lithograph	
9	Bird in Tropics (Paradise)	Romare Bearden	1982	Watercolor and collage	29 x 20 in.
10	Blue Silk Stockings	Romare Bearden	1981	Collage	
11	Conjur Woman and the Virgin	Romare Bearden	1978	Collage of various papers with ink on fiber board	14 x 20 in. (35.6 x 50.8 cm)
12	The Farmer	Romare Bearden	1968	Mixed media collage on masonite	39 1/2 x 29 3/4 in.
13	Girl	Romare Bearden			
14	Homage to Duke, Bessie and Louie	Romare Bearden		Collage with graphite on masonite	15 3/4 x 22 in.
15	The Lantern	Romare Bearden	1976	Lithograph in colors	28.5 x 19.8 in (72.39 x 50.29 cm)
16	Noah's Ark	Romare Bearden	1974	Screenprint	52 1/2 x 46 1/2 x 1 in (133.4 x 118.1 x 2.5 cm)
17	Patchwork Quilt	Romare Bearden	1970	Felt-tip pen and colored inks on printed graph paper	6 x 5 1/4 in. (15.2 x 13.3 cm)
18	The Piano Lesson	Romare Bearden	1983	Lithograph on paper	36 3/4 x 26 3/4 in.
19	Pilate	Romare Bearden	1979	Color lithograph (there's multiple)	21 15/16 x 15 in. (55.72125 x 38.1 cm)
20	Roman Warriors	Romare Bearden		Mixed media (watercolor with pen and ink)	17 x 21.5 in. (43.2 x 54.6 cm)
21	Three Women (Easter Sunday)	Romare Bearden	1979	Color lithograph on wove paper	28 x 21 in. (71.12 x 53.34 cm)
22	Untitled (classical series), 0	Romare Bearden	n.d.	Ink, pencil and watercolor on paper	24 x 18 1/2 in.
23	Untitled Landscape	Edward Bannister	1878	Oil on canvas	19 1/2 27 1/2 in.
24	Untitled (Tropical Scene)	Romare Bearden			
25	Untitled watercolors (Tropical scenes)	Romare Bearden			
26	Woman Bathing in Tropics	Romare Bearden			
27	Cafe du Mater	Wilson Bigaud	1974	Oil on masonite	24 x 30 in
28	Conversation	William Carter	1955	Acrylic on paper board	19 1/2 x 16 in. (495 x 406 mm)
29	Ostensibly Certain	Lisa Corinne Davis	2010		
30		Louis Delsarte			
31	A Shadow of Life	Thornton Dial	1994	Charcoal on wove paper	35 5/8 x 24 3/4 in. (90.49 x 62.87 cm)
32	The Bat Lady	Thornton Dial	1995	Charcoal and colored chalk on paper	29 7/8 x 22 in. (75.9 x 55.9 cm)
33	Bird Catcher Ladies	Thornton Dial	1992	Water-soluble crayon, transparent watercolor, charcoal	29 15/16 x 22 12 in.
34	The Day the Tigers Got Together	Thornton Dial	2000	Drawing	
35	Friends	Thornton Dial	1998	Graphite pencil on paper	Sheet: 30 1/8 x 22 1/8 in. (76.5 x 56.2 cm)
36	Nesting	Thornton Dial	1993	Charcoal and watercolor on paper	30 1/2 x 22 3/4 in. (77.5 x 57.8 cm)
37	Shadows	Thornton Dial	1994	Charcoal, graphite and pastel on paper	30 1/8 x 22 1/4 in. (76.5 x 56.5 cm)
38	Sitting at Home	Thornton Dial	1995	Charcoal and pastel on paper	30 1/8 x 22 1/2 in. (76.5 x 57.2 cm)
39	The Spirit of Life (Helping Hands)	Thornton Dial	2004	Charcoal on paper	30 1/8 x 22 1/8 in. (76.5 x 56.2 cm)
40	Woman Posing on Chair with Cat	Thornton Dial	1995	Drawing	
41	Recollections of Italy	Robert Duncanson	1864	Oil on canvas	52.1 x 99.1 cm
42	Pink House/Black Grapes	Amos Ferguson			
43	Tourist, Building, Bird	Amos Ferguson			
44	Untitled (figures with curtain rods)	Lonnie Holley	n.d.	Wood, metal, paint	
45	The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments	AJ Holman and Company	1875	Leather, metal, ink on book paper	12 3/4 x 10 x 5 in. (32.4 x 25.4 x 12.7 cm)
46	Portrait of Sarah Maria Coward	Joshua Johnson	1804	Oil on canvas	36 x 30 in. (91.4 x 76.2 cm)
47	Lee Whipper Portrait (Dans un cafe)	Lois Mailou Jones	1939	Oil on canvas	36 x 29 in. (91.4 x 73.7 cm)
48	A Two Sunday Week	Claude Lawrence	2014	Acrylic paint on wove paper	29 1/2 x 21 3/8 in. (74.93 x 54.29 cm)

1	Title	Artist	Date Created	Medium	Dimensions
49	Astral Logic	Claude Lawrence	2013	Acrylic on canvas (unstretched)	
50	At the Hop	Claude Lawrence		Acrylic on canvas	
51	Back Street	Claude Lawrence	1994	Acrylic on canvas (unstretched)	
52	Cabaret	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
53	Canbbean	Claude Lawrence	2002	Oil on paper	Sheet: 30 x 22 1/4 in. (76.2 x 56.5 cm)
54	Carnival	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
55	Crossroads	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
56	Dancing Eyes	Claude Lawrence	2003	Acrylic and crayon on paper	23 x 29 in. (58.4 x 73.7 cm)
57	Dole House	Claude Lawrence	2004	Oil on paper	
58	Dormir	Claude Lawrence	2007-2013	Oil on paper	18 x 12 in. (45.7 x 30.5 cm)
59	Family	Claude Lawrence			
60	Flag Man	Claude Lawrence	1990	Oil on paper	
61	Former Circle	Claude Lawrence	2006		
62	Friendly Harry	Claude Lawrence	1993	Mixed media on paper	23 1/8 x 29 in. (59 x 74 cm)
63	Half Past Four	Claude Lawrence	2014	Painting	
64	Le Balance	Claude Lawrence	2004	Acrylic on paper	29 13/16 x 22 in. (75.7 x 55.9 cm)
65	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
66	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
67	Saturday Night	Claude Lawrence	2000	Oil on paper	35 x 60 in. (88.9 x 152.4 cm)
68	Oasis	Claude Lawrence	2001	Acrylic on paper	23 x 30 in. (58.4 x 76.2 cm)
69	Secular Appeal	Claude Lawrence	n.d.	Acrylic on paper	30 x 22 3/8 in. (76.2 x 56.8 cm)
70	Proposal	Claude Lawrence	2007	Acrylic paint on wove paper	19 x 26 3/4 in. (48.26 x 67.95 cm)
71	Shroud of Venus	Claude Lawrence	2011	Acrylic on canvas (unstretched)	
72	One with Iz	Claude Lawrence	2014	Oil on paper	
73	Point of Departure	Claude Lawrence	2013	Acrylic on paper	19 3/16 x 25 1/16 in. (48.74 x 63.66 cm)
74	reet and mary	Claude Lawrence	1991	Oil on canvas	22 x 27 in. (55.9 x 68.6 cm)
75	Ronald and Donald, The Oldest	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
76	Sauter	Claude Lawrence	2014	Acrylic on paper	29 5/16 x 21 1/8 in. (74.45 x 53.66 cm)
77	Savoy Faire	Claude Lawrence	1995	Painting	
78	Self-Surrender	Claude Lawrence	2013	Acrylic on canvas	
79	Shark City	Claude Lawrence	1989	Painting	
80	The Shift	Claude Lawrence	2002	Acrylic paint on wove paper	Sheet: 22 1/4 x 30 in. (56.52 x 76.2 cm)
81	Stalk Talk	Claude Lawrence	2007	Acrylic paint on wove paper	Sheet: 30 1/8 x 22 1/8 in. (76.5 x 56.2 cm)
82	Station X	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
83	Strap Hangers	Claude Lawrence	n.d.	Acrylic on paper	
84	Thrice	Claude Lawrence	2002	Oil on paper	
85	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2007	Oil on paper	
86	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2007	Oil on paper	
87	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004	Acrylic on paper	
88	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004	Acrylic on paper	
89	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	1993	Oil on paper	Sheet: 22 5/8 x 30 in. (57.5 x 76.2 cm)
90	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2001	Oil on paper	Sheet: 22 5/8 x 30 in. (57.5 x 76.2 cm)
91	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2008	Oil on paper	30 x 23 in. (76.2 x 58.4 cm)
92	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
93	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
94	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
95	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
96	Untitled	Claude Lawrence	2004-2009	Painting	
97	Yard -- An Ode to Charlie Parker	Claude Lawrence		Pastel on paper?	
98	Builders 1974	Jacob Lawrence	1974	Screenprint	
99	Tools	Jacob Lawrence	1977	Silkscreen	26 x 21 3/4 in. (66.0 x 55.2 cm)
100	Festive Vista	Hughie-Lee Smith	1980	Oil on canvas	15 x 13 in.
101	The Promise	Hughie-Lee Smith			
102	Still Life	Hughie-Lee-Smith			
103	Still Life African Head	Hughie-Lee-Smith			
104	Seascape	Henry Ossawa Tanner	1879		
105	Ship in a Storm	Henry Ossawa Tanner	1879	Oil on academy board	10.06 x 6 in. (25.56 x 15.24 cm)
106	Childhood Memories	Betye Saar			
107	Opus #52	Aima Thomas	1965	Acrylic on paper	10 x 7 1/4 in.
108	Space	Aima Thomas	1966		
109	(Turtleman) Soft Shell Turtle	Mose Tolliver			
110	Landscapes (Landscape at Dawn)	Anthony Watkins	late 20th/early 21st	Oil on canvas	16 x 21.5 in. (40.6 x 54.6 cm)
111	Africa and the Bull	Hale Woodruff		Linocut with chine collé	Image: 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in. (15.1 x 10 cm); Si
112	Atlanta Period Prints	Hale Woodruff	c. 1935; printed 19	Linocut with chine collé	Image: 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in. (15.1 x 10 cm); Si

1	Title	Artist	Date Created	Medium	Dimensions
113	Blue Landscape (Gathering Storm)	Hale Woodruff	1968	Oil on linen canvas	36 x 42 1/4 in. (91.4 x 107.3 cm)
114	Figuration II	Hale Woodruff		Linocut with chine collé	Image: 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in. (15.1 x 10 cm); Si
115	Fisherman	Hale Woodruff	c. 1930	Transparent and opaque watercolor on paper	18 x 14 7/8 in. (45.7 x 37.8 cm)
116	Girl Skipping Rope	Hale Woodruff	1959	Oil on canvas	51 1/2 x 37 1/4 in.
117	Rocky Mountain Landscape I and II	Hale Woodruff		Linocut with chine collé	Image: 5 15/16 x 3 15/16 in. (15.1 x 10 cm); Si
118	Untitled (Matador)	Hale Woodruff			

Appendix B: Annotated Finding Aid of E.T. Williams's Papers

- Art Collecting
 - b. 1 f. 1-6
 - 1988-1993
 - Contained within this first box are correspondences between Williams and different New York galleries regarding the sale and appraisal of works of art by Lois Mailou Jones, Hughie-Lee Smith, and Jacob Lawrence. There are also letters discussing Williams's loans to the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Philadelphia Museum Art. Many of the correspondences held in this box pertain to Williams's attempts to sell works from his collection to museums such as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and the High Museum in Atlanta.
 - b. 2 f. 1-5
 - 1991-2011
 - These folders consist of Williams's initial donation of contents from the estate of Hale Woodruff to institutions like Spelman College. There is also a copy of a letter Williams sent to the Studio Museum asking that they include his and his wife's names on the credit line of works purchased or donated from their collection.
 - b. 2 f. 6-7
 - Romare Bearden 1988-1993
 - Folders 6 and 7 in Box 2 are dedicated to letters relating to Williams's role as the executor of Romare Bearden's estate. The bulk of the letters were written during Williams's and Nanette Bearden's struggle to hold the first retrospective of the artist's work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Most of the letters were from Nanette Bearden and addressed to curators and executives at the Met and the Studio Museum. The letters in these folders that were sent by Williams were sent after the debacle was settled and contain his reflections on his failure to achieve his and the Bearden family's goal. There is also a letter documenting Williams's decision to join the Advisory Board of the Romare Bearden Foundation.
 - b. 2 f. 8
 - John G. Borders 1975-1976
 - b. 2 f. 9
 - Cinque Gallery 1989-2004
 - b. 2 f. 10
 - Norman Lewis 1987
 - Mint Museum
 - b. 2 f. 11

- 2009
- b. 3 f. 1-2
 - 2010
 - The letters contained in this folder primarily concern the proposed merging of the Romare Bearden Foundation with the Mint Museum. In these letters, Williams laid out the extensive conditions of this potential merger, which was meant to augment the artist's legacy and use the Mint Museum's resources to do so all while giving the Museum unprecedented access to the artist's work and his copyright. Despite his efforts, the merger fell through.
- b. 3 f. 3
 - Smithsonian Institute Five Black Artists 1988-1989
- b. 3 f. 4-6
 - Hale Woodruff 1986-2009
 - Many of the letters in this set of folders are letters of receipt from the many institutions to which Williams donated the reproductions of Hale Woodruff's Atlanta Period prints. For those that Williams did not donate himself, such as the set held at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, there are letters addressed to the donor with Williams copied onto it. There is also a clipping of an article detailing William's donation of the crossed out original linoleum blocks that were used to make the posthumous reprints.
- b. 3 f. 7
 - Venice Biennale 2003