

Guide to the Jonathan Williams Photographs

YCAL MSS 757



by Matthew Daniel Mason

2013

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
P. O. Box 208330
New Haven, CT 06520-8330
(203) 432-2977
beinecke.library@yale.edu
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

CALL NUMBER: YCAL MSS 757

CREATOR: Williams, Jonathan, 1929-2008

TITLE: Jonathan Williams photographs

DATES: circa 1951-2007

BULK DATES: 1951-1997

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 32.1 linear feet (63 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The Jonathan Williams Photographs include portraits of persons in his social circle, principally poets, painters, writers, artists, and friends, as well as images of outsider art and artists, architecture, gravesites, and landscapes, circa 1951-circa 1997. The collection includes photograph albums of Polaroid prints, as well as loose Polaroid prints, color transparencies, black and white negatives, copy slides, and copy negatives. Overall, the images in the collection document Williams' work as a photographer, as well as his social network, interests, and activities. The collection also includes information about individual photographs provided by Williams and his partner, Thomas Meyer, 2006-2007.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.williamsj>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.williamsj>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Purchased from James S. Jaffe on the Ezra Pound Archive Fund, 2006-2007.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Box 63 (computer disk): Restricted fragile material. Reference copies of electronic files may be requested. Consult Access Services for further information.

Conditions Governing Use

The Jonathan Williams Photographs are the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Jonathan Williams Photographs. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

Portions of this guide derive from Filemaker Pro 7 databases created by Jonathan Williams and his partner, Thomas Meyer, and transferred to the library in 2006. These databases identify black and white negatives in the collection, as well as color transparencies of portraits, outsider art, and images that appeared in the work, Jonathan Williams, *A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude* (Boston, Massachusetts: David R. Godine, 2002). The databases also established numbering systems for each group. In 2007, Williams and Meyer also provided identifications for Polaroid prints compiled in photograph albums. In 2009, the processing archivist consolidated information provided by Williams and Meyer in a Microsoft Access database, and supplemented this information with an item-level examination of the collection to create this guide.

The collection includes Polaroid prints originally housed in "magnetic" photograph albums, which are physically harmful to the items in them. For their preservation, library staff removed the Polaroid prints from the original albums and rehoused them in archival sheets and albums, which replicate their original arrangement and expression.

During physical processing, library staff rehoused each loose Polaroid print, transparency, and negative in acid-free paper sleeves.

In 2009-2010, library staff created digital surrogates for nearly all of the Polaroid prints in the collection, including nearly all the prints in the albums.

Former call numbers: Uncat MSS 929 and Uncat MSS 977

Existence and Location of Copies

Access to the database created by the processing archivist may be requested. Please consult with the appropriate curator.

Digital surrogates exist in the Beinecke Library's Digital Images Online database for most of the material in Series I and Series II.

Associated Materials

Jargon Society Collection, 1950-2008 (PCMS-0019). The Poetry Collection, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Jonathan Williams (1929-2008)

Jonathan Williams was a poet, publisher, and photographer. He was born Jonathan Chamberlain Williams in Asheville, North Carolina, the only child of Thomas Benjamin Williams (1898-1974) and Georgette Chamberlain Williams (1904-2000). Williams was educated at St. Albans School, Princeton University, and Black Mountain College, and studied art and design at the Institute of Design in Chicago.

Books of poetry by Williams include *An Ear in Bartram's Tree* (1969), *Blues and Roots/Rue and Bluets* (1971), *The Loco Logodaedalus in Situ* (1972), and *Elite/Elate Poems* (1979), while his books of photography include *Portrait Photographs* (1979) and *A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude* (2002).

In 1951, Williams founded the Jargon Society, a small-press publisher that publishes poetry, experimental fiction, photography, and folk art. As a poet and publisher, Williams was associated with the Black Mountain Poets. He also served as a contributing editor to the photography journal *Aperture*.

Williams and his partner of forty years, poet Thomas Meyer (born 1947), lived their summers at Corn Close, a seventeenth century shepherd's cottage in Dentdale in the Cumbrian hills of England and their winters at Skywinding Farm on Scaly Mountain, near Highlands, North Carolina.

Scope and Contents

The Jonathan Williams Photographs include portraits of persons in his social circle, principally poets, painters, writers, artists, and friends, as well as images of outsider art and artists, architecture, gravesites, and landscapes, circa 1951-circa 1997. The collection includes photograph albums of Polaroid prints, as well as loose Polaroid prints, color transparencies, black and white negatives, copy slides, and copy negatives. Overall, the images in the collection document Williams' work as a photographer, as well as his social network, interests, and activities. The collection also includes information about individual photographs provided by Williams and his partner, Thomas Meyer, 2006-2007.

Digital surrogates exist for significant portions of the collection and are available in the Beinecke Library's Digital Images Online database.

Arrangement

Organized into six series: I. Photograph Albums, 1977-2007. II. Polaroid Prints, 1976-1994. III. Color Transparencies, circa 1951-circa 1997. IV. Black and White Negatives, circa 1951-circa 1988. V. Copy Photographs, circa 1978-circa 1993. VI. Electronic Files, 2006.

Collection Contents

Series I: Photographs Albums, 1977-2007

7.3 linear feet (34 boxes)

This series consists of photograph albums with more than 2700 Polaroid prints created and compiled in albums by Williams. The albums chiefly document his social circle and outsider art, as well as his travel throughout Europe and the United States.

The Polaroid prints in these albums are a proprietary photographic format marketed by the Polaroid Corporation. The prints are made using a diffusion transfer process in film packets, which contains all of the developing chemicals and are exposed in a special camera.

Identified individuals with significant quantities of informal portraits in the series include Donald B. Anderson, Basil Bunting, Mary Cooper, Simon Cutts, Sandra Fisher, Astrid Furnival, John Furnival, Ian Gardner, Mike Harding, Michael Heny, David Hockney, Robert Holmes, R. B. Kitaj, Todd Merrell, Anne Midgette, Stuart Mills, Raymond Moore, Karl Torok, and Erica Van Horn, as well as many portraits of Williams and Meyer.

Digital surrogates exist in the Beinecke Library's Digital Images Online database for most of the material in Series I.

For long-term preservation, the Polaroid prints were removed from their original "magnetic" photograph albums and rehoused in archival sheets and albums, which replicate their original arrangement and expression.

Series I is arranged sequentially by the numbers Williams applied to individual albums, followed by image identifications that Williams and Meyer provided for the albums, and then a sample selection of the original albums without prints

b. 1	Album No. 1 <i>76 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents a visit to the Black Forest in Germany, as well as Nancy, France, and Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, England	1978-1987
b. 2	Album No. 2 <i>142 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents a trip to the Dolomite Alps in Italy, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	circa 1980-circa 1985
b. 3	Album No. 3 <i>140 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents a trip to a Black Mountain Conference at Bard College, New York, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	1987
b. 4	Album No. 4 <i>65 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents visits to English churches and sites in East Sussex, Gloucestershire, and Norfolk	circa 1985
b. 5	Album No. 5 <i>114 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents sites along the Offa's Dyke Path National Trail along the border of Wales and England, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	circa 1978-1986

b. 6	Album No. 6 <i>110 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents a travel to the Black Forest in Germany and throughout England, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	circa 1988
b. 7	Album No. 7 <i>140 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents sites along the Tour du Mont Blanc trail through parts of Switzerland, Italy and France, as well as a trip to Cardiff, Wales	circa 1990
b. 8	Album No. 8 <i>69 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale, as well as a visit to Rooksmoor House, the home of artists John Furnival and Astrid Furnival in Stroud, England	circa 1978-1982
b. 9	Album No. 9 <i>81 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale, as well as a visit to Saltaire, England	circa 1992-1995
b. 10	Album No. 10 <i>106 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents sites in the Pyrenees during a walking tour, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	circa 1991
b. 11	Album No. 11 <i>70 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents artwork at Château de la Napoule in Mandelieu-la-Napoule, France, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	1987
b. 12	Album No. 12 <i>118 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents sites in and around the At the Atlantic Center for the Arts in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	1992-1993
b. 13	Album No. 13 <i>118 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents artwork in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne, Switzerland, and sites in and around the Black Forest in Germany, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	1988-1989
b. 14	Album No. 14 <i>118 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	circa 1981
b. 15	Album No. 15 <i>71 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale	1977-circa 1980

b. 16	Album No. 16 <i>80 Polaroid prints</i> <p>The album documents a trip by Williams and Mike Harding to Ireland. They published an account of the trip as Jonathan Williams and Mike Harding, <i>Eight Days in Eire, or, Nothing so Urgent As Mañana</i> (Rocky Mount, North Carolina: North Carolina Wesleyan College Press, 1990)</p>	1988
b. 17	Album No. 17 <i>77 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents churches and other sites throughout the United Kingdom, as well as Williams' visits with friends</p>	circa 1978
b. 18	Album No. 18 <i>74 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale, as well as a visit to Rooksmoor House, the home of artists John Furnival and Astrid Furnival in Stroud, England</p>	circa 1978
b. 19	Album No. 19 <i>75 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents architectural details in Hexham Abbey in the town of Hexham, Northumberland, in northeast England, as well as persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale</p>	circa 1984
b. 20	Album No. 20 <i>73 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale, as well as architectural details Southwell Minster in Nottinghamshire, England</p>	circa 1992
b. 21	Album No. 21 <i>112 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents persons visiting Williams' home in Dentdale, as well as sites along the Cotswold Way footpath in the Cotswolds of England</p>	circa 1983
b. 22	Album No. 22 <i>62 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents outsider art created by Ralph Griffin, James Harold Jennings, Thornton Dial, Sr., and others</p>	circa 1984-1988
b. 23	Album No. 23 <i>116 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents outsider art created by Vernon Lee Burwell, Carlos Cortez Coyle, Hermon Finney, Carl McKenzie, William Carlton Rice, and others</p>	circa 1984-circa 1987
b. 24	Album No. 24 <i>114 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents outsider art created by Burlon Bart Craig, Howard Finster, Joe Louis Light, Eddie Owens Martin, Felix L. Virgous, and Enoch Tanner Wickham, and others, as well as a visit to Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee</p>	circa 1984-circa 1988
b. 25	Album No. 25 <i>114 Polaroid prints</i> <p>This album documents outsider art created by Raymond Coins, Dilmus Hall, Annie Hooper, James Harold Jennings, Clyde Jones, Mary Tillman Smith, Mose Ernest Tolliver, and others</p>	circa 1984

b. 26	Album No. 26 <i>171 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents persons visiting Williams' homes in Dentdale and Scaly Mountain, as well as his visits to friends in Hartford, Connecticut, and London, England, and other places	circa 1978-circa 1995
b. 27	Album No. 27 <i>115 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents Williams' visits with friends in the United States and England	circa 1978-circa 1988
b. 28	Album No. 28 <i>107 Polaroid prints</i> This album documents Williams' visits with friends in the United States and England	circa 1978-circa 1986
b. 29	Image identifications provided by Jonathan Williams and Thomas Meyer <i>28 Folders</i>	2007 August
b. 30	Empty album	undated
b. 31	Empty album	undated
b. 32	Empty album	undated
b. 33	Empty album	undated
b. 34	Empty album	undated

Series II: Polaroid Prints, 1976-1994*9.2 linear feet (10 boxes)*

This series consists of Polaroid prints created by Williams that document his social circle, travel, and interests.

Identified individuals with significant quantities of portraits in the series include Michael Atkinson, Lyle Bongé, Shelley Brown, Simon Cutts, Sandra Fisher, Astrid Furnival, John Furnival, Mike Harding, Robert Holmes, R. B. Kitaj, Anne Midgette, Alvin Doyle Moore, as well as many portraits of Williams and Meyer.

A group of images documents the exhibition "Jonathan Williams - A Poet Collects," which took place at the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, February 27-April 30, 1981.

Identifications for individual images derive from item-level examination by the processing archivist compared to photograph albums in the collection.

Digital surrogates exist in the Beinecke Library's Digital Images Online database for most of the material in Series II.

Series II is arranged sequentially by numbers applied to each Polaroid print during processing.

b. 35	T0001-T0250	1976-1994
b. 36	T0251-T0500	1976-1994
b. 37	T0501-T0800	1976-1994
b. 38	T0801-T1050	1976-1994
b. 39	T1051-T1320	1976-1994
b. 40	T1321-T1621	1976-1994
b. 41	T1622-T1910	1976-1994
b. 42	T1911-T2192	1976-1994
b. 43	T2193-T2476	1976-1994
b. 44	T2477-T2693	1976-1994

Series III: Color Transparencies, circa 1951-circa 1997*14.3 linear feet (16 boxes)*

This series consists of color transparencies on 120-millimeter film created by Williams and arranged by him into groups based on broad subjects.

Series III is organized into seven subseries: Images Used in *A Palpable Elysium*, Portraits, Outsider Art, Architecture and Artwork, Gravesites, Landscapes, and Miscellaneous.

Images Used in A Palpable Elysium

Images compiled by for publication in Jonathan Williams, *A Palpable Elysium: Portraits of Genius and Solitude* (Boston, Massachusetts: David R. Godine, 2002).

b. 45	PE0001-PE0080 PE66, Jack Spicer, Fort Bragg, California, was not received with the collection	circa 1955-circa 1995
<p>Portraits</p> <p>This subseries consists of portraits of individuals, as well as views of birthplaces, homes, and gravesites related to persons admired by Williams.</p> <p>Identified individuals with significant quantities of portraits in this subseries include Lyle Bongé, Basil Bunting, Robert Creeley, Guy Davenport, Fielding Dawson, John Furnival, Jonathan Greene, Ronald Johnson, James Laughlin, Guy Mendes, Paul Metcalf, and Joel Oppenheimer, as well as many portraits of Williams and Meyer.</p>		
b. 46	P0001-P0449	circa 1951-circa 1997
b. 47	P0450-P0999	circa 1951-circa 1997
b. 48	P1000-P1449	circa 1951-circa 1997
b. 49	P1450-P1950	circa 1951-circa 1997
b. 50	P1951-P2191	circa 1951-circa 1997
<p>Outsider Art</p> <p>This subseries includes images related to outsider art, including portraits of artists, as well as views of their environs and artwork.</p> <p>Individuals with significant representation in this subseries include James Butt, Ferdinand Cheval, Howard Finster, Raymond Isidore, Eddie Owens Martin, Clarence Schmidt, and Vollis Simpson.</p>		
b. 51	OA001-OA538	circa 1955-circa 1995

Architecture and Artwork

This subseries includes images that depict mostly unidentified architecture and artwork, principally sculpture.

The subseries has a significant quantity of images that depict Lanarkshire (later known as Little Sparta), a garden at Dunsyre in the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, Scotland established by artist and poet Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006) and his wife Sue Finlay in 1966.

b. 52	A0001-A0420	circa 1968-circa 1986
b. 53	A0421-A0799	circa 1968-circa 1986
b. 54	A0800-A1230	circa 1968-circa 1986
b. 55	A1231-A1564	circa 1968-circa 1986
<p>Gravesites This subseries includes images of gravesites and monuments for persons admired by Williams.</p>		
b. 56	G0001-G0250	undated
<p>Landscapes This subseries includes images that depict mostly unidentified landscapes. The subseries has a significant quantity of images that depict the Callanish Stones near the village of Callanish on the west coast of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, as well as views of Grand Canyon National Park and Bryce Canyon National Park in the United States.</p>		
b. 57	L0001-L0300	undated
b. 58	L0301-L0800	undated
b. 59	L0801-L1010	undated
<p>Miscellaneous This subseries includes images designated by Williams as miscellaneous. Significant quantities of images depict views of artwork, including works by Clyde Jones and Ian Hamilton Finlay, as well as buildings and landscapes.</p>		
b. 60	M0001-M0455	circa 1961-circa 1984

Series IV: Black and White Negatives, circa 1951-circa 1988

0.92 linear feet (1 box)

This series consists of black and white negatives that chiefly depict portraits, as well as views of landscapes and gravesites. The negatives are mostly single frames of 120-millimeter film, with a few examples of multiple frame negatives.

Significant quantities of images in the series depict portraits of Basil Bunting, Jess Collins, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Ronald Johnson, Christopher Middleton, Charles Olson, and Kenneth Patchen, as well as many portraits of Williams and Meyer.

A group of views in the series shows of the birthplace of Thelonius Monk, while another group of still lifes represents books published by the Jargon Society and Divers Press.

Series IV is arranged sequentially by numbers applied to each negative by Williams.

b. 61

[BW001-BW379](#)

circa 1951-circa
1988

Series V: Copy Photographs, circa 1978-circa 1993*0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

This series consists of copy photographs of images created by Williams. They consist primarily of 35-millimeter slides, as well as a few color negatives on film 4 x 5 inches.

Series V is organized into two subseries: Color Slides and Copy Negatives.

Color Slides

This subseries chiefly consists of images related to outsider art.

This subseries is arranged alphabetically by artist followed by unidentified outsider art, a gravesite image, and unidentified portraits.

b. 62	Bailey, Eldren M. <i>2 slides</i>	circa 1987
b. 62	Doyle, Sam <i>6 slides</i>	circa 1985
b. 62	Finster, Howard <i>54 slides</i>	circa 1979-1985
b. 62	Forrester, Laura Pope <i>9 slides</i>	circa 1982
b. 62	Hill, Churchill Winston <i>5 slides</i>	circa 1984
b. 62	Holley, Lonnie <i>2 slides</i>	circa 1988
b. 62	Hooper, Annie <i>1 slide</i>	circa 1986
b. 62	Jones, Clyde <i>4 slides</i>	circa 1986-circa 1993
b. 62	Martin, Eddie Owens <i>83 slides</i>	circa 1979-1987
b. 62	McKenzie, Carl <i>1 slide</i>	circa 1984
b. 62	Moore, A Doyle <i>1 slide</i>	circa 1979
b. 62	Owens, William <i>1 slide</i>	circa 1985
b. 62	Thomas, Martha Nelson <i>2 slides</i>	circa 1978-circa 1980
b. 62	Unidentified outsider art <i>4 slides</i>	undated
b. 62	Gravesite of an infant <i>1 slide</i>	undated

Color Slides (continued)

b. 62	Unidentified portraits <i>25 slides</i>	undated
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Copy Negatives

b. 62	Unidentified portraits <i>3 negatives</i>	undated
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Series VI: Electronic Files, 2006

0.21 linear feet (1 box)

Compact disk with files by Williams and Meyer that provide information about components of photographs created by Williams, including color transparencies of portraits, outsider art, and images used in *A Palpable Elysium*, as well as black and white negatives.

b. 63	Image databases and portable document format files <i>169 megabytes (8 files)</i>	2006 October 12-13
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Computer disks are restricted. Copies of electronic files may be requested through Access Services.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Architectural photography
Artists -- United States -- Portraits
Authors, American -- Portraits
Landscape photography
LGBTQ resource
Outsider art -- United States -- Pictorial works
Poets, American -- Portraits
Portrait photography
Sepulchral monuments -- Pictorial works

Geographic Names

Dentdale (England) -- Pictorial works
Great Britain -- Pictorial works
North Carolina -- Pictorial works

Genres / Formats

Black-and-white negatives
Born digital
Diffusion transfer prints
Photograph albums
Photographic prints
Slides (photographs)
Transparencies

Names

Meyer, Thomas, 1947-
Williams, Jonathan, 1929-2008

Corporate Body

Jargon Society

Contributors

Williams, Jonathan, 1929-2008
Meyer, Thomas, 1947-