

# **WILLIS, JOHN RALPH.**

## **John Ralph Willis papers, 1971-1992**

Emory University  
Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library  
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### **Descriptive Summary**

**Creator:** Willis, John Ralph.  
**Title:** John Ralph Willis papers, 1971-1992  
**Call Number:** Manuscript Collection No. 1208  
**Extent:** .25 linear ft. (1 box)  
**Abstract:** This collection contains the papers of John Ralph Willis from 1971-1992, including correspondence, printed material and a few photographs.  
**Language:** Materials entirely in English.

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### **Administrative Information**

#### **Restrictions on Access**

Unrestricted access.

#### **Terms Governing Use and Reproduction**

All requests subject to limitations noted in departmental policies on reproduction.

#### **Source**

Purchase, 2011.

#### **Citation**

[after identification of item(s)], John Ralph Willis papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

#### **Processing**

Processed by Sarah Quigley, November 2011.

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### **Collection Description**

#### **Biographical Note**

John Ralph Willis (1938-2007), African American educator and art collector, was born in Lorain, Ohio to John R. Willis, Sr. and Lena Mae Tinch Willis. He was a cousin of noted African

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American author Toni Morrison. Willis received a bachelor's degree from the University of Arizona, a master's degree from Boston University and a Ph.D. from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London where he was a Marshall Scholar. He was a faculty member at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Birmingham (UK) before joining the faculty in Princeton University's Department of Near Eastern Studies in 1972. He was an expert in West African History and Islamic Law; Director of Princeton's program in African American Studies; founder of *Slavery and Abolition: A Journal of Comparative Studies*; advisor to the Cass Library of African Studies; and a fellow of the Morgan Library. Willis was also an art collector, and wrote the catalog for "Fragment of American Life," an exhibition at Princeton University focusing on seven African-American artists, including Romare Bearden, Joseph Delaney, Rex Goreleigh, Lois Mailou Jones, Jacob Lawrence, Hughie Lee-Smith, and Hale Woodruff.

Willis married Anne Jones in 1972 and the couple had three children together; a daughter, Avery and two sons, Kingsley and Gorleigh. He also had two daughters, Ashley and Courtney, from a previous marriage. Willis died of a heart attack in November 2007 at age 69.

### **Scope and Content Note**

This collection contains the papers of John Ralph Willis from 1971-1992. The collection documents Willis's interest in African American art through correspondence, printed material and a few photographs. The correspondence includes letters to Willis from artists Joseph Delaney and Rex Gorleigh, as well as a number of fellow educators. Printed material includes symposia programs, newsletters and articles about African American art, and also exhibition invitations and programs, particularly from the Rainbow Sun Gallery. The photographs in this collection are of Willis with artists Hughie Lee-Smith and Jacob Lawrence.

### **Arrangement Note**

Arranged alphabetically by record type.

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## Container List

Box	Folder	Content
1	1	Correspondence, 1973-1992
1	2	Photographs, including John Willis with Hughie Lee-Smith and Jacob Lawrence, undated
1	3	Printed material: "Elizabeth Catlett Mora Making Art like the Blues," <i>The Sunday Bulletin</i> supplement (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), December 1974
1	4	Printed material: Exhibit invitations and programs, 1971-1984
1	5	Printed material: Newsletters, 1975-1976
1	6	Printed material: Rainbow Sign Gallery exhibit programs, 1972-1975
1	7	Printed material: Symposia programs, 1975-1976
1	8	Printed material: <i>Voices from the Harlem Renaissance</i> , edited by Nathan Irvin Huggins, brochure, 1976

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