

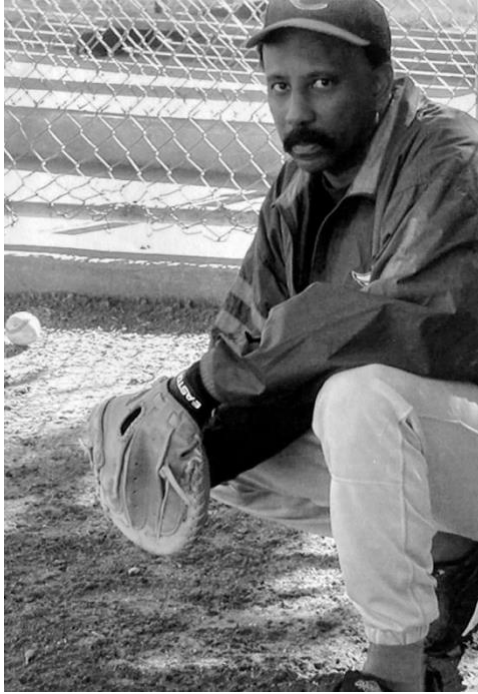


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WILL ALEXANDER ARCHIVE



Photograph of Will Alexander, courtesy of Alexander Athletics. "Poets think they are pitchers, but they are really catchers"— Jack Spicer.

Extent: Approximately 7 linear feet of documents, plus approximately 55 items containing audio material. Housed in 7 bankers boxes.

Date: ca. 1979–2017.

About Will Alexander:

Granary Books is pleased to announce the archive of Will Alexander (b. 1948 in Los Angeles), a multimodal writer and artist who has authored over thirty collections of writing. Through poetry, novels, essays, philosophy, aphorisms, plays, piano compositions, and drawings, Alexander's work explores the nature of language and being, informed by imaginative and poetic research.

With poetry as a primary expressive mode, Alexander began working on book-length projects in the 1980s after earlier forays into publishing with little magazines. He was one of the first writers published in *Hambone*, begun by Nathaniel Mackey in 1974, and likewise in *Sulfur*, edited by Clayton Eshleman. Over the years, Alexander has been published by numerous small and independent presses, including Sun & Moon Press, Jazz Press, Skylight Press, Spuyten Duyvil Publishing, Chax Press, New Directions, Essay Press, City Lights Books, and Roof Books. Alexander cites influences and interlocuters including Octavio Paz, Antonin Artaud, Bob Kaufman, Philip Lamantia, and others involved a range of surrealist and experimental writing.

Alexander was poet laureate of Los Angeles in 2014, where he has been a lifelong resident. He has received a Whiting Fellowship for Poetry, a PEN/Oakland Josephine Miles Award, a California Arts Council Fellowship, and the Jackson Poetry Prize as well as an American Book Award for *Singing in Magnetic Hoofbeat* (2013). He has taught at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, New College, University of California-San Diego, and Hofstra University. He received Big Other's Lifetime Achievement award in 2020.

The Archive:

While Alexander continues to actively write and publish, these earlier works represent a “cooled magma” of poetic thought (to borrow a simile from an interview between Alexander and Johanna Drucker, in which they discuss the archive). The archive contains all known surviving materials from ca. 1979 to 2017, housed within a compact but dense seven bankers boxes. The archive will be of particular interest to scholars of contemporary American poetry, the legacies of Surrealism, African American art and literature, Los Angeles’s poetry scene, and more.

With three boxes of manuscript drafts and two boxes of autograph notebooks, the archive is unusually dense in handwritten materials and evidence of revision. These drafts are particularly interesting in light of Alexander’s writing technique, which is invested in the idea of writing from “above,” as an automatic or external process that is channeled through the poet’s intuitive and imaginative handling of information (in contrast to the idea of writing from “below,” in the subconscious sense). The reputation of automatic writing in postwar America, as understood vis-à-vis writers like Kerouac, often suggests a minimal editing process. However, one can trace Alexander’s work as it begins with automatic writing in his notebooks, is typed and edited further on a typewriter, revised in printed word processor documents, and ultimately solidified in publisher proofs. In our current era of word processing on computers, which conceals much editorial labor, Alexander’s revising techniques make his process visible, and show the range of his interests and writing voices.

In this light, the approximately 11 linear inches of research material included in this archive are particularly relevant to Alexander’s process, which is heavily invested in poetic research as the basis of his writing. Alongside his notebooks, full of autograph notes that distill his research and contain long stretches of uninterrupted writing, and audio recordings of his piano compositions, which demonstrate his process in another medium, researchers will be able to cross-reference genres to more fully engage Alexander’s poetics.

Other aspects of the archive also include Alexander’s sports career, with recommendations for baseball players (he is an experienced catcher and athletic trainer), his interviews with incarcerated writers at his San Quentin poetry workshop, and numerous drafts of *ars poetica*-esque statements on his work.

Description of Archive

Types of Series Represented

- Series I: Drafts of Works
- Series II: Notebooks
- Series III: Research Files
- Series IV: Additional Material, Including Audio

In approximate order of largest amount to smallest amount, the archive contains manuscript and typescript drafts of literary works, printed typescripts and proofs, autograph notebooks, audio recordings, computer printouts and reference copies (at times with annotations), biographical information and material for applications/events/community projects, correspondence (mostly drafts of outgoing), and ephemera.

Drafts of Works

This archive contains all surviving materials from Alexander's earlier career through the present, including the manuscript of his first book-length work in 1988, *Vertical Rainbow Climber*, as well manuscript draft materials of novels (*Sunrise in Armageddon*, *Diary as Sin*), plays (*Treason in the Northern Theatre*), and numerous other published and unpublished works. Primarily housed in Boxes 1–3, and comprising the richest portion of the archive, most of these materials are typescripts that have been corrected by hand or typewriter and many demonstrate extensive reworkings and autograph annotations. There are also a significant number of corrected proofs and printed typescripts near their final state, in preparation for publication. Among these, a small volume of correspondence (mostly outgoing) is included, as well as biographical notes and a very slight amount of ephemera. Together, the drafts of works are 3.75 linear feet.

Notebooks

Alexander's notebooks comprise a significant trove of material evidence for his poetic process. The archive contains 46 autograph notebooks, composed from ca. 2011–2015 (though individually undated) which Alexander describes as “energy fields” or “random seatings.” Most notebooks have been completely filled with writing, including numerous extended pieces and some titled works that can be cross-referenced in the “drafts of works” series of the archive. Overall, the notebooks contain poetry, prose, and notes ranging from reading observations to rental housing to baseball statistics. At times, notebooks have check-marks next to pieces, suggesting their eventual transformation into typescripts and ultimately published work. However, Alexander does not draw a linear link between the notebooks and his manuscript drafts, which may only add to their research value as documents that characterize Alexander's associative and intuitive work.

Research Files

In an interview with Johanna Drucker for the preparation of this archive, Alexander describes himself as a “poetic scholar,” whose process engages what he calls “spontaneous research” to identify

ideas of interest through association and imagination. There are approximately 11 linear inches of materials that reflect this aspect of his process, the bulk of which are computer printouts that are annotated at times. These files are mostly housed in Box 4; a comparably small amount of research materials is housed directly alongside manuscripts in Boxes 1–3.

While future researchers of the archive will be able to deepen the connections between Alexander’s research and his writing, first glance reveals a strong interest in two opposing poles: individuals and subjects of interest. There are many biographical notes about people, including Aimé Césaire, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte, Mircea Eliade, Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, John Coltrane, Nick Brandt, Vladimir Nabokov, Heraclitus, Octavia Butler, and many other historical, literary, artistic, and scientific figures. Larger topics include the Moors in Spain, Egyptology, extraterrestrials, cosmology, transhumanism, Bon Buddhism, the modern oil industry, Islamic architecture, volcanoes, deep time, and more.

Additional Materials, Including Audio

Alexander’s archive also contains exhibition materials related to projects at Beyond Baroque, reviews of his work by Kevin Killian, *HTMLGIANT*, Arkava Das, Patrick James Dunagan, and others, and reviews by Alexander. Additionally, the archive contains interviews on Alexander’s poetry workshop at San Quentin along with program notes; drawings; resumes and biographical notes for applications; a comic art project with Kerry James Marshall; and works by poet Sotère Torregian, as well as folders dedicated to other poets including Heller Levinson, Marie Wilson, Brian Lucas, Michael Keenan, Carlos Lara, and other collaborators. These are mostly housed in Boxes 1–3.

This collection also contains approximately 55 audio recordings from Alexander’s collection, including recorded interviews and recordings of his piano playing. While Alexander does not formally identify as a musician, his playing is part of his poetic practice to explore ideas and information. Alexander indicates that the composition process for these pieces is similar to his process for both writing and drawing. Drawing, too, is represented in the notebooks and “drafts of work” series.

Notes on the Inventory

Throughout the inventory, page and leaf numbers are approximate. Unless otherwise specified, only page numbers are provided when they correspond to number of leaves. “Copied” refers to an item that has been duplicated through some form of xerographic or other home office means. Copied typescripts, for instance, often appear as part of the revision process; Alexander would handwrite pieces, type them, and copy them to then make additional corrections. “Printed typescript” refers to a document that was typed in a word processor, and then printed. “Computer printout” refers to a printed sheet of paper not from a word processor, usually an online source.

Files are preserved in the original order as filed by Will Alexander, Johanna Drucker, and Maxwell Holland at Beyond Baroque Literary Arts Center.

According to the poet, there are also a number of unpublished manuscripts within the archive, including *Interval of Dormancy*, *Treason in the Northern Theatre*, *One's Organic Intuition*, and *Random Notes and Fragments*.

Select Bibliography of Published Works

The following are book-length projects by Alexander that are represented in various forms within the archive. This list is chronological, and not necessarily comprehensive.

Little magazines, magazines, and online magazines in which Alexander's work is represented (regarding projects represented in the archive) include *Your Impossible Voice* (2014), *Tripwire*, *Entropy*, *Alligatorzine*, *The Fiend*, *Granta* (2016), *Hambone*, *River Styx* (1979), and others.

Vertical Rainbow Climber. Jazz Press, 1987.

Arcane Lavender Morals. Leave Books, 1994.

The Stratospheric Canticles. Pantograph Press, 1995.

Poems for the Millennium, ed. Jerome Rothenberg and Pierre Joris. University of California Press, 1995.

American Poets Say Goodbye to the 20th Century, ed. Andrei Codrescu and Laura Rosenthal. Four Walls Eight Windows, 1996.

Above the Human Nerve Domain. Pavement Saw Press, 1998.

Towards the Primeval Lightning Field. O Books, 1998.

Sunrise in Armageddon. Spuyten Duyvil Publishing, 2006.

The Sri Lankan Loxodrome. New Directions Publishing, 2009.

Diary as Sin. Skylight Press, 2011.

Inside the Earthquake Palace. Chax Press, 2011.

Compression & Purity. City Lights, 2011.

Kaleidoscopic Omniscience. Skylight Press, 2012.

Singing in Magnetic Hoofbeat. Essay Press, 2012.

The Brimstone Boat. Rêve à Deux, 2012.

Alien Weaving. Anonymous Energy, 2010.

Secrets Prior to the Sun. White Print Inc., 2015.

Spectral Hieroglyphics. Rêve à Deux, 2016.

The Audiographic as Data. Anonymous Energy, 2016.

Across the Vapour Gulf. New Directions, 2017.

At Night on the Sun. Chax Press, 2017.

The Combustion Cycle, Roof Books, 2021.

Refracting Africa. City Lights, forthcoming.

On Dar El Hikma. Africa World Press, forthcoming.