

# Basic Detail Report

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## Governor Williams

John Coppin, G. Mennen Williams

Governor

### Date

c. 1960

### Medium

oil paint

### Dimensions

92 1/2 x 67 in. (235 x 170.2 cm)

Paintings

### Object number

CA.2025.03.057

Michigan State Capitol Building (100 N. Capitol Ave), Floor 3, Rotunda, Southeast Quadrant

The artistic choices made in this painting of Governor G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams help to communicate his

identity and values clearly to the viewer. As in many Capitol portraits, artist John Coppin uses symbolic objects to explain Williams' priorities and achievements as the state's leader. The six red Michigan Manuals on the desk beside him nod to his six terms in office, while the presence of a cross and Episcopalian book of prayer show his ties to religion. He wears his trademark polka dot green bow tie, and the Mackinac Bridge, built during his term, stretches out across the background. Coppin goes further than just these direct symbols, however. The way in which he paints Williams alone communicates a great deal about the man's personality and demeanor. Williams is pictured sitting in a relaxed fashion, leaning back in his chair as if making space for the viewer to join him. He gazes directly out at his audience, and the wrinkle lines created by his smile ensure that the look is not alarming, but rather welcoming. The choice to smile in a formal portrait is unusual; generally, sitters are painted with a more neutral, ambiguous expression that allows for a more complex reading of the piece. It is likely that Williams requested a smile, as the other Michigan governors painted by Coppin are not shown smiling. This suggests a healthy level of communication between Williams and his artist, and a strong desire for the governor to be painted in a genial fashion.