

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elizabeth Catlett

PERSON

Catlett, Elizabeth, 1915-2012

**Alternative Names:** Elizabeth Catlett;

**Life Dates:** April 15, 1915-April 2, 2012

**Place of Birth:** Washington, District of Columbia, USA

**Work:** New York, NY

**Occupations:** Printmaker; Sculptor

## Biographical Note

Acclaimed printer maker and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett was born on April 15, 1915, in Washington, D.C. Growing up with grandparents who had been slaves, she was very aware of the injustices against black women. She attended Lucretia Mott Elementary School, Dunbar High School and then Howard University School of Art where she graduated cum laude in 1936. After she became the first student to earn an MFA degree in sculpture from the University of Iowa in 1940, she studied ceramics at the Art Institute of Chicago and later in New York she studied lithography at the Art Students League.

In 1946, Catlett accepted an invitation to work in Mexico City's Taller de Grafica Popular, a collective graphic arts and mural workshop. There she cultivated the theme for her work, the African American Woman. In 1947, she produced her first major show "I am a Negro Woman," a series of sculptures, prints, and paintings through a Julius Rosenwald Foundation fellowship, which toured black women's colleges in the South. That same year she married Mexican painter Francisco Mora. A lively community of artists surrounded her and Mora, including Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo. From 1958 through 1976, she directed the sculpture department at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

In 1993, Catlett received her first New York City exhibition since 1971 and in 1998 the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York honored her with a fifty year retrospective. Her paintings and sculptures were in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, in New York, the Baltimore Museum of Art and the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Catlett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 26, 2005 and July 27, 2005.

Catlett passed away on April 4, 2012 at age 96.

## Related Entries

**Paul Laurence Dunbar High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Lucretia Mott Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Howard University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**B.A.**

**University of Iowa** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**MFA**

**Art Students League of New York** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**School of the Art Institute of Chicago** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**George Washington Carver School** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Art Teacher**

**Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1958 to 1975]

**Head of the Sculpture Department**