

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Tinnie, Dinizulu Gene, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 23, 2017 and March 6, 2017
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2017
<b>Physical Description:</b>	14 uncompressed MOV digital video files (7:10:22).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Professor and artist Dinizulu Gene Tinnie (1942 - ) designed the inaugural museum space of the Boston African American Museum in 1974, and also designed exhibitions and installations at the Old Dillard Museum in Fort Lauderdale. His works can be seen in numerous locations around Miami and Boston. Tinnie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 23, 2017 and March 6, 2017, in Miami, Florida. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2017_018
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Professor and artist Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was born Gene Sinclair Tinnie on February 25, 1942, in the South Bronx, New York. Tinnie attended Suffolk County Community College, earning his A.A. degree, with Science Emphasis, in 1962. He continued his studies at the State University of New York-Stony Brook, with a B.A. degree in French in 1965, minoring in education and Spanish. In 1966, Tinnie earned a Fulbright scholarship to study French language, history and culture at the Université de Caen, France, receiving a *Diplôme supérieur d'études françaises* in 1967, and, in 1968, his *Licence ès Lettres* degree from the Université de Nancy. He would go on to earn his M.A. degree in French literature and linguistics from Queens College, City University of New York, in 1970.

Following his graduation, Tinnie worked as a linguist for the Black Dialect Project at the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in Los Angeles, California, while also continuing graduate studies in linguistics at UCLA.

Relocating to Boston, Massachusetts, he served as a project coordinator and artist-in-residence at Circle Associates educational consulting firm, and would be featured in his first exhibition, entitled "Black Artists," in 1974 at Horticultural Hall, the same year he designed the inaugural museum space and exhibition of the new Boston African American Museum.

Subsequently moving to Miami, Florida, he joined the Miami Black Arts Workshop as an artist, designer, and project coordinator, serving in that position until 1983, and would become a founding member of the Kuumba Artists Collective of South Florida. Tinnie was an adjunct professor of English, humanities, and art appreciation at Miami-Dade Community College from 1975 to 1995, and joined Florida Memorial College in 1982, going on to serve in several positions that included art department chair. He also designed exhibitions for the Old Dillard

Museum in Fort Lauderdale, and supplemental “*After the Henrietta Marie*” historical exhibitions in conjunction with the touring “*A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie*” exhibition, created by the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society in 1995.

Tinnie’s public art commissions in South Florida include “Remembrance of the Way,” “Trilogy for Dr. King,” “The World is a Garden in which All Are One,” “A Gathering of Spirits,” the Richmond Heights Pioneers Monument, and the artwork on the Key West African Cemetery memorial monument. Major exhibitions include “I Remember the March on Washington,” (DC and Houston) and “*Dinizulu Gene Tinnie: an Overview*” (Miami).

Tinnie is the founder and co-director of the *Dos Amigos/Fair Rosamond* Slave Ship Replica Project. Publications discussing Tinnie’s research on the history of the Middle Passage have appeared in publications such as the *Journal of African American History*, *Florida History*, *FlaVour* magazine, and *Islas* bilingual quarterly.

In addition, he is chair of the City of Miami Virginia Key Beach Park Trust, and serves on several other boards related to historic preservation.

Tinnie and his wife, Dr. Wallis Hamm Tinnie, have two daughters.

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 23, 2017.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 23, 2017 and March 6, 2017, in Miami, Florida, and was recorded on 14 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Professor and artist Dinizulu Gene Tinnie (1942 - ) designed the inaugural museum space of the Boston African American Museum in 1974, and also designed exhibitions and installations at the Old Dillard Museum in Fort Lauderdale. His works can be seen in numerous locations around Miami and Boston.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Tinnie, Dinizulu Gene, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Tinnie, Dinizulu Gene, 1942- --Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Muralist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, January 23, 2017 and March 6, 2017. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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# Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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# Detailed Description of the Collection

## Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_001, TRT: 1:32:57 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was born on February 25, 1942 in New York City to Johanna Wittingham Tinnie and Albert Tinnie. His maternal great-grandfather was half Portuguese. Tinnie's mother emigrated from Jamaica with her aunt when she was twelve years old, and joined her mother in New York City during the Harlem Renaissance. There, she witnessed the Marcus Garvey movement, including the activities of the Black Cross Nurses and the African Legion. She attended Wadleigh High School for Girls, where she made lifelong friends, among whom Tinnie's parents later became known for their parties. Tinnie's paternal family originated in British Guiana, where his grandmother worked as a seamstress and his paternal grandfather and father were mechanics in the sugar industry. When Tinnie's grandfather died, his father moved to the island of St. Kitts to work at a newly constructed sugar refinery. Tinnie also talks about his name, Dinizulu, which he adopted while working with the African Liberation Support Committee.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:06 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie's father, Albert Tinnie, moved to New York City in 1923. He sought a mechanic position at American Sugar Refining Company, but was rejected due his race. Dissatisfied with custodial work, he became an elevator operator at Warren-Nash Motor Corporation and J.C. Penney Company, where he met department store founder James Cash Penney. Later, while working as a clerk at the U.S. Post Office Lenox Hill Station, Tinnie's father made deliveries to Getty Oil founder J. Paul Getty and Radio Corporation of America founder David Sarnoff. Tinnie remembers his parents' commitment to gaining permanent U.S. citizenship, and their dedication to activism as members of New York City's Jackson Democratic Club. They also raised six children, of whom Tinnie was the second born. Spurred by the increase in drug use in the Bronx during the 1950s, Tinnie moved with his family to the Middle Island neighborhood on Long Island when he was twelve years old.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_003, TRT: 3:29:17 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie spent his early childhood in the Morrisania neighborhood of the Bronx, New York, where his peers included activist Stokely Carmichael, vocalist Maxine Sullivan and bassist Milt Hinton. He was a fan of the New York Yankees, and frequented the American Museum of National History with his father. Tinnie was interested in art from a young age, and often watched a John Gnagy's drawing program on television. He liked to draw cars, and also built model cars and airplanes. Tinnie began his education at P.S. 54; and, after his family converted to Catholicism at St. Anthony of Padua Church, he completed

the seventh and eighth grade at St. Anthony's School. He briefly attended Bishop Dubois High School in Washington Heights, and then moved to Long Island with his family. At this point in the interview, Tinnie remembers learning about the events of Civil Rights Movement, including the Little Rock Nine, Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka and the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_004, TRT: 4:30:58 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie attended Earl L. Vandermeulen High School in Port Jefferson, New York, where he learned about the folklore of Long Island. He graduated in 1959, and enrolled at the Suffolk County Community College in Selden, New York, where he became interested in the French language. Tinnie transferred to Stony Brook University, and began a bachelor's degree in French. For a time, he played basketball with the Harlem Wizards; but, frustrated by the minstrel theatrics and low wages, he quit the team to focus on his studies. After briefly teaching at a high school in New York, Tinnie was named a Fulbright Scholar, and left to study in France. While hitchhiking in Spain and Morocco, he met a stranger who convinced him to pursue art, which he had abandoned to accommodate his demanding courseload at Stony Brook University. Many years later, Tinnie was honored with the African American Achievers Award for his artistry and community work.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_005, TRT: 5:32:05 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was preparing for a civil rights rally at New York's Stony Brook University when he learned of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Texas. Later, Tinnie's cousin, a musician in Kennedy's motorcade, called the family with firsthand details of the shooting. Disillusioned with social activism after Malcom X's murder and the Freedom Rider bus burning in Anniston, Alabama, Tinnie decided to focus on his coursework at Stony Brook University, where he was one of two African American students on campus. In 1965, Tinnie graduated with a bachelor's degree in French, and briefly taught at a high school in New York. Shortly afterwards, he was named a Fulbright Scholar, which allowed him to study the French language, history and culture at the University of Caen Normandy in France. Tinnie also played amateur basketball in France for a year. During the breaks from school, he hitchhiked through France, Spain and Morocco.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:16 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie became aware of the Pan-African movement because of the highly publicized First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal in 1966. He was also influenced by Pan-Africanist Frantz Fanon's books, 'Black Skin, White Masks' and 'The Wretched of the Earth.' Tinnie was exempt from serving in the Vietnam War because of his 6'10" stature, and studied the French language and literature in France during the 1960s. There, he became sympathetic to the North Vietnamese after learning about their colonial history. He also studied French history, and read about the friendships between French soldiers and African American soldiers during World War I. Tinnie returned to the United States in 1968, after hearing the news of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. In 1970, he earned a master's degree in French literature from Queens College in New York City. He wrote his thesis on the French poet Francis Villon, whose poetry evoked the works of Haki Madhubuti and Sonia Sanchez.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_007, TRT:

7:30:43 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie worked as a linguist for a black dialect project conducted by the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Research and Development in Los Angeles, California. During this time, he avoided activist groups like the Black Panther Party and Maulana Karenga's US Organization, especially after the groups' deadly shooting at the University of California, Los Angeles. In 1970, Tinnie moved to Boston, Massachusetts to serve as a project coordinator and photographer at Circle Associates, where he worked with scholars Willard Johnson and Vivian R. Johnson. While employed at Circle Associates, Tinnie was inspired by Owusu Sadaukai's African Liberation Day efforts, and joined the African Liberation Support Committee. Tinnie also achieved prominence within Boston's art community. He was commissioned by state legislator Byron Rushing to design the interior of the American Museum of Negro History, and his art was featured in an exhibit of black artists at Boston's Horticultural Hall.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_001\_008, TRT: 8:32:38 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie joined the African Liberation Support Committee while living in Boston, Massachusetts. With the group, he raised funds to support the liberation of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Tinnie remembers the influence of the Black Arts movement on television and theater, including the television show 'Roots' and Ed Bullins' plays. He was also inspired by Pharoah Sanders' album, 'Black Unity,' and Roy Ayers' album, 'Red, Black & Green.' In 1974, Tinnie moved to Miami, Florida, where he worked as an English instructor at the Opportunities Industrialization Center. He then became a project coordinator and resident artist at the Miami Black Arts Workshop. In 1978, Tinnie installed his wood sculpture, 'Remembrance of the Way,' in the predominantly black Overtown neighborhood. Tinnie also remembers the civil uprisings of 1980, which occurred in response to the acquittal of the four Miami police officers responsible for the killing of Arthur McDuffie.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_009, TRT: 9:30:58 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was a member of the Miami Black Arts Workshop in Miami, Florida. Founded in 1969 at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, the group's early members included student artists Roland Woods, Jr., Walter Dennis, Donald McKnight and Robert McKnight. The organization sought to improve public awareness of black art and the global black artist aesthetic, and to mentor the younger generation through afterschool programs. They also coordinated the 'Hidden Talent' exhibit, which featured the art of prison inmates in Florida. In 1987, Tinnie and the local art community held a celebration for Marcus Garvey's hundredth birthday, where they honored James Nimmo, who was an original member of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). At this point in the interview, Tinnie talks about the history of Miami, including the Underground Railroad escape route that led to the Bahamas, wade-ins during the Civil Rights Movement and the founding of the all-black Overtown neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_010, TRT: 10:32:02 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie began carving wood sculptures in 1959. Assisted by members of the Miami Black Arts Workshop, Tinnie created the woodwork 'Remembrance of The Way' for Henry Reeves Park in Miami, Florida. The

piece was inspired by Ayi Kwei Armah's book 'Two Thousand Seasons,' and became well known in the community. Tinnie was also commissioned to craft relief carvings on the trellis beams at Miami's Coral Reef Branch Library. The installation was removed after sustaining damage during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Tinnie also participated in the Miami Black Arts Workshop's exhibition at the Northside Shopping Center. At this point, he talks about the importance of government commissioned public art, and programs like the Works Progress Administration and the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA). He also describes the mural at Sherdavia Jenkins Peace Park, which was created by the Inner City Illustrators, LLC of Miami Beach, Florida. The park's namesake was the victim of gun violence in 2006.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_011, TRT: 11:28:30 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was a member of the National Conference of Artists and the Kuumba Artists Association of Florida, Inc., which was established in 1980 by Emily Barefield. Tinnie began his teaching career at Reverend Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Center. He went on to teach adult French classes at Coral Reef Senior High School in Miami, Florida, and various courses in French, Spanish and English at Miami-Dade Junior College and the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. In 1982, Tinnie was recruited by music professor Alfred Pinkston to join the faculty at Florida Memorial College. He started as an adjunct professor, and was eventually promoted to chairperson of the art department. While there, he worked with theater professor Patricia Warren, and artists Pamela Bowens-Saffo and Roland Woods, Jr. Tinnie talks about the influence of the mural at Sherdavia Jenkins Peace Park. He also shares his views on graffiti, and his hopes for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard in Miami.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_012, TRT: 12:29:59 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie participated in the Free South Africa Movement during the 1980s. He was also involved with the Kuumba Artists Association of Florida, Inc., which held art auctions to benefit The Black Archives History and Research Foundation of South Florida, Inc. and the Haitian Refugee Center in Miami, Florida. In 1992, Nelson Mandela visited Miami Beach. He was shunned by local government officials for his connection to Fidel Castro, but received support from grassroots demonstrators. Tinnie created a sign to show his support, but was unable to attend the gathering, as he was in New York City tending to his sick mother, who died shortly afterwards. In 1986, Tinnie learned about the Henrietta Marie slave ship, which sunk during a storm in the 1700s. Later, he met archaeologist Corey Malcom at the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum, and helped organize an underwater memorial at the site of the wreckage in 1992. Tinnie also talks about the slave trade by Britain and the United States during the 19th century.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_013, TRT: 13:28:42 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was asked to join the design committee for the African Cemetery at Higgs Beach in Key West, Florida in 2005. Through the research of amateur historian Gail Swanson, fifteen African graves dating to 1860 were discovered at the site in 1996. Tinnie and the Nigerian artist Johnson Odibi were nominated by activist Norma Jean Sawyer and chosen to create the memorial, which featured sculpted columns with Adinkra symbols. Tinnie went on to design the 'Richmond Heights Pioneers Monument' in the Richmond Heights

community of Miami, Florida. He also created small pieces like the 'Duke's Flight' collage and the African and Native American influenced 'A Gathering of Spirits.' His collage 'In the Wake of Columbus' was acquired by poet Maya Angelou. In addition to his art career, Tinnie served on the boards of the Urban Environment League of Greater Miami, Inc.; the Mel Fisher Maritime Museum in Key West; and the New Birth Corporation, Inc. He was also chairman of the Virginia Key Beach Park Trust.

Video Oral History Interview with Dinizulu Gene Tinnie, Section A2017\_018\_002\_014, TRT: 14:31:11 ?

Dinizulu Gene Tinnie was a well-known wood sculptor and visual artist in the community of Miami, Florida. He talks about the city's art scene, including the Art Africa Miami Arts Fair in Overtown and the Art Basel festival at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Tinnie partnered with the local activist and politician M. Athalie Range to restore Virginia Key Beach Park, a historic all-black beach in Miami. The park reopened in 2008 with the addition of a museum that commemorates its history. At this point in the interview, Tinnie talks about his family, which included his wife, Wallis Hamm Tinnie, and their daughters, Antoinette Riley and Michelle Riley. He also reflects upon his life, legacy and hopes and concerns for the African American community. Tinnie concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.