

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Geraldine McCullough

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	McCullough, Geraldine, 1917-2008
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough,
Dates:	March 20, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:52:58).
Abstract:	Art professor, painter, and sculptor Geraldine McCullough (1917 - 2008) was an award winning sculptor and painter whose works were informed by African ritual art and European and American influences. From 1967-1989, McCullough was the chairperson of the Art Department at Rosary College (later Dominican University) in Chicago. McCullough was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 20, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_052
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Renowned sculptor and painter Geraldine McCullough was born Geraldine Hamilton on December 1, 1917 in Kingston, Arkansas, and raised in Chicago from the time she was three years old. McCullough attended the Art Institute of Chicago for undergraduate and graduate studies, receiving her B.A. degree in 1948 and her M.A. degree in art education in 1955. As a student, she earned a John D. Standercker Scholarship, a Memorial Scholarship and a Figure Painting Citation.

After completing her graduate studies, McCullough taught art at Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago. She also began exhibiting her paintings at various national galleries, receiving first prize in 1961 at the Art Exhibit of Atlanta University. With help from her husband, Lester McCullough, she took up welded sculpture and made her sculpting debut in 1963 at the Century of Negro Progress Exposition in Chicago. She received the George D. Widener Gold Medal for Sculpture in 1965 for her steel and copper structure, Phoenix.

In 1967, she became the chairperson of the Art Department at Rosary College (later Dominican University) in River Forest, Illinois. Upon her retirement from the school in 1989, she was given an honorary doctorate.

McCullough's various works were informed by African ritual art to European and American influences. She was a distinguished guest artist of the Russian government and her work was exhibited at such respected institutions as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and the National Woman's Museum.

McCullough passed away on December 15, 2008 at the age of 91.

McCullough was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 12, 2002.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Geraldine McCullough was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 20, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Art professor, painter, and sculptor Geraldine McCullough (1917 - 2008) was an award winning sculptor and painter whose works were informed by African ritual art and European and American influences. From 1967-1989, McCullough was the chairperson of the Art Department at Rosary College (later Dominican University) in Chicago.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

McCullough, Geraldine, 1917-2008

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

McCullough, Geraldine, 1917-2008--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Painter

Sculptor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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 Geraldine McCullough, March 20, 2003. 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_001, TRT: 0:28:45 ?

Geraldine McCullough was born on December 1, 1917 in Kingston, Arkansas. Her mother, Esther Duke Hamilton, Her maternal grandfather Jesse C. Duke was a Mason, had a newspaper publishing company and debated with Booker T.

Washington. Duke fled to Pine Bluff, Arkansas disguised as a woman in order to evade the Ku Klux Klan lynch mob. Her mother graduated from Barber-Scotia College in Charlotte, North Carolina and married her father in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. She worked as a teacher and had five children. McCullough's cousin is HistoryMaker Amy Billingsley. Her uncle, Charles S. Duke, a Harvard University graduate and prominent Chicago architect, encouraged her parents to migrate to Chicago, Illinois when McCullough was three years old. Her father, Hugh Hamilton, was a tall, unassertive man who earned his high school certificate through her mother's tutoring. Her mother was a short, spirited, religious woman. As a child, McCullough visited the Field Museum of Natural History and grew up on Chicago's South Side.

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_002, TRT: 0:29:01 ?

Geraldine McCullough describes her childhood. After her family moved to the South Side of Chicago from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, her father, Hugh Hamilton, worked for Commonwealth Edison. McCullough remembers the smell of cantaloupe and cherry ice cream, the sight of Saint Xavier College from her family's apartment, and the sounds of streetcars. McCullough had an early interest in drawing, particularly doodling, and enjoyed visiting the Art Institute of Chicago. She attended Wilmer Elementary School which she hated and she recalls a German poem the teacher taught them. At Hyde Park High School, McCullough participated in the swim team, field hockey, and worked on the yearbook but she felt socially isolated from the white students and was not allowed to attend the prom. McCullough shares her struggle with theology and her study of comparative religions. She describes the Baptist church that her family attended as prim and proper and not offering social activities for youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_003, TRT: 0:28:05 ?

Geraldine McCullough describes her education and early art career. After marrying Lester McCullough and saving money, McCullough attended the Art Institute of Chicago for undergraduate and graduate studies, receiving her B.A. degree in 1948 and her M.A. degree in art education in 1955. As a student, she earned a John D. Standercker Scholarship. After completing her graduate studies, McCullough taught art at Wendell Phillips High School in Chicago. She also began exhibiting her paintings at various national galleries and held weekend workshops with jewelry maker Lee Peck. With help from her husband, she took up welded sculpture. She received the George D. Widener Gold Medal for Sculpture in 1965 for her steel and copper structure, entitled the Phoenix. McCullough received great publicity for this award including coverage in Time magazine. In 1967, she became the chairperson of the Art Department at Rosary College (later Dominican University) in River Forest, Illinois.

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_004, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

Geraldine McCullough describes the major themes found in her artwork. Her sculpture, The Phoenix, which won the 1965 George D. Widener Gold Medal for Sculpture, was inspired by Maywood, Illinois which she described as a town that deteriorated and then was rebuilt like the myth of the phoenix. McCullough states that her artwork was also inspired by Sepik River in Papua, New Guinea and African and Mayan art. She also views art as a way to transmit the dream world and relies heavily on doodling to tap into the unconscious organization of space in her work. While most of her artwork is abstract, McCullough has occasionally produced works based in realism, such as the statue of Reverend

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Springfield, Illinois. McCullough prefers to allow others to interpret her artwork, and she believes that the quality of artwork does not depend on how much time one spends creating it. In regard to the black aesthetic movement of the 1960s, she believes that artists are influenced by their environment.

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_005, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Geraldine McCullough talks about her art career. She describes her art piece “Echo” and how she has managed a successful career despite not being able to negotiate the business side of the art world. She comments on the growing importance of creativity in the business and legal fields. While there are very few black female sculptors, McCullough befriended a white artist named Margot McMahaon Burke in Oak Park, Illinois. She discusses her ambivalence as to whether formal art training is necessary. McCullough also talks about her favorite sculptures that she has created, her public art, and government support of the arts. McCullough shares her hopes and concerns for the black community and gives advice to young artists. She concludes by reflecting upon her legacy and talking about her family.

Video Oral History Interview with Geraldine McCullough, Section A2003_052_001_006, TRT: 0:28:22 ?

Geraldine McCullough narrates her photographs.