



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Nick Cave

---

## 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>	Cave, Nick
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave,
<b>Dates:</b>	July 22, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:19:30).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Art professor and performance artist Nick Cave (1959 - ) is known for his "soundsuits," suits that ritualize Cave's feelings about the isolation and insulation attendant to being a black male in America. Cave has been part of School of the Art Institute of Chicago faculty for nearly twenty years. Cave was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 22, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_104
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art professor and performance artist Nick Cave was born February 4, 1959 in Fulton, Missouri. His mother, Sharon, raised him and his seven brothers. As a student at George Washington Carver School in Fulton, Missouri and at West Junior High School in Columbia, Missouri, Cave showed creativity and artistic ability at a young age. Graduating from Hickman High School in 1977, he enrolled in the Kansas City Art Institute where he continued to express himself through both visual art and performance art. In 1979, Cave met Alvin Ailey and spent that summer and several summers thereafter in New York, New York studying with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. After graduating from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1981, he designed displays for the department store, Macy's, and worked professionally as a fashion designer, while continuing his passions as an artist and dancer. Cave earned his M.F.A. degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan in 1988.

Joining the faculty of the Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois after his graduation from Cranbrook, Cave has built a reputation as an educator and performance artist, especially with his ritualistic costumes called "soundsuits." These sculpted, full body "soundsuits" are layered and textured in metal, plastic, fabric, hair, and objects designed to rattle and resonate in concert with the movement of the wearer, usually Cave himself. The suits represent Cave's feelings about the isolation and insulation attendant to being a African American man in America. One of Cave's well-known projects is "Drop: Soundsuits in Degrees of Observation," a performance parade featuring ten dancers and sixty "Soundsuits." In 2007, he planned an event in Chicago involving three dance companies, musicians and over 120 sculptured suits.

As the director of the graduate fashion program at the Art Institute of Chicago, Cave enjoys working with students and sharing his knowledge and experiences. His works of art have been shown at the Los Angeles Art

Show in Los Angeles, California and the Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, Washington. Exhibitions of his assemblage sculptures in The Arts Connexion in Amsterdam, Holland, and Kestener Museum in Hannover, Germany have earned Cave an international following.

Nick Cave was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on July 22, 2004.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Nick Cave was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 22, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Art professor and performance artist Nick Cave (1959 - ) is known for his "soundsuits," suits that ritualize Cave's feelings about the isolation and insulation attendant to being a black male in America. Cave has been part of School of the Art Institute of Chicago faculty for nearly twenty years.

---

## 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:

Cave, Nick, 1959-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cave, Nick, 1959- --Interviews

---

African American artists--Interviews

---

African American artists as teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

---

## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

---

## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers

---

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 Nick Cave, July 22, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/15/2011 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, July 22, 2004

Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave, Section A2004\_104\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:20  
2004/07/22

Nick Cave slates the interview. Cave then describes his family history and his childhood in Missouri. His grandmother was a seamstress who Cave cites as an inspiration for his own fashion design career. Cave recounts growing up with seven brothers and how his mother worked very hard to raise her eight sons right. His parents separated when he was young and his contact with his father was sporadic. The sights, smells, and sounds of his childhood were informed by memories of spending time on his maternal grandparents' farm. When he was thirteen years old, he and his family moved from Fulton, Missouri to Columbia, Missouri.

African American families--Missouri--History.

African American children--Missouri.

Single-parent families--Missouri.

African American grandmothers--Missouri.

Grandparent and child--Missouri.

Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave, Section A2004\_104\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:30  
2004/07/22

Nick Cave recounts his childhood and the different influences that shaped his artistic career: musical artists, like Michael Jackson and his family, including his uncle who was painter. Growing up he read a lot, including short novels, books on art history, and magazines like "Jet" and "Ebony." Cave had a creative childhood with his brothers doing projects like watercolor painting, macramé, and performing in the church choir. Cave remembers how his high school art teacher, Mrs. McRitt, encouraged him to apply to art school and how he was accepted into the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri.

African American children--Education.

Art--Study and teaching.

African Americans--Education (Higher)--Missouri--Kansas City.

Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave, Section A2004\_104\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:50  
2004/07/22

At Kansas Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri Nick Cave found art school to be liberating because he was immersed in the study of art with other artists. After Kansas Art Institute, he attended University of Missouri-Kansas City and shifted his attention from the visual arts to performance arts. As his studies continued, he began to contemplate how he could incorporate visual art into performance art. Cave discusses how he got involved with dance after seeing Alvin Ailey perform. He went to New York during the summer when he was twenty years old and eventually joined the Alvin Ailey Dance Company and spent four summers with the company. Working with Alvin Ailey inspired Cave to design his own costumes, as well as costumes for others.

Art--studying and teaching.

African American men--Education (Higher).

Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre--Missouri.

Fashion design.

African American fashion designers.

Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave, Section A2004\_104\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:50  
2004/07/22

Nick Cave describes his fashion career and his performance art pieces. After finishing art school, Cave was hired as the visual director at Macy's in Kansas City, Missouri. After leaving that position, he opened his own studio, began designing for clients, and organizing fashion shows. Cave then talks about his graduate studies at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where he was one of the few people of color and he had difficulty adjusting to the new cultural environment. He experienced racial profiling for the first time and it affected his racial identity. These experiences, Cave explains, shaped his most well-known art exhibition, "Soundsuits," which explores the isolation African American men have felt in American society.

African American artists.

African American fashion designers.

Race relations--Education.

Art--Studying and teaching.

Macy's (Firm)--Employees.

Cranbrook Academy of Art--Students.

Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave, Section A2004\_104\_001\_005, TRT: 0:22:00  
2004/07/22

Nick Cave explains "Soundsuits," an exhibition which came to Chicago in 2006 at the Chicago Cultural Center. He then describes another soundsuit project from 2007 entitled "Soundsuits: Hollaback" which consisted of a soundsuit exhibition as well as an accompanying soundsuit performance. His artistic goal is to start discourses on diversity and multiculturalism. He believes that art is a vehicle he can use to deliver his message. Cave also describes his career as an art educator and his position as co-chair of the fashion design department of the Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. He explains that African American artists have to continue to advocate and struggle to have their voices heard. Cave wants to be remembered for making a major contribution to the arts and for being an artist who celebrated diversity.

African American art--Exhibitions.

Clothing and dress in art--Exhibitions.

Performance art.

Art--Studying and teaching.

Multiculturalism.

Cultural diversity.

Art Institute of Chicago--Faculty.

African Americans--Conduct of life.