

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Cave, Nick, 1959-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Nick Cave,
Dates:	July 22, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:20:40).
Abstract:	Performance artist and art professor Nick Cave (1959 -) was known for his "Soundsuits," suits that ritualize Cave's feelings about the isolation and insulation that characterizes being a black male in America. Cave was a part of the 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.
Identification:	A2004_104
Language:	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 Betacame SP videocassettes. Performance artist and art professor Nick Cave (1959 -) was known for his "Soundsuits," suits that ritualize Cave's feelings about the isolation and insulation that characterizes being a black male in America. Cave was a part of the 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

Occupations:

Performance Artist

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 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 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 Nick Cave, Section A2004_104_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Nick Cave was born on February 4, 1959. His mother, Sharron Kelly, was born in Jefferson City, Missouri around 1939 and was one of thirteen children. She attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City and worked as a receptionist at the University of Missouri. Cave's maternal great-grandfather was a painter and a poet; his grandmother was a domestic worker and a seamstress who designed costumes for high school theater productions. The family was Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.). Cave's father, John Cave, was from Fulton, Missouri and was born around 1937. He was not in Cave's life during his childhood. Cave's paternal grandfather worked at a brick plant and his grandmother was head of maintenance at a hospital. Cave grew up in Fulton and Columbia in a family of seven boys surrounded by his extended family. He remembers family dance competitions at pig roasts and his grandmother winning awards for her baking. He describes his childhood personality and early interest in art and dance.

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 ?

Nick Cave had a sheltered childhood. He enjoyed drawing and painting and was influenced by his uncle who was an oil painter. Cave began school in Fulton, Missouri at George Washington Carver School. When he was in sixth grade his mother remarried and moved the family to Columbia, Missouri where she worked at the University of Missouri and Cave attended West Junior High School and David H. Hickman High School. Cave first began to take art seriously in seventh grade. In high school, he was involved in theatre, visual art, choir, and worked in the mailroom at the University of Missouri. He also took art classes at the University of Missouri, painted still lifes with his brothers and competed against them to demonstrate his artistic abilities. Cave's high school art teacher helped him prepare his portfolio and encouraged him to apply to the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri. Cave attended the art institute, following in the footsteps of his older brother.

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: 0:30:00 ?

Nick Cave was president of the art league, and acted in and did set design for school productions at David H. Hickman High School in Columbia, Missouri. He earned scholarships to attend Kansas City Art Institute in Missouri. There, he had the opportunity to work with artists such as Dale Chihuly and Karen Finely, and create a fashion line for a local department store. He also began to create identity-based performance art, such as 'Many Faces, Many Hats.' While in school, he was introduced to the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, and starting in 1979, performed with the company for four years during summers in New York City. In New York, Cave lived in a studio apartment with four other people, and immersed himself in the art community, making connections with fashion designers such as Stephen Sprouse. After earning his B.A. degree from Kansas City Art Institute, Cave remained in Kansas City for six months creating

performance art. Although his family did not understand his work, they were supportive of him.

Art--Study 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 ?

Nick Cave's first job after graduating from Kansas City Art Institute was at Macy's in Kansas City, Missouri. He worked there for two years as visual director and also designed clothing with a group of local artists, creating outrageous pieces for fashion shows and conservative pieces for clients. In 1986, he enrolled in an M.F.A. program at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, where he was the only black student. He remembers being racially profiled by a policeman the first time he drove into Bloomfield. At Cranbrook, he concentrated on painting and was able to focus on developing his art practice free from distraction or influence. He also connected with artists of color in nearby Detroit, Michigan. Cave graduated in 1988, and immediately accepted a position at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He began to create his signature Soundsuits in 1989, which are based on the experience of being a black man in society and take inspiration from non-Western uses of costume in ceremony.

African American artists.

African American fashion designers.

Race relations--Education.

Art--Study 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 ?

At the time of the interview, Nick Cave planned to create 140 of his signature Soundsuits for an exhibition and performance in 2007. He planned to use Chicago-based dance companies and street performers in bringing the work to life. The first component of the project debuted as an exhibition in Montana in 2004. Cave sees his Soundsuit work as a conduit for other artists and emphasizes the importance of making sure each piece had been used in performances prior to being sold. In addition to his art practice, at the time of the interview, Cave was co-chair of the fashion department at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and was in the midst of developing a graduate program within the department. He also planned to open a lifestyle store in Chicago, Illinois. Cave is close to his mother, who is very supportive of his career. He reflects upon his talents, his hopes and concerns for the African American community, how he would like to be remembered, and his legacy.

African American art--Exhibitions.

Clothing and dress in art--Exhibitions.

Performance art.

Art--Study and teaching.

Multiculturalism.

Cultural diversity.

Art Institute of Chicago--Faculty.

African Americans--Conduct of life.