

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lilian Thomas Burwell

PERSON

Burwell, Lilian Thomas, 1927-

Alternative Names: Lilian Thomas Burwell;

Life Dates: June 7, 1927-

Place of Birth: Washington, District of Columbia,
USA

Residence: Highland Beach, MD

Occupations: Painter; High School Art Teacher

Biographical Note

Artist Lilian Thomas Burwell was born in Washington, D.C. on June 7, 1927. After completing junior high school, Burwell attended the prestigious High School of Music and Art in New York City, but moved to Washington, D.C., before graduating. Burwell went on to earn her high school diploma from Dunbar High School in 1944.

Burwell had a strong desire to be an artist, however,

society, and her family, felt that she would be unable to support herself. One of Burwell's aunts believed in her though, and together they reached a compromise with her family: she would become an art teacher. In 1946, Burwell completed her studies at the Pratt Institute; she would later earn her B.A. from the D.C. Teacher's College. Burwell went on to earn her M.F.A. in 1975 from Catholic University.

Throughout her career, Burwell taught at the Pratt Institute; in the Washington, D.C. public schools; and at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Between 1964 and 1967, Burwell served as the publication and exhibits specialist for the Department of Commerce. In 1983, Burwell founded the Alma Thomas Memorial Gallery where she served as curatorial director for the next year. As an artist, Burwell's works have been included in public and private collections around the world; she was also invited to participate in numerous group and one-woman shows. Burwell went on to become the owner of Burwell Studios, which exhibited her works.

In addition to being an active lecturer in her field, Burwell also published articles on art, and served on the board of directors of the Smithsonian Institution Renwick Alliance and the Arlington Arts Centers. Burwell also served as the curatorial director of the Summer Museum Archives in Washington, D.C., and was the recipient of several awards, including the Excellence in Arts/D.C. Commission on the Arts Individual Artist Award in 1998.

Related Entries

Paul Laurence Dunbar High School [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

Pratt Institute [STUDENTOF]
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

University of the District of Columbia [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.A.

Catholic University of America [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

MFA

Pratt Institute [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1976 to 1978]

Instructor

District of Columbia Public Schools [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1970 to 1971]

Teacher

Duke Ellington School of the Arts [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1985 to 1995]

Teacher

Burwell Studios [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Owner

Summer Museum Archives [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Curatorial Director

United States Department of Commerce [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 197601 to 197701]

Publication and Exhibits Specialist

Alma Thomas Memorial Gallery [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1983 to ?]

Founder and Curatorial Director

Entitled: Black Women Artists [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]

National Conference of Artists [MEMBEROF]
[from ? to ?]