

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Elizabeth Catlett

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Catlett, Elizabeth, 1915-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett,
Dates:	July 26, 2005 and July 27, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:03:01).
Abstract:	Printmaker, art professor, and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett (1915 - 2012) was an acclaimed visual artist known for her works that explore African American themes. She was especially well-known for her depictions of a mother and child motif, both in two and three dimensions. Catlett spent much of her life in Mexico, where she directed the sculpture department at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico for nearly twenty years. Catlett was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 26, 2005 and July 27, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_170
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Acclaimed printer maker and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett was born on April 15, 1915, in Washington, D.C. Growing up with grandparents who had been slaves, she was very aware of the injustices against black women. She attended Lucretia Mott Elementary School, Dunbar High School and then Howard University

School of Art where she graduated cum laude in 1936. After she became the first student to earn an MFA degree in sculpture from the University of Iowa in 1940, she studied ceramics at the Art Institute of Chicago and later in New York she studied lithography at the Art Students League.

In 1946, Catlett accepted an invitation to work in Mexico City's Taller de Grafica Popular, a collective graphic arts and mural workshop. There she cultivated the theme for her work, the African American woman. In 1947, she produced her first major show "I am a Negro Woman," a series of sculptures, prints, and paintings through a Julius Rosenwald Foundation fellowship, which toured black women's colleges in the South. That same year she married Mexican painter Francisco Mora. A lively community of artists surrounded her and Mora, including Diego Rivera and his wife Frida Kahlo. From 1958 through 1976, she directed the sculpture department at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico.

In 1993, Catlett received her first New York City exhibition since 1971 and in 1998 the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, New York honored her with a fifty year retrospective. Her paintings and sculptures were in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum, in New York, the Baltimore Museum of Art and the New Orleans Museum of Art.

Catlett passed away on April 4, 2012 at age 96.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Elizabeth Catlett was conducted by Shawn Wilson on July 26, 2005 and July 27, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Printmaker, art professor, and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett (1915 - 2012) was an acclaimed visual artist known for her works that explore African American themes. She was especially well-known for her depictions of a mother and child motif, both in two and three dimensions. Catlett spent much of her life in Mexico, where she directed the sculpture department at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico 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:

Catlett, Elizabeth, 1915-

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Catlett, Elizabeth, 1915---Interviews

African American artists as teachers--Interviews.

African American sculptors--Interviews.

African American printmakers--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Occupations:

Printmaker

Sculptor

Art Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|EducationMakers

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 Elizabeth Catlett, July 26, 2005 and July 27, 2005. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_001_001, TRT: 0:30:24 2005/07/26

Printmaker and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett begins by describing her family background, detailing the lives of her mother and father and sharing stories about her ancestors. Catlett then describes her childhood in a middle class neighborhood in Washington, D.C. She also details her summers in North Carolina, where she stayed on a family farm. Catlett describes the rural life there and recalls her encounters with racism.

Childhood and youth--Washington (D.C.).

African American families.

Racism--North Carolina.

African American parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_001_002, TRT: 0:30:31 2005/07/26

Printmaker and sculptor Elizabeth Catlett describes her childhood and teen years in Washington D.C. at Lucretia Mott Elementary School and Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. She recalls notable classmates like Edward Brooke, Charles Hamilton Houston, and Kenneth Clark among others. Catlett also details the lives of extended family members with whom she stayed in North Carolina during her summers.

Childhood and youth--Washington (D.C.).

Education, Elementary--Washington (D.C.).

Education, Secondary--Washington (D.C.).

African American extended families--North Carolina.

Brooke, Edward W. (Edward William), 1919-2015.

Houston, Charles Hamilton, 1895-1950.

Clark, Kenneth, 1903-1983.

Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_001_003, TRT: 0:30:41 2005/07/26

Sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett details her young adult life in segregated Washington D.C. She describes the mix of classmates from Paul Laurence Dunbar School, including Senator Edward Brooke and Dr. Kenneth Clark. After discussing her early artistic expressions, Catlett describes her siblings. Catlett recalls her brother's life and early death, and contrasts her own personality with her sister's.

African Americans--Segregation--Washington (D.C.).

Brothers and sisters.

Children's art.

Clark, Kenneth, 1903-1983.

Brooke, Edward W. (Edward William), 1919-2015.

Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_002_004, TRT: 0:29:40 2005/07/27

Sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett briefly describes her high school experience at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. Catlett then describes her time at Howard University, including her studies, social life, sorority life and burgeoning artistic talent. Finally, she describes her relationship with Lois Mailou Jones,

dispelling stories that Jones influenced her.
Education, Secondary--Washington (D.C.).
Howard University.
African American college students--Activities.
Jones, Lois Mailou.

Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_002_005, TRT: 0:30:35 2005/07/27

Sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett describes campus life at Howard University, describing her increasing political awareness and her academic interest in psychology. After moving to Durham, North Carolina, Catlett describes how she became involved with protesting discrimination against African American schoolteachers in North Carolina. Catlett also explains why she wanted to leave Durham.

Howard University.
Civil rights demonstrations--North Carolina--Durham.
Discrimination against African Americans--North Carolina--Durham.
Moving, Household.

Video Oral History Interview with Elizabeth Catlett, Section
A2005_170_002_006, TRT: 0:31:10 2005/07/27

Sculptor and printmaker Elizabeth Catlett describes the efforts she made to attain a graduate education in art at the University of Iowa. She also describes how famed artist Grant Wood was influential in her artistic development and in her effort to be the first person to be awarded a Master of Fine Arts from the University of Iowa, despite opposition from a racist administrator.

University of Iowa.
Discrimination in education--Iowa.
Wood, Grant, 1891-1942.
Art--Study and teaching.