

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kevin Cole

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## 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>	Cole, Kevin, 1960-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 15, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:21:11).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Mixed media artist and art professor Kevin Cole (1960 - ) was an adjunct professor at Georgia State University's School of Art and Design until 1998. From 1992, Cole's artwork evolved from the use of the necktie as an icon, motif and symbol of power. His work emphasized the relationship between color and music, particularly jazz, blues, rap, and gospel. Cole was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 15, 2007, in Fairburn, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_009
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art professor and mixed media artist Kevin E. Cole was born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas on January 19, 1960 to Jessie and Sam Cole, Jr. He received his B.S. degree in art education from the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in 1982; his M.A. degree in art education a year later, and his M.F.A degree in drawing from Northern Illinois University in 1984.

Cole began his art career as an art teacher at Camp Creek Middle School in College Park, Georgia in 1985. At the same time, he also became an adjunct professor at Georgia State University's School of Art and Design where he remained until 1998. In 1990, Cole was chairperson of the visual and performing arts magnet program of Tri-Cities High School in East Point, Georgia until 1994. Later, in 2003, he became the chairman of the Fine Arts Department at Westlake High School where created the school's first arts program. Cole's artwork is well known for including imagery of neckties as symbols of power and emphasizes the relationship between color and music, particularly jazz, blues, hip-hop, and gospel. He incorporates patterns and textures from traditional African cloths to speak to human conditions and behaviors.

In 1994, Cole was commissioned by the Coca-Cola Company to create a fifteen story mural celebrating the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia. The mural took two years to create and was a little over 800 square feet. He has been featured in *Who's Who in Education* and received the Award of Excellence for Public Art by the Atlanta Urban Design Commission.

Cole was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on January 15, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kevin Cole was conducted by Denise Gines on January 15, 2007, in Fairburn, Georgia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mixed media artist and art professor Kevin Cole (1960 - ) was an adjunct professor at Georgia State University's School of Art and Design until 1998. From 1992, Cole's artwork evolved from the use of the necktie as an icon, motif and symbol of power. His work emphasized the relationship between color and music, particularly jazz, blues, rap, and gospel.

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## 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®.

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## 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.

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## Controlled Access Terms

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

### Persons:

Cole, Kevin, 1960-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Cole, Kevin, 1960---Interviews

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African American artists as teachers--Interviews.

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African American artists--Interviews.

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Art teachers--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Mixed Media Artist

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Art Professor

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

ArtMakers|EducationMakers

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## **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 Kevin Cole, January 15, 2007. 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole, Section  
A2007\_009\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/01/15

Kevin Cole was born January 19, 1960 in Pine Bluff, Arkansas to Jessie McGlounce Cole and Sam Cole, Jr. Cole's paternal grandfather, Sam Cole, Sr., was born in Mississippi. He settled in Terry, Arkansas with Cole's grandmother, Mable Cole, and raised soybeans and corn on their land. Cole's paternal grandfather's stories of lynchings in the area deeply influenced Cole's later art. Cole's maternal grandfather, Jessie McGlounce, worked in a steel mill and owned an apartment in Chicago after his divorce from Cole's maternal grandmother, Mariah McGlounce. She owned a blues club in Birdsong, Arkansas where B.B. King performed. Both born in 1927, Cole's parents earned GED degrees and studied at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, which Cole later attended. Cole's father instilled his children with the work ethic that he learned in the U.S. military, despite his experiences of racial discrimination from white soldiers. Cole's mother taught him how to cook, and his maternal grandfather developed his confidence.

African American families--Arkansas--Pine Bluff.

African American grandparents--Arkansas.

Grandfathers--Arkansas.

Brothers and sisters--Arkansas.

African American mothers--Arkansas--Pine Bluff.

Mothers and sons--Arkansas.

## Lynching--Southern States.

Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole, Section  
A2007\_009\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:01 2007/01/15

Kevin Cole describes growing up in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, a rural town where his family raised hogs, and he and his siblings had many chores. Cole also recalls the smell of town's paper mill. Cole was eight years old at the time of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. When he was eleven years old, Cole won a neighborhood art competition. He attended the segregated Indiana Street Elementary School until the fifth grade, when he transferred into the integrated Belair Middle School. At first, Cole experienced culture shock and fear, but with his parents' encouragement, he excelled as an artist, academic and athlete. He played basketball and football at Southeast Junior High School. At Pine Bluff High School, Cole's art teacher advised him to apply to the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, where he was inspired by artistic mentors such as Tarrance Corbin, Henri Linton and Ernest Davidson. Cole's primary medium was sculpture, and he learned to paint murals while employed as Corbin's assistant.

African American students--Education (Secondary)--  
Arkansas--Pine Bluff.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff--Students.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff--Faculty.

African American artists--Arkansas.

African American universities and colleges--Arkansas.

African American art.

Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole, Section  
A2007\_009\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:10 2007/01/15

Kevin Cole further describes his time at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff, where he pledged to the Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Cole received a full scholarship to pursue his master's degree. Cole obtained his degree in one year, graduating in 1983. Cole developed his necktie motif to honor his grandfather, Sam Cole, Sr.'s legacy. From 1984 to 1985, Cole earned his M.F.A. degree at

Northern Illinois University. A vice president of Johnson Products Company bought every piece in his graduate show, "Have You Checked the Closet?" He had experienced racial discrimination at both graduate institutions, including from a professor who claimed that only white male students would succeed as artists. Cole taught for one year at University of Wisconsin-Madison, then moved to College Park, Georgia to teach at Camp Creek Middle School. Cole names contemporary artists whom he admires, and talks about the controversial work of his former student, Kara Walker.

African American students--Education (Higher).

Art--Study and teaching.

African Americans in art.

Discrimination in education.

Gilliam, Sam, 1933-.

African American artists--United States.

University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff--Students.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign--Students.

Northern Illinois University--Students.

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity.

Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole, Section  
A2007\_009\_001\_004, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/01/15

Kevin Cole describes his relocation to Atlanta, Georgia in 1986 to teach at Georgia State University. In 1990, Cole won his first major commission to paint a mural at Atlanta City Hall. The mural, entitled 'The Sign of the Times,' won an Urban Design Award for Public Art. That year, Cole was named Teacher of the Year at Woodland Middle School. From 1990 to 1994, Cole established the Tri-Cities High School visual performing arts magnet program, and most of its students succeeded in obtaining college scholarships. In 1994, Cole was commissioned by The Coca-Cola Company to paint a large mural in honor of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia. From 1995 to 2004, he taught at North Springs Charter High School in Sandy Springs, Georgia, where he established a visual performing arts magnet program and advanced placement classes. In 2004, Cole became chairman of the

art department at Westlake High School. Cole explains how his spirituality influences his work, and names artists he admires, such as Sam Gilliam.

African American artists--Georgia--Atlanta.

Artists as teachers.

Art teachers--Georgia.

Olympic Games (26th: 1996: Atlanta, Ga.).

Mural painting and decoration.

Magnet schools--Georgia--Atlanta.

Art galleries, Commercial--Georgia--Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with Kevin Cole, Section  
A2007\_009\_001\_005, TRT: 0:26:30 2007/01/15

Kevin Cole describes some of the influences on his work at the time of the interview, such as Hurricane Katrina; the September 11, 2001 attacks; and the legacy of his grandfather, Sam Cole, Sr. Cole explains how his work reflects his experience as an artist, educator and father. Cole also describes his latest warrior series, which was inspired by the late Maynard Jackson, Jr. Cole shares a message for future generations regarding hard work and helping others, and expresses his concerns about the lack of education focused on problem-solving and creative thinking within the African American community. Cole would like to be remembered as a good husband and father, and for making a lasting difference in his community. While his art is his legacy, Cole also passed on his artistic talent to his children, Skylar Cole and Nia Cole. Cole lists some of the famous proprietors of his art, like Michael Jordan, Oscar Robertson and the Coca-Cola Company. Cole concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

African American artists--Georgia.

Jackson, Maynard, 1938-2003.

African American art.

Art--Study and teaching.

Artists as teachers.

African Americans--Conduct of life.