

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Annie Lee

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Lee, Annie, 1935-2014
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Annie Lee,
Dates:	April 5, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:01:00).
Abstract:	Painter Annie Lee (1935 - 2014) started painting at the age of forty but still enjoyed a successful painting career. Lee later used her unique designs to develop figurines, high fashion dolls, decorative housewares and kitchen tiles; she also enjoyed visiting schools to encourage and inspire students. Lee was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 5, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_123
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Artist Annie Frances Lee was born on March 3, 1935, in Gadsden, Alabama; raised by a single parent, she grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and attended Wendell Phillips High School. Lee began painting at an early age, winning her first art competition at the age of ten. Lee was offered a four year scholarship to attend Northwestern University after high school, but married instead and raised a family.

It was not until age forty that Lee decided to pursue a career as an artist; she enrolled in Loop Junior College and completed her undergraduate work at Mundelein College in Chicago. After eight years of night classes while working at Northwestern Railroad as a clerk in the engineering department, Lee earned her M.A. degree in interdisciplinary arts education from Loyola University. Lee's railroad job inspired one of her most popular paintings, *Blue Monday*, which depicts a woman struggling to pull herself out of bed on a Monday morning. Her trademarks are the animated emotion of the personalities in the artwork and the faces which are painted without features. At age fifty, Lee had her first gallery show; she allowed prints to be made of four of her original paintings. Using her unique designs, Lee also developed figurines, high fashion dolls, decorative housewares, and kitchen tiles.

After showing her work in other galleries for a number of years, Lee opened Annie Lee and Friends Gallery where she displayed her works as well as the works of other artists. When several of her paintings appeared on the sets of popular television shows such as *The Cosby Show* and *A Different World*, the exposure helped popularize her work. Although she regularly received requests for public appearances, Lee preferred to appear at gallery shows; she also enjoyed visiting schools to encourage and inspire students. She passed away on November 14, 2014, at the age of 79.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Annie Lee was conducted by Denise Gines on April 5, 2007, in Las Vegas, Nevada, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Painter Annie Lee (1935 - 2014) started painting at the age of forty but still enjoyed a successful painting career. Lee later used her unique designs to develop figurines, high fashion dolls, decorative housewares and kitchen tiles; she also enjoyed visiting schools to encourage and inspire students.

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:

Lee, Annie, 1935-2014

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Lee, Annie, 1935-2014 --Interviews

African American artists--Interviews

African American painters--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Painter

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 Annie Lee, April 5, 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 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 Annie Lee, Section A2007_123_001_001, TRT: 0:28:16 ?

Annie Lee was born on March 3, 1935 in Gadsden, Alabama to Ruby Moten and Robert Moten. Her maternal family was from Gadsden, while her paternal family came from Mississippi. Lee's father and mother married, and moved to

the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, where her father worked in a steel mill. He left when Lee was eight years old, and Lee's family struggled financially. To help her mother, Lee worked as a domestic, and sold *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines. She attended Chicago's James R. Doolittle Elementary School, where she won a scholarship to the Art Institute of Chicago. However, she never aspired to pursue art as a career. Upon graduation from Wendell Phillips High School, Lee turned down a scholarship to Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and married instead. Within a few years, she was widowed, remarried and had two children. Lee worked as a secretary at Supreme Life Insurance Company of America and Chicago and North Western Railway, where she experienced racial discrimination, until 1986.

African American artists--Interviews.

African American painters--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Annie Lee, Section A2007_123_001_002, TRT: 0:28:24 ?

Annie Lee grew up on the South Side of Chicago, Illinois, where she ate peppermint pickles from Mr. Gamble's candy store, and shopped at the Catholic Salvage Bureau with her mother. At Hopewell Missionary Baptist Church, she sang in the choir with her brother, Tony Moten. After services, the two often went to the movies at the Louis Theatre. Lee attended Chicago's James R. Doolittle Elementary School, where her gym teacher once rescued her from drowning in the pool. Years later, Lee had two children, and was in an abusive marriage. After nine years, she divorced her husband, but continued to live with him. Lee worked as a secretary at several companies in Chicago, including a government agency, the 5th Army Headquarters and Chicago and North Western Railway. While at the railroad, Lee won enough money in a poker game to pay for a down payment on a house. She also took night classes at Loop Junior College. After ten years, her son died, and Lee left the railroad to paint full time.

Video Oral History Interview with Annie Lee, Section A2007_123_001_003, TRT: 0:26:54 ?

Annie Lee returned to school to earn an art education degree. She attended Loop Junior College, Mundelein College, Columbia College and Loyola University Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, and earned a master's degree from the latter two. While in school, Lee worked as the chief clerk of the Chicago and North Western Railway. She was on her way to New Orleans, Louisiana, when a woman who worked for Color Your World, a home show company, saw Lee's art portfolio. Soon after, the company began selling Lee's work. Lee's most popular painting, 'Blue Monday,' was inspired by her job at the railroad, and was exhibited with thirty other pieces at her friend's gallery in Chicago. Her work was inspired by her everyday life and surroundings. Lee received numerous commissions after placing an advertisement in *Essence* magazine, and decided to open her own gallery, Annie Lee and Friends Art Gallery, in Hazel Crest, Illinois. She subsequently opened galleries in Glenwood, Illinois and Las Vegas, Nevada.

Video Oral History Interview with Annie Lee, Section A2007_123_001_004, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Annie Lee moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, and opened Annie Lee and Friends Art Gallery. Lee describes her creative process, which began with researching the subject to ensure the accuracy of the depicted costume and setting. After Lee created an original painting, the image was made into lithographs, giclee prints or licensed products, like puzzles, tapestries and mouse pads. Her works were shown annually on the Tom Joyner Foundation Fantastic Voyage cruise. Lee also licensed her art to several television shows, and illustrated a children's book, 'Shouting!' Lee reflects upon her career, and the demographics of her customer base. She also talks about how African American female artists, such

as Synthia Saint James and herself, were paid less than other artists. In addition to drawing and painting, Lee was an avid art collector. She did not collect investment pieces, but rather bought art that she enjoyed. Her collection included the works of Paul D. Goodnight and Varnette Honeywood.

Video Oral History Interview with Annie Lee, Section A2007_123_001_005, TRT: 0:08:56 ?

Annie Lee reflects upon the lack of recognition for African American artists. She advises aspiring artists to take as many art classes as they can; to practice as much as possible; and to preserve their own artistic vision. Lee also describes how she would like to be remembered, and concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.