Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers®
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Creator: Phoebe Beasley

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley,

Dates: April 18, 2007

Bulk Dates: 2007

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:47:19).

Abstract: Collage artist Phoebe Beasley (1943 - ) is a world renowned artist whose pieces have been commissioned by President Bill Clinton and President George Bush. Beasley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 18, 2007, in Santa Monica, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.

Identification: A2007_148

Language: The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Collage artist Phoebe Beasley was born on June 3, 1943 in Cleveland, Ohio to Penelope Davis Beasley and George Arthur Beasley, Jr. Beasley has two other siblings; she has one brother, George Arthur Beasley, III and one sister, Annette Joyce Beasley Coleman. When Beasley was seven years old, her mother who was seven months pregnant died of a heart attack at twenty-nine years of age; her father, later remarried. During her early years, Beasley developed an interest in being an artist. During high school, Beasley received extensive artistic training. In 1961, she entered Ohio University, where she completed her B.F.A. degree in painting, with a minor in education, graduating in June of 1965. She later earned her M.A. degree from Kent State University.

In 1968, Beasley married Louie Gene Evans Jr; the union ended in divorce in 1969. It was during those years that Beasley's artistic efforts increased, culminating in the opening of a store front studio. She specialized in oils-on-canvas, as well as prints and collages. Her reputation as an artist grew, and she began meeting celebrities, including the legendary NBA player Bill Russell. It was through that relationship that she was introduced to Dr. Maya Angelou, who later became her mentor. Beasley simultaneously began a second career in radio marketing. She eventually worked more than twenty-five years in the radio industry.

Throughout the years, Beasley has become a world-renowned artist whose works are featured in the homes of Oprah Winfrey, Anita Baker, Dr. William Burke and Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke, Tavis Smiley, Byron Allen, Grant Hill, Marla Gibbs, Roger Penske, Tyler Perry and Bill Cosby. Beasley’s commissions include being the official artist of the 1987 and 2000 Los Angeles Marathons, the 100 Black Men National Convention and the 2000 National Democratic Convention. Beasley became the first African American female president of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. Beasley’s work honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has been exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution.
Phoebe Beasley was interviewed by "The HistoryMakers" on April 18, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Phoebe Beasley was conducted by Ron Brewington on April 18, 2007, in Santa Monica, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacam SP videocassettes. Collage artist Phoebe Beasley (1943- ) is a world renowned artist whose pieces have been commissioned by President Bill Clinton and President George Bush.

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:

Beasley, Phoebe, 1943-
Brewington, Ron (Interviewer)
Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Beasley, Phoebe, 1943---Interviews

Organizations:
Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Phoebe Beasley

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

**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**


**Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/9/2011 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, April 18, 2007**

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_001_001, TRT: 0:27:49

Phoebe Beasley begins the interview with a discussion of her family history. Her mother Annette Penelope Davis Beasley died of a heart attack when Beasley was seven years old. She describes the sights and sounds of her childhood. Beasley recalls some of her earliest memories about her mother and father. She remembers going to church every Sunday to attend service and partake in the after service activities. She is the middle child; she has one younger brother, George Authur Beasley, III and one older sister, Annette Joyce Beasley-Coleman. Beasley believes she was treated differently because
she was the middle child.
African American families--Ohio--Cleveland
Social life and customs--United States
African American churches--Ohio--Cleveland.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_001_002, TRT: 0:28:08 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley discusses the African American caste system that was in place in Cleveland, Ohio during her childhood years. This caste system effected which organizations certain African Americans were allowed to join. Beasley recalls her memories of her grandmother, Jessie Beckwithe Beasley, and grandfather, George Arthur Beasley, Sr. George was one of the first African Americans to work in the local post office. She remembers being the best artist in her elementary school class. She felt like an outcast during her childhood due to her height and red hair.
African American letter carriers-Ohio-Cleveland
African American children--Ohio
Cleveland (Ohio)--Social life and customs.
African American elementary school students--Ohio
Single parents.


Phoebe Beasley discusses the tragic death of her mother, Annette Penelope Davis Beasley. While Annette was seven months pregnant, she died of a heart attack; she was only twenty nine years old. Beasley shares how losing her mother at a young age impacted how she thinks about life. She shares her life philosophies. After Annette died, Beasley’s father, George Arthur Beasley, began to date and eventually remarried. Beasley shares her initial reactions as a child to her father dating. George’s second marriage ended in a divorce. Beasley and her siblings wanted to stay with their stepmother, but the courts would not allow this.
Heart attack--diagnosis
Life--Philosophy.
African Americans--Marriage.
Mothers--death.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_001_004, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley describes her relationship with her stepmother as being very close. Beasley’s stepmother is the closest person to her and she visits her often at the senior citizens' home. She recalls the birth of her sister, Annette Joyce Beasley and the birth of her brother, George Arthur Beasley III. Beasley describes her college years at Ohio University. She recalls her experiences teaching art at Glenville High School in Cleveland, Ohio. Beasley served as an unofficial negotiator for students during the civil rights movement and the school riots that surrounded this time. She was married to Louie Gene Evans, Jr. from 1968-1969; this union ended in divorce. Beasley describes her artistic process and her first store front studio.
African American college students--Ohio--Athens
Ohio University--Students
Glenville High School (Cleveland, Ohio)--Art teachers.
Phoebe Beasley discusses her career outside of the field of art. She worked in sales and marketing at KFI Los Angeles Radio for nineteen years, as the senior account manager. Beasley remembers this time fondly because she enjoyed experiencing how things were bought and sold. She appreciates the unique way in which radio advertises. She shares her personal work philosophy. Beasley discusses how her friendship with Oprah Winfrey came about. She analyzes her art work in terms of line and composition, and describes her work as being vignettes of life.

KFI Los Angeles
African Americans in radio
African American--Work Ethic
African American artists.
Work--Philosophy
Winfrey, Oprah

Phoebe Beasley discusses her vision of doing something to commemorate the Tuskegee Airmen. She is amazed by the ignorance people have about African American history, especially amongst African Americans. She believes it is one of her purposes in life to provide knowledge about obscure African American history. For example, her collage, “Executive Order 9981,” was produced in order to illuminate an obscure event that affected African American history. Beasley does not know how many paintings she has produced over her career due to a lack of documentation. She met Tyler Perry through her good friend Reuben Cannon and tells a story about commissioning a piece for him. She describes being commissioned by two presidents, Bill Clinton and George Bush. In closing, Beasley shares what she wants her legacy to be.

African American history and culture.
Perry, Tyler, 1963-
Art commissions--United States.
Cannon, Reuben, 1946-