

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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Beasley, Phoebe, 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley,
Dates:	April 18, 2007 and November 18, 2019
Bulk Dates:	2007 and 2019
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:03:13).
Abstract:	Visual artist Phoebe Beasley (1943 -) was commissioned to design inaugural artwork for President Bill Clinton and President George Bush. Her artwork was featured in the homes of Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Maya Angelou, and Tyler Perry. Beasley was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 18, 2007 and November 18, 2019, in Los Angeles, California and 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®

Visual artist Phoebe Beasley was born on June 3, 1943 in Cleveland, Ohio to parents Annette and George Arthur Beasley, Jr. When Beasley was seven years old, her mother died of a heart attack at twenty-nine years of age. Her father later married Mildred Gaines. After graduating from John Adams High School in 1961, Beasley entered Ohio University, where she received her B.F.A. degree in painting, with a minor in education, in 1965. She went on to study at the Art Center College of Design and the Otis Art Institute. In 1965, Beasley joined

Glenville High School in Cleveland, Ohio, as an art teacher. She eventually opened a store front studio and gallery along with several artists. She specialized in oils-on-canvas, as well as prints and collages. Beasley moved to Los Angeles, California in 1969, where she worked as a layout artist at SAGE Publications for one year before joining KFI Radio. Beasley worked at KFI for twenty-nine years, eventually as senior account manager. In 1973, she established the Phoebe Beasley Art Studio; and, in 1976, she began showing at solo art exhibitions. Beasley's collage artwork was part of two major touring museum exhibitions, including a 2003 group show mounted by the Smithsonian Institution entitled *In the Spirit of Martin*, honoring the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a museum show entitled *Portraying Lincoln: Man of Many Faces* in 2008. Beasley's works are also featured in the homes of Oprah Winfrey, Anita Baker, Dr. William Burke and Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Dr. Maya Angelou, LaTanya Richardson and Samuel L. Jackson, Tavis Smiley, Byron Allen, Grant Hill, Marla Gibbs, Roger Penske and Tyler Perry.

Beasley's commissions include being the official artist of the 1987 and 2000 Los Angeles Marathons, the 1999 National Convention of the 100 Black Men of America, and the 2000 National Democratic Convention. She is the only artist commissioned to do the inaugural artwork for two U.S. presidents; first, in 1989, for the inauguration of President George Bush; and, in 1993, for the inauguration of President Bill Clinton.

In 1977, Beasley became the first Black woman to be appointed president of American Women in Radio and Television. In 1997, she joined the Los Angeles County Arts Commission and served for over ten years. In 2105, she was appointed to the California Arts Council.

Beasley was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 18, 2007 and November 18, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Phoebe Beasley was conducted by Harriette Cole and Ron Brewington on April 18, 2007 and November 18, 2019, in Los Angeles, California and Santa Monica, California, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Visual artist Phoebe Beasley (1943 -) was commissioned to design inaugural artwork for President Bill Clinton and President George Bush. Her artwork was featured in the homes of Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Maya Angelou, and Tyler Perry.

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)

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

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

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Visual Artist

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 Phoebe Beasley, April 18, 2007 and November 18, 2019. 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 Phoebe Beasley, Section
A2007_148_001_001, TRT: 0:27:49 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley was born on June 3, 1943 in Cleveland, Ohio to Annette Davis Beasley and George Beasley, Jr. Her parents worked at the Manakiki Golf and Country Club in Willoughby Hills, Ohio, where her mother assisted her father, who managed the locker room and catered events. Beasley's maternal and paternal grandparents helped to raise her, and she spent much of her childhood at their homes and churches. In Cleveland, she grew up in a housing project on Scovill Avenue, and later moved to a house on the city's east side. She remembers the garbage incinerator at the center of the housing complex, and the deliverymen who visited, like the coal man and milkman. Her family was among the first in their neighborhood to own a television. She also recalls taking doses of castor oil; dressing up for the Easter parade; and decorating her house for Christmas. When Beasley was seven years old, her mother died, and her older sister, Annette Beasley Coleman, became the family matriarch.

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's paternal grandparents, Jessie Beckwith Beasley and George Beasley, Sr., helped to raise her in Cleveland, Ohio. Her paternal grandfather worked in the lost letter department of the local post office, and was a fan of the Cleveland Browns football team. He often brought Beasley and her siblings to games, where he had seats on the fifty-yard line. Each Sunday, Beasley attended church with her family and paternal grandparents at Mt. Zion Congregational Church in Cleveland. After the service, she went to her grandparents' house to drink coffee; relax on the front porch; and listen to baseball games or show tunes with her grandfather. At home, Beasley and her siblings had many chores, as her father required their house to be as clean as the Manakiki Golf and Country Club, where he was a manager. She began her education at Cleveland's Charles W. Eliot Middle School, and served as a teacher's assistant.

African American letter carriers--Ohio-Cleveland.

African American children--Ohio.

Cleveland (Ohio)--Social life and customs.

African American school children--Ohio.

Single parents.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section
A2007_148_001_003, TRT: 0:28:32 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley's mother, Annette Davis Beasley, passed away when Beasley was seven years old. Beasley was at her paternal grandparents' home, when they learned that her pregnant mother had died of a heart attack at twenty-nine years old. Beasley remembers her mother's funeral, where she cried in the bathroom during most of the service. Beasley's father sent Beasley and her siblings, Annette Beasley Coleman and George Beasley III, to live with their aunt in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but they soon returned to Cleveland, Ohio. Eighteen months later, her father married Mildred Gaines, and the children

accepted her as their new mother. However, Beasley's father became an alcoholic, and his marriage ended after six years. She and her siblings requested to remain with their stepmother, but their petition was denied by Ohio's courts. To protect Beasley and her brother, Beasley's older sister sued their father for withholding social security payments. He moved out, and Beasley's sister became her guardian.

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's father divorced her stepmother, Mildred Gaines, but Beasley and her siblings remained close with her throughout their lives. At John Adams Senior High School in Cleveland, Ohio, Beasley hoped to become a painter, but her school counselor discouraged her aspirations. This experience of discrimination only strengthened Beasley's resolve, and she studied painting and education at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Upon graduation, Beasley married Louie Evans, Jr., and obtained a teaching position at Cleveland's Glenville High School. On one occasion, the students rioted against the teachers, and Beasley was chosen to negotiate with them. During this time, Beasley also opened an art cooperative in a local storefront with ten other artists. In 1969, Beasley divorced her husband, and moved to Los Angeles, California to pursue her art career. She reconnected with basketball coach Bill Russell, whom she met in Cleveland, and he introduced her to author Maya Angelou.

African American college students--Ohio--Athens.

Ohio University--Students.

Glenville High School (Cleveland, Ohio)--Art teachers.

Civil rights movements--Ohio--Cleveland.

Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section
A2007_148_001_005, TRT: 0:30:16 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley's mentor, Maya Angelou, encouraged Beasley to paint, and promoted her work. While in South Africa for Nelson Mandela's inauguration, Angelou distributed postcards for Beasley's latest exhibit. In Los Angeles, California, local politician Yvonne Brathwaite Burke and her husband, William Burke, also encouraged Beasley, and found her a position on the Los Angeles County Arts Commission. In addition to painting, Beasley worked in merchandising for Los Angeles' KFI Radio. Through this position, Beasley learned to give presentations and negotiate contracts, and used those skills to market her artwork. Due in part to Angelou's promotion of her work, Beasley began to receive commissions from celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey's partner, Stedman Graham. Beasley gained national recognition for her depiction of Winfrey as a child with her maternal grandparents, which Graham gave to Winfrey on her birthday. Beasley's other paintings focused on political and social issues like desegregation.

KFI Los Angeles.

African Americans in radio.

Work ethic.

African American artists.

Work--Philosophy.

Winfrey, Oprah.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section
A2007_148_001_006, TRT: 0:23:15 2007/04/18

Phoebe Beasley painted hundreds of art pieces during her career, although many of their sales were poorly documented. Beasley also received commissions from celebrities and politicians. Her clients included filmmaker Tyler Perry, whom she did not realize was a comedian known for playing a woman until after he bought several paintings; two United States presidents, President Bill Clinton and President George H.W. Bush; and Black Enterprise founder Earl G. Graves, Sr., who bought the piece 'Textured Threads' for his wife, Barbara Graves. Some of her artwork was intended to educate future generations, including 'Executive Order 9981,' which depicted the desegregation of the U.S. military. In 1998,

Beasley was selected to create serigraph illustrations for 'Sunrise Is Coming After While,' Maya Angelou's anthology of Langston Hughes' poetry. Beasley concludes the interview by reflecting upon her life, and how she would like to be remembered.

Perry, Tyler.

Art commissions--United States.

Cannon, Reuben, 1946-.

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_007, TRT: 7:34:42 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_008, TRT: 8:29:49 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_009, TRT: 9:28:57 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_010, TRT: 10:31:33 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_011, TRT: 11:32:35 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_012, TRT: 12:24:46 2019/11/18

Video Oral History Interview with Phoebe Beasley, Section A2007_148_002_013, TRT: 13:13:32 2019/11/18