

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Kenneth G. Rodgers

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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>	Rodgers, Kenneth G.
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 22, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:50:43).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fine artist, curator, art history professor, and museum director Kenneth G. Rodgers (1949 - ) taught at many universities, and in 2006, was named Professor of Art and Director of the North Carolina University Art Museum. He was a part of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture and was charged with conserving, promoting and interpreting the history of black Marylanders. Rodgers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 22, 2007, in Durham, North Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_184
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Artist and art historian Kenneth Gerald Rodgers was born on October 22, 1949 in Siler City, North Carolina to Cornelia and Johnnie Rodgers, a data entry operator and laborer, respectively. Rodgers' uncle inspired him to begin drawing at the age of seven, and Rodgers became a young caricaturist. He graduated from Chatham High School in 1967 and received a scholarship to attend North Carolina A&T

State University where he majored in art design. At North Carolina A&T State University, Rodgers learned the technical aspects of drawing, painting, design and color, and he mastered skills in still life and portraiture. Rodgers graduated from North Carolina A&T State University in 1971 with his B.S. degree in art design and, in 1972, became a graduate assistant at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery where he studied exhibition design, mounting and crafting. He received his M.F.A. degree from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro in 1973.

Rodgers' academic career progressed in 1974 when he was named director of the art program at Voorhees College. Leaving Voorhees in 1977, he assumed the position of assistant professor of art at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore. In 1984, Rodgers began the "Art of the Modern World" series in Ocean City, Maryland. In 1990, he joined the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture and was charged with conserving, promoting and interpreting the history of black Marylanders and became chairman of the commission in 1993. As chairman, he supervised the Banneker-Douglass Museum in Annapolis, Maryland. Also in 1993, Rodgers was named associate professor of African American Art History at the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore and was also named Artist-in-Residence at Mesa State College in Colorado.

In 1996, Rodgers became director of the North Carolina Central University Art Museum, which houses the largest collection of African American art in the state. In this capacity, Rodgers served as organizer and curator of several high profile exhibits including *Edward Mitchell Bannister: American Landscape Artist, Re-connecting Roots: The Silver Anniversary Alumni Invitational*, *Charles White: American Draughtsman*, *Elizabeth Catlett: Master Printmaker* and *William H. Johnson: Revisiting an African American Modernist*. In 2006, Rodgers was named Professor of Art and Director of the North Carolina University Art Museum. He has published several art compilations including *William H. Johnson: Revisiting an African American Modernist* and *Climbing Up the Mountain: The Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson*. Rodgers painted the official portrait of the first African American member of the North Carolina Council of State and the first African American State Auditor for North Carolina, Ralph Campbell. Rodgers has received numerous research grants and awards including: a National Endowment for the Humanities for study at the Vatican Museums and the American Academy in Rome, a Fulbright-Hays Study Abroad award for research in Kenya and Tanzania, and grants from the North Carolina Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Duke-Semans Fine Arts Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation to support museum exhibitions and programs.

Rodgers is the father of two and lives in North Carolina with his wife, Shiela Glover Rodgers.

Kenneth Rodgers was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 22, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers was conducted by Cheryl Butler on June 22, 2007, in Durham, North Carolina, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fine artist, curator, art history professor, and museum director Kenneth G. Rodgers (1949 - ) taught at many universities, and in 2006, was named Professor of Art and Director of the North Carolina University Art Museum. He was a part of the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture and was charged with conserving, promoting and interpreting the history of black Marylanders.

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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:**

Rodgers, Kenneth G.

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Rodgers, Kenneth G.--Interviews

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African American art museum curators--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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North Carolina Central University. Museum of Art

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North Carolina Central University. Museum of Art

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### **Occupations:**

Fine Artist

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Curator

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Museum Director

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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 Kenneth G. Rodgers, June 22, 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 Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section  
A2007\_184\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:11 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers was born on October 22, 1949 in Siler City, North Carolina to Cornelia Johnson Rodgers and Johnnie Rodgers, Jr. His maternal great-grandmother, Cordia Glover, was a well-known herbalist and midwife in Chatham County, Virginia. She delivered more than three thousand babies and gave lectures on African American birthing traditions at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Rodgers' maternal grandparents, Iona Glover Johnson and Junior Johnson, were sharecroppers in Chatham County. His paternal grandmother, Agnes Alston Rodgers, was a schoolteacher, while his paternal grandfather, Johnnie Rodgers, Sr., worked as a laborer until becoming blind. Both Rodgers' parents were born in Siler City, and worked as laborers at the local meat processing plants. Later in life, Rodgers' mother earned an associate's degree, and became a data processor. Rodgers grew up in Siler City, where he remembers his mother baking cakes and pies on Sundays, and going to the circus.

African American families--North Carolina--Chatham County.

African American farmers--Southern States--Economic conditions.

African American midwives--North Carolina.

African American churches.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section  
A2007\_184\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:35 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers grew up in a predominately black neighborhood in Siler City, North Carolina, where racial relations were strained due to segregation and the Ku Klux Klan. Inside his childhood home, Rodgers and his siblings listened to their father play the piano, while his mother prepared meals in the kitchen. The family also listened to Smokey Robinson and Al Green on a phonograph. Rodgers enjoyed attending Sunday school at Corinth A.M.E. Zion Church. He became interested in art at a

young age through his uncle, who drew caricatures. Rodgers attended the all-black Chatham High School in Siler City from the first to twelfth grades, and spent most of his time drawing instead of paying attention in class. During his senior year, Rodgers took his first art class in mechanical drawing, which inspired him to become an artist. Rodgers' mother and art teacher, Alexander Graves, Jr., encouraged him to attend North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina.

African American neighborhoods--North Carolina--Siler City.

Race relations--North Carolina--Siler City.

Ku Klux Klan (1915-).

Race discrimination--North Carolina.

African Americans--Social conditions--1964-1975.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section A2007\_184\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:56 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers first encountered artist James Melvin at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, North Carolina. After watching Melvin paint, Rodgers was inspired to start his first painting, a portrait of his sister, Cheryl Rodgers. In college, Rodgers studied the fundamentals of visual art, created a series of abstract self-portraits and joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. In 1969, civil rights protests involving members of the Black Panther Party took place on campus, and resulted in the death of Rodgers' friend, Willie Grimes. After graduating in 1971, Rodgers registered as a conscientious objector to avoid the Vietnam War draft, and attended graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro instead. Graduate school was a new experience for Rodgers, as this was his first integrated school, and he was impressed by the art studios and curriculum. In school, Rodgers studied the work of Charles White and other Harlem Renaissance artists.

North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Black Panther Party.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Conscientious objectors.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--African Americans.

White, Charles, 1918-1979.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section  
A2007\_184\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:15 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he studied artists of the Black Arts Movement such as Charles White and Elizabeth Catlett, and was a graduate assistant at the Weatherspoon Art Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina. After graduating in 1973, Rodgers applied for a curatorial position at the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh, North Carolina, but was instead offered a security guard position, which he declined. Rodgers then decided to shift his focus to teaching. He became the painting instructor at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee, Florida for one year, before moving to Denmark, South Carolina to head the art department at Voorhees College. There, Rodgers met painters Leo Twiggs and Arthur Rose. He then taught at South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, South Carolina, where he won first place in the Orangeburg Festival of Roses exhibit. He married his sister's friend, Shielda Glover Rodgers, and had two children.

Black Arts movement

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Weatherspoon Art Museum

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University--Faculty

Voorhees College

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section  
A2007\_184\_001\_005, TRT: 0:29:19 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers' painting, 'Cardplayers,' was inspired by Italian painter Caravaggio's 'Cardsharps.' In addition to Caravaggio, Rodgers also admired the work of other acclaimed painters Rembrandt and Henry Ossawa Tanner. Rodgers' own work was exhibited in galleries and museums like the J.B. Speed Memorial Museum in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1977, he became a professor and curator at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in

Princess Anne, Maryland. For his first curated exhibition, Rodgers showcased the work of painter Robert Scott Duncanson. The following exhibition, 'Edward Mitchell Bannister: American Landscape Artist,' was a success. Rodgers served on the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture, and lobbied for the placement of the Thurgood Marshall statue at the Maryland State House in Annapolis, Maryland. In 1996, he became the director of the North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, North Carolina, which showcased art from MacArthur Fellowship winners.

Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da, 1573-1610.  
Cardsharps.

Tanner, Henry Ossawa,--1859-1937.

Duncanson, Robert S., 1821-1872--Exhibitions.

Bannister, Edward Mitchell,--1828-1901--Exhibitions.  
Amistad Research Center.

Art museum curators.

Art--Exhibition techniques.

North Carolina Central University. Museum of Art.

African Americans--Maryland--History.

Maryland Commission on Afro-American History and Culture.

Harlem Renaissance.

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section  
A2007\_184\_001\_006, TRT: 0:24:27 2007/06/22

Kenneth G. Rodgers became a professor and the director of the North Carolina Central University Art Museum in Durham, North Carolina in 1996. In this role, Rodgers curated several exhibitions of African American artists. One of his first exhibitions was 'Charles White: American Draughtsman.' He acquired Charles White's works from private lenders and galleries in California. Rodgers' subsequent show, 'Elizabeth Catlett: Master Printmaker,' was one of the only exhibitions to include all of her prints. Other artists exhibited at the museum include Malvin Gray Johnson and Beverly McIver, whose exhibit, 'Beverly McIver: Raising Renee and Other Themes,' featured a

series of pieces on her sister, Renee McIver. Rodgers reflects upon his artistic inspirations and legacy, and concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.

African American art--Study and teaching.

African American art--Exhibitions.

Catlett, Elizabeth, 1915---Exhibitions.

Johnson, Malvin Gray,--1896-1934--Exhibitions.

Harlem Renaissance--Pictorial works.