



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

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Kenneth G. Rodgers
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers,
Dates:	June 22, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:50:45).
Abstract:	Art history professor, curator, fine artist, and museum director Kenneth G. Rodgers (1949 -) has 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.
Identification:	A2007_184
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

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's 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, Shielda Glover Rodgers.

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

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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Art history professor, curator, fine artist, and museum director Kenneth G. Rodgers (1949 -) has 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.

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:

Rodgers, Kenneth G.

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Rodgers, Kenneth G.--Interviews

African American art museum curators--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

North Carolina Central University. Museum of Art

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 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 8/12/2011 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, June 22, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Kenneth G. Rodgers, Section A2007_184_001_001, TRT: 0:29:11 2007/06/22

Kenneth Rodgers examines his parents' genealogy as well as his early childhood. Both of Rodgers's parents came from sharecropping families. They farmed tobacco and moved around frequently. Life was very hard; crops failed, and they moved to find better land. The African American population was nearly twenty percent of Chatham County, North Carolina. Rodgers specifically discusses a maternal ancestor, Cortie Glover, who was a midwife. She delivered more than 3,000 babies of various ethnicities. She was also an amateur herbalist and found healing plants in the woods. "Mama" Cortie was widely respected throughout the area. Individuals who did not have money to pay her, gave her chickens. She made a number of visits to the University of North Carolina Medical School to talk about midwifery and herbal medicines.

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 Rodgers's childhood home had a piano and a phonograph, and the family often played music or listened to Motown records. The home was initially without running water and used an oil stove for heat. Rodgers grew up in an African American neighborhood that was educationally mixed; schoolteachers lived next to laborers and he recalls being an arbitrator amongst friends. His interest in art was piqued by an uncle who caricatured people in the neighborhood. Rodgers's first drawings were of cars and donkeys. Race relations in Siler City were difficult. There was frequent Ku Klux Klan activity, but Rodgers did not remember any lynching in the area. He also remembers "Whites Only" signs, "Colored" entrances, and being relegated to the balconies of the local movie theater. Rodgers has fond memories of attending Corinth A.M.E. Zion Church with his family. After his mother encouraged him to go to college, Rodgers received the Chatham High School alumni scholarship and attended North Carolina A&T University.

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 Rodgers remembers the first time he saw an easel. His first painting was based on a photograph of his sister. That painting still hangs in his mother's living room. Undergraduate courses did not actually teach Rodgers how to paint; he feels only repetition and practice did that. He used a series of self-portraits as his senior project and secured acceptance to graduate school. Rodgers remembers North Carolina A&T as rife with activism and fraternal rivalries. He recalls the unsolved death of a fellow classmate and ongoing battles between the Black Panthers and the police who used tanks, tear gas, helicopters, and searchlights looking for dissidents. These skirmishes could result in the campus being closed. Rodgers avoided being drafted for the Vietnam War by registering as a conscientious objector. Adjusting to a racially integrated graduate school was difficult. However, Rodgers was impressed with the improved facilities and developed an interest in African American history and artist Charles White.

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 Rodgers recalls being influenced by the Black Arts Movement and criticized for his series on revolutionary figures. His mentor in the Art Department at University of North Carolina at Greensboro gave him validation by purchasing one of his works. Rodgers worked as an assistant at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery while he pursued his M.F.A., but when he applied for a position at the North Carolina Museum of Art, was only offered a job as a security guard. Rodgers was hired by Florida A & M University and Voorhees College, where he served as the entire art department. Rodgers married Shielda Glover in 1975, and they have two children, Nia and Kenneth. Kenneth is described as outgoing and is the procurement officer at Morehouse College. Nia graduated from Carnegie-Mellon and the University of Virginia; she is a landscape architect in Boston who is described as a competitive student who won writing and art contests.

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:
0:29:21 2007/06/22

Kenneth Rodgers discusses Caravaggio's "The Card Players" and describes Henry Tanner as a seminal 19th century African American painter. Rodgers discusses one of his portraits and the artist's problem of relinquishing a work that has personal meaning. He addresses the challenges of being a combination of teacher and artist, and he explores the longevity of reputation for Harlem

Renaissance artists. Rodgers' first exhibition displayed the work of Robert Scott Duncanson; his second was more successful and displayed the work of Edward Mitchell Bannister. Rodgers cites the assistance of the Amistad Research Center in curatorial research and is often tasked with persuading lenders to part with their art. Rodgers moved to an integrated neighborhood in Maryland in the 1970s and joined the Maryland Commission on African American Culture. He came to North Carolina Central University in 1996 and was challenged to reconcile his ambitions with the existing program and to explore ways to procure required resources.

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 Rodgers lists personal highlights in exhibitions he has curated. His favorite exhibitions include: "Charles White: American Draughtsman," "Elizabeth Catlett: Master Printmaker," and "Climbing Up the Mountain: the Modern Art of Malvin Gray Johnson. As an adult, Rodgers discovered that he was related by marriage to Malvin Gray Johnson," an unsung painter of the Harlem Renaissance and remembers he frequently stared at a painting of Johnson's that was displayed at a relative's home as a boy. Rodgers contemplates his legacy and shares what he considers to be his inspiration in teaching and creating art. Kenneth Rodgers narrates personal 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