

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ras Ammar Nsoroma

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Nsoroma, Ras Ammar, 1967-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma,
Dates:	December 1, 2007 and November 29, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:57:20).
Abstract:	Muralist Ras Ammar Nsoroma (1967 -) painted more than forty murals, including pieces in Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and Milwaukee. Two of Nsoroma's murals were nominated for inclusion in the book, Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals. Nsoroma was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 1, 2007 and November 29, 2007, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_334
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

An artist known for his murals, Ras Ammar Nsoroma was born Kevin Wayne Tate on June 20, 1967 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When he was only a teenager, Nsoroma became aware of the work of Reynaldo Hernandez, an inner-city mural artist, which inspired him. Nsoroma graduated from the Milwaukee High School of the Arts in 1985 and attended the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. Nsoroma completing his first mural as a senior in high school.

In the late 1980s, Nsoroma moved to Chicago and studied at Chicago's School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He returned to Wisconsin and began working as an artist, designing three-dimensional murals on the Fond du Lac Avenue overpass for the north and south wing walls and bridge abutments. In 2000, two of Nsoroma's murals were nominated for inclusion in the book, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals*, a collection of 200 murals spanning three decades of African American mural art. In 2004, Nsoroma designed a mural to celebrate the radio station 1290 WMCS-AM's 25th anniversary of African American community programming; entitled *The Tradition Continues*. Nsoroma utilized photographs and created a compilation of twenty-five portraits of men and women who participated in the growth of the station.

Nsoroma has painted more than forty murals, including pieces in Chicago, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., as well as his hometown of Milwaukee.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 1, 2007 and November 29, 2007, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Muralist Ras Ammar Nsoroma (1967 -) painted more than forty murals, including pieces in Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and Milwaukee. Two of Nsoroma's murals were nominated for inclusion in the book, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals*.

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:

Nsoroma, Ras Ammar, 1967-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Nsoroma, Ras Ammar, 1967---Interviews

African American artists--Wisconsin--Interviews

African American painters--Wisconsin--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Muralist

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 Ras Ammar Nsoroma, December 1, 2007 and November 29, 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).

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 Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_001_001, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/11/29

Ras Ammar Nsoroma was born on June 20, 1967 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Erma Riley Tate and Luke Tate, Jr. Nsoroma's maternal great-grandparents, Mamie Riley and John Riley, raised his mother in Birmingham, Alabama, as his grandmother, Minnie Riley, was too young to raise a child on her own. His paternal grandparents, Juanita Tate and Luke Tate, Sr., were sharecroppers in Lexington, Mississippi. Several of Nsoroma's maternal and paternal family members moved in the late 1950s and early 1960s to Milwaukee, where his parents met. They separated when Nsoroma was three years old; and, after that time, his mother held multiple jobs, including a position as a telephone operator, to provide for her children. Nsoroma remained in contact with his paternal family, and was influenced by his paternal Aunt Juanita to convert to Islam. Nsoroma practiced orthodox Islam between the ages of nineteen and twenty-seven years old, but decided to leave the religion as he became interested in Rastafarianism.

African American artists--Wisconsin--Interviews.

African American painters--Wisconsin--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_001_002, TRT: 0:30:40 2007/11/29

Ras Ammar Nsoroma grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he lived with his older siblings and parents, Erma Riley Tate and Luke Tate, Jr., until their separation in 1970, due to his father's womanizing and criminal activity. After the separation, Nsoroma's two older brothers lived with their father, while he and his older sister stayed with their mother. He grew up in a predominantly African American community in Milwaukee, where his neighbors included civil rights activist O.C. White. He spent much of his childhood with his maternal grandmothers and aunts at their homes in the

Hillside Terrace housing development, which was located near Milwaukee's Hostess and Wonder Bread factories. Nsoroma attended the 20th Street School and 31st Street School until 1974, when he was bused to the formerly all-white Hawley Road School. Nsoroma was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal church, but converted to Islam at nineteen years old, due in part to the influence of his paternal Aunt Juanita.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_001_003, TRT: 0:28:40 2007/11/29

Ras Ammar Nsoroma's teachers recognized his artistic abilities from an early age, and provided him with art supplies and instruction. The first piece of art that drew their attention was a sketch of a lion, which Nsoroma drew in pre-kindergarten after a field trip to the Milwaukee County Zoo. When Nsoroma was in the third grade, his teacher paid for him to take art lessons at the Milwaukee Art Museum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Along with his drawings, Nsoroma created a comic series entitled King Fearless Comics, which featured African American superheroes along with his African American friends from the Hawley Road School, which was majority white. From 1974, Nsoroma and his friends were bused to the school, where they were bullied by their classmates because of their race. Eventually, they confronted the white students, and ended the harassment. Outside of school, Nsoroma frequented Milwaukee's Oasis Theatre, where he saw blaxploitation and kung fu films.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_001_004, TRT: 0:30:40 2007/11/29

Ras Ammar Nsoroma was a student at the 31st Street School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he often misbehaved, and was required to meet with a social worker once a week. He went on to attend Jackie Robinson Middle School, Bay View High School and the Milwaukee High School of the Arts. Nsoroma was an average student, but excelled in his art classes and at local art competitions. During high school, he was active with Milwaukee's Inner City Arts Council, where he became acquainted with artists like Evelyn Patricia Terry and arts associations such as the Freewheelers. At sixteen years

old, Nsoroma painted his first public murals for the Cooperation West Side Association in Milwaukee, alongside three other artists. Then, he won an art contest at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, and was awarded a partial scholarship. Nsoroma was initially unable to attend, as he could not afford the rest of the tuition.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_001_005, TRT: 0:29:00 2007/11/29

Ras Ammar Nsoroma enrolled at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1986; but, after two semesters, was expelled for poor attendance. He then worked at the local Pick 'n Save Warehouse Foods, and interned at Milwaukee's Inner City Arts Council, where he met muralist Reynaldo Hernandez. During this time, Nsoroma converted to Islam, and became more aware of politics. He exhibited and sold his work at Milwaukee's African World Festival, and at the International African Arts Festival in Brooklyn, New York, which he attended with photographer Emerson Matabele and Ahmed Mbalia, who was the founder of the Pan-African Revolutionary Socialist Party. In 1991, Nsoroma moved to Chicago, Illinois, where he enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also began working with the Chicago Public Art Group to paint 'The Circle Journey,' a mural at 53rd Street and Lake Park Avenue in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_002_006, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/12/01

Ras Ammar Nsoroma painted 'The Circle Journey' mural in collaboration with Beatriz Santiago Munoz and Stephanie George in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. The mural was funded by the community police partnership, and was criticized by a board member who felt it included too few white faces. In 1994, Nsoroma returned to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to paint murals for institutions like the Wisconsin Black Historical Society. In conjunction with the O.C. White Soul Club, a civil rights group, the City of Milwaukee commissioned a mural depicting African Americans who made contributions to the city. His sketches of the mural were

approved; but, once he began painting, Nsoroma was stopped by a county representative who did not approve of the piece. State representative Marcia P. Cogg's intervened on Nsoroma's behalf to ensure the work was completed. Nsoroma's artwork was influenced by the Yoruba religion, which he studied through the works of scholars like Jacob H. Carruthers, Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_002_007, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/12/01

Ras Ammar Nsoroma painted two murals for the Walker's Point Center for the Arts in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1995. Completed with the help of teenagers from the area, the murals depicted the Milwaukee's Mexican American and African American communities. One of the murals, installed at a Hispanic church, featured the Virgin of Guadalupe. The figure was incorrectly painted as a white woman when Nsoroma missed a day of work, but he corrected the mural upon his return. In addition to his public artwork, Nsoroma painted murals for the Ausar Auset Society in Milwaukee and Washington, D.C., and for the America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee. There, his murals flanked the entryway to the exhibition on the Middle Passage, and depicted an African village before enslavement, as well as the ocean and African coastline. Nsoroma also created a concrete relief mural illustrating the life of escaped slave Joshua Glover for Milwaukee's Marquette Interchange.

Video Oral History Interview with Ras Ammar Nsoroma, Section A2007_334_002_008, TRT: 0:29:50 2007/12/01

Ras Ammar Nsoroma painted numerous murals in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and across the United States. On behalf of the Social and Public Art Resource Center in Los Angeles, California, Nsoroma created 'The Resurrection of Watts' to represent the spiritual cleansing of the Watts uprising. In addition to his work as a muralist, Nsoroma curated 'JuJu: The Role of the African American Artist to Transform, Heal and Protect,' an exhibition at the Milwaukee Institute of Art. He was also active in Milwaukee's civic organizations, including African Americans Beginning to Educate Americans about African American Art (ABEA), which sponsored exhibits

and workshops for Milwaukee's African American artists. Nsoroma talks about his family, including his wife, Janeen Nsoroma, and two children, Kwame Nsoroma and Adjua Nsoroma. He also reflects upon his life and legacy, his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered. Nsoroma concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.