

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Pitchford-Jolly, Marva Lee
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly,
Dates:	July 15, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:16:06).
Abstract:	Sculptor Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly (1937 - 2012) was a tenured professor of ceramics at Chicago State University. She was recognized as one of the Top Ten Emerging Black Chicago Artists of 1986, and her works have been exhibited numerous times. Pitchford-Jolly was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on July 15, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_086
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Sculptor Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly was born on September 11, 1937 in Crenshaw, Mississippi to Mattie Louise Williams and Floyd Pitchford. Jolly received her B.A. degree from Roosevelt University in 1961 and her M.A. degree from Governors State University in 1974, both in the State of Illinois.

From 1961 to 1965, Pitchford-Jolly taught at the University of Chicago Laboratory School. She worked as teacher and director at the Chicago Youth Center Head Start from 1965 to 1969. Pitchford-Jolly then worked as program

director at the Chicago Commons from 1969 to 1974. In 1974, she worked as a professor of ceramic at Chicago State University and the education coordinator of the Suburban Health System Agency until 1981. From 1981 to 1985, she was a self-taught ceramic artist and sculptor at the Press Artisan 21 Gallery in Chicago, Illinois. Pitchford-Jolly received an award in the Best Of Category at the Museum of Science and Industry in 1984. In 1986, she was recognized as a Top Ten Emerging Black Chicago Artist. A year later, Pitchford-Jolly worked as a curator at the Sapphire and Crystals Black Women's Art Exhibition. Her profile was featured in *Today's Chicago Woman Magazine* and worked as an artist-in-residence for the Lakeside Group in 1988. Her work was also featured in the 2005 Chicago Woman's Caucus for Art. In 2008, Pitchford-Jolly and David Philpot's clay pots and carved wooden staffs were showcased in the "Kindred Spirits" Exhibit at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center. Her art is also exhibited and sold at the Esther Saks Gallery and was seen in Columbia Motion Pictures film, *Date Night 7*.

Pitchford-Jolly served on the board of directors of Urban Traditions in 1984 and the Chicago Cultural Center in 1986; a board member of the African American Roundtable in 1985; and on the Exhibition Committee at the Chicago Cultural Center. In addition, Pitchford-Jolly volunteered at the Southside Community Art Center. Also, she is the founder of the Mude People's Black Women's Resources Sharing Workshop. Pitchford-Jolly lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Pitchford-Jolly was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 15, 2008.

Marva Pitchford-Jolly passed away on October 21, 2012.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly was conducted by Larry Crowe on July 15, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sculptor Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly (1937 - 2012) was a tenured professor of ceramics at Chicago State University. She was recognized as one of the Top Ten Emerging Black Chicago Artists of 1986, and her works have been exhibited numerous times.

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:

Pitchford-Jolly, Marva Lee

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Pitchford-Jolly, Marva Lee--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Sculptor

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 Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, July 15, 2008. 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 Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_001, TRT: 0:28:35 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly was born on September 11, 1937 in Crenshaw, Mississippi to Mattie Williams Pitchford and Floyd Pitchford, Sr. Her mother's family migrated from North Carolina to Crenshaw during the 19th century in search of inexpensive land. Her maternal grandparents, Matilda Williams and Butler Williams, became established members of the community; and, as a child, Pitchford-Jolly's mother was known for her singing and storytelling skills. Pitchford-Jolly's paternal grandfather arrived in Crenshaw as a young man, and purchased farmland where he raised his children, including Pitchford-Jolly's father. Pitchford-Jolly's parents met in school, and married in Memphis, Tennessee. After the birth of their first set of twins, they returned to Crenshaw to live with Pitchford-Jolly's paternal grandfather. As a child, Pitchford-Jolly was assigned many chores, and came to dislike rural life. She also witnessed the respect her grandfather received from Crenshaw's white residents, despite southern segregation.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_002, TRT: 0:28:33 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly's parents met in Crenshaw, Mississippi. Her maternal grandparents were notable residents in town, and did not approve of Pitchford-Jolly's father because he had grown up in a rural area. When her mother became pregnant, Pitchford-Jolly's parents moved to Memphis, Tennessee; and, after a short time, returned to live with her paternal grandfather in Crenshaw. Pitchford-Jolly was one of eight siblings, including her fraternal twin, Larva Pitchford Cunningham. She often spent time

with her family on their porch, and also enjoyed playing alone on the farm. Her family attended church occasionally; and, despite pressure from the community, Pitchford-Jolly never left the mourner's bench. Although they were not wealthy, her family's landownership lessened the impact of the Great Depression, and rationing during World War II. Pitchford-Jolly began her education at Crenshaw Elementary School. She also describes her family's food preservation techniques, including potato banking.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_003, TRT: 0:28:45 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly attended Crenshaw Elementary School in Crenshaw, Mississippi. She enjoyed studying mathematics and history, and was mentored by her first grade teacher after graduating to the second grade. Outside of school, Pitchford-Jolly assisted with chores on her paternal family's cotton farm, and enjoyed listening to the radio with her relatives at night. After the death of her mother, Mattie Williams Pitchford, in 1948, Pitchford-Jolly's father, Floyd Pitchford, Sr., left Crenshaw to work for the Corn Products Refining Company in Chicago, Illinois. Pitchford-Jolly threatened to run away to her aunt's home Detroit, Michigan, but remained with her seven siblings on her paternal grandfather's farm, until being sent to live with another aunt in Memphis, Tennessee. The children often conflicted with her; and, in 1951, moved to their father's home on the South Side of Chicago. There, Pitchford-Jolly attended Francis Parkman Elementary School, and then Englewood High School.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_004, TRT: 0:29:12 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly attended Englewood High School in Chicago, Illinois, where she played volleyball and basketball. Aspiring to study political science, she successfully campaigned for the presidency of her junior class. She was also inducted to the National Honor Society. At the time, the student body of Englewood High School was predominantly black, while most of the faculty were white. Upon graduating from high school in 1957, Pitchford-Jolly worked for the summer at Chicago's

Mercy Hospital, and then matriculated at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. There, she was one of twelve African American students, and experienced racial discrimination and derogatory comments from both her peers and professors. After one year, she returned to Chicago and joined the workforce. She married Warner Jolly in 1960; and, in 1962, enrolled at Roosevelt University while continuing to work full time as a preschool teacher. Pitchford-Jolly divorced her husband in 1969.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_005, TRT: 0:29:53 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly attended Roosevelt University in Chicago, Illinois, and worked on a research project about early childhood education at the University of Chicago. Upon graduating in 1966, Pitchford-Jolly taught at a Head Start program, eventually becoming an administrator. In the mid-1970s, she worked as a community organizer for the Suburban Cook-DuPage County Health Systems Agency; and, after her position was defunded in 1980, she decided to focus on learning to make ceramics. The following summer, Pitchford-Jolly became a ceramics teacher at Chicago State University, where she continued to learn about ceramics, including glaze chemistry. In 1990, Dolores E. Cross was appointed as the university's president, and Cross persuaded Pitchford-Jolly to become a full faculty member. Pitchford-Jolly also became involved with the South Side Community Arts Center, where she worked with local artists like painter Jonathan Green; and founded Sapphire and Crystal, an art collective for black women, in 1986.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_006, TRT: 0:29:27 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly was a noted sculptor and ceramics professor in Chicago, Illinois. There, she was active in arts organizations like the Sapphire and Crystal collective and the National Conference of Artists. Pitchford-Jolly first visited West Africa in 1974, when she travelled to Senegal. She returned in subsequent years, and received a grant from the City of Chicago to conduct research in Zambia, where she studied the work of rural

ceramic artists. In 1992, Pitchford-Jolly created 'Old People Say,' a sculpture that represented proverbs from her childhood in Mississippi. It was installed at Chicago State University, and later destroyed by a construction project. Pitchford-Jolly was most well-known for a series of sculptures called story pots. She often drew inspiration from her observations of people, and created a story pot about Hurricane Katrina in 2005. She talks about her artistic philosophy, and describes her hopes and concerns for African American artists.

Video Oral History Interview with Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly, Section A2008_086_001_007, TRT: 0:21:41 2008/07/15

Marva Lee Pitchford-Jolly sold her early story pot sculptures to her friends in Chicago, Illinois, and went on to exhibit her work at the Artisans 21 Gallery in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. Pitchford-Jolly talks about the role of her spirituality in her artistic work. She also reflects upon her life, legacy and how she would like to be remembered; and describes her friends and family, including her youngest brother, Charles Pitchford, who lived in Liberia. In addition, Pitchford-Jolly shares 'Women of the World,' a story pot sculpture that honored the work of women.