

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Lee Ransaw

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ransaw, Lee A., 1938-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw,
Dates:	April 19, 2011
Bulk Dates:	2011
Physical Description:	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:48:36).
Abstract:	Fine artist and art professor Lee Ransaw (1938 -) was the dean of arts and letters and chair of the fine arts department at Morris Brown College and founder of The National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges. Ransaw was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2011, in Stone Mountain, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2011_026
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fine artist and art professor Lee Ransaw, was born on March 24, 1938, in Little Rock, Arkansas, to Sylvia and Lee Lester. In 1955, Ransaw received his high school diploma from Shortridge High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. He later attended Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana where he earned his B.A. degree in art education in 1962 and his M.A. degree in fine arts in 1966. In 1973, Ransaw received his Ed.D. degree from Illinois State University.

While Ransaw was a graduate student at Illinois State University, he travelled to

Nashville, Tennessee where he met artist and scholar David Driskell. This visit inspired Ransaw to begin collecting artwork for his private art collection. After taking courses at Pratt Institute in New York, Ransaw moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he taught African art and Afro-American art at Emory University. In 1979, Ransaw was hired at Morris Brown College as an art professor where he painted the *Centennial Mural* which depicted the history of the college. The mural was considered to be a national project and was commissioned by the Atlanta Coca Cola Bottling Company. In 2002, Ransaw along with Lamar Wilson, director of Ruth Hall Hodges Art Gallery, founded The National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (NAAHBCU) on the campus of Morris Brown College. Ransaw, then dean of arts and letters, and chair of the fine art department at the college, initially held a statewide exhibit that featured the artwork of the art faculty from Georgia based HBCUs. NAAHBCU held its first major traveling exhibition entitled *Visions From Within* at the James Kemp Gallery at The Black Academy of Arts & Letters in Dallas, Texas and featured thirty artists. In 2004, Ransaw was hired as an adjunct art professor at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Ransaw retired as president of NAAHBCU in 2010 and served as chairman of the organization. Among his many honors and awards were The Distinguished United Negro College Fund Scholars Award in Washington, D.C., The Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, The Ford Foundation Fellowship, and a Bronze Jubilee Award for artistic achievement given by PBS in Atlanta, Georgia.

Lee Ransaw was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April, 19, 2011.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Lee Ransaw was conducted by Denise Gines on April 19, 2011, in Stone Mountain, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Fine artist and art professor Lee Ransaw (1938 -) was the dean of arts and letters and chair of the fine arts department at Morris Brown College and founder of The National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The

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:

Ransaw, Lee A., 1938-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ransaw, Lee A., 1938---Interviews

African American artists as teachers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Spelman College

Morris Brown College

Occupations:

Fine Artist

Art Professor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|EducationMakers

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 Lee Ransaw, April 19, 2011. 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 Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_001, TRT: 1:29:55 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw was born on March 24, 1938 in North Little Rock, Arkansas to Sylvia Hall Ransaw and Lee Lester. His maternal grandfather, George Hall, was a Methodist preacher, while his grandmother, Mary Gamble Hall, worked in the post office. Ransaw's mother was raised in Ozan, Arkansas and sold her high school class ring to pay her first year's tuition at Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. Ransaw's father was born and raised in Brinkley, Arkansas, and later worked as a teacher and tailor. Ransaw's parents divorced when he was five years old, and Ransaw and his mother moved to Gary, Indiana, where they lived with several of his maternal relatives. He attended East Pulaski School and Tainey Methodist Church, and frequented his uncle's grocery store nearby. Ransaw also enjoyed drawing from an early age. His mother met and married insurance salesman George Ransaw, and moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where Ransaw joined her a few months later.

African American children.

African American families--Arkansas.

African Americans--Migrations--History--20th century.

African Americans--Marriage.

Divorce.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_002, TRT: 2:29:08 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw was bussed to George Washington Carver School 87 in Indianapolis, Indiana even after several parents advocated for the integration of a closer school. He graduated to Shortridge High School, a college preparatory school where one of his few African American peers was journalist Wallace Terry. African American students were barred from certain extracurricular clubs there, so Ransaw played baseball on a city-wide team instead. He belonged to the congregation at University United Methodist Church, and listened to WLAC Radio, which played more African American artists than mainstream stations. Ransaw's family was one of the first to own a television in his neighborhood, and neighbors often came to watch the African American performers. Following his graduation, Ransaw hoped to attend Indiana University in Bloomington, but his mother, Sylvia Hall Ransaw, insisted that he enroll at John Herron Art Institute and extension classes at Indiana University in Indianapolis for the first year.

African Americans--Education--Indiana.

School integration--Indiana.

Art--Study and teaching.

John Herron Art Institute. Art School.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_003, TRT: 3:28:57 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw's maternal grandfather, George Hall, was born in Chickasaw County, Mississippi as the illegitimate son of an African American woman, Sylvia Buckingham, and a white plantation foreman. When he and his brother, David Hall, were accused of stealing, they fled the state separately to escape a lynch mob. Ransaw's grandfather migrated to Arkansas, where he met Ransaw's

grandmother, Mary Gamble Hall, and became a preacher. Decades later, Ransaw and his mother moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where Ransaw took classes at the Indiana University Extension Center and John Herron Art Institute before transferring to Indiana University in Bloomington. Upon graduating in 1960, Ransaw was drafted into the U.S. Army and sent to cryptologic training at Fort Gordon in Georgia. He was stationed in Venice, Italy after he was unfairly denied an assignment in Paris, France. Cryptologic work was stressful and dangerous, and after his discharge, Ransaw declined an offer to continue the work in Washington, D.C.

African American families.

African American students--Indiana University.

African American soldiers--Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

African Americans--Genealogy.

Slavery--Mississippi.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_004, TRT: 4:28:50 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw was discharged from the U.S Army in 1964, and returned to Gary, Indiana, where he began his master's studies at Indiana University Northwest. He also worked for the Inland Steel Company and as a substitute teacher. Ransaw finished his master's degree in 1966, and was hired as an art teacher in Louisville, Kentucky.

Afterwards, he was encouraged by his professor Frederick V. Mills to pursue his Ph.D. degree at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. There, he learned about African American art for the first time. With his mentor, William Colvin, he also visited collections across the United States, and met artist David Driskell. Ransaw's doctoral thesis merged art and sociology to examine the Wall of Respect and similar urban civil rights murals. Ransaw became the third African American student to graduate from Illinois State University's art department in 1973. He taught at the University of Wisconsin Madison for a year, then joined the faculty at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia.

African American artists--Graduate studies.

African American teachers--Education (Primary).

African American art--History--19th century.

African American art--History--20th century.

African Americans--Art--History and criticism.

Rockefeller Foundation.

Morris Brown College--Faculty.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_005, TRT: 5:29:27 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw became an assistant professor of art at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia in 1974. He was promoted to associate professor, and selected to serve as department chair when Ruth Hall Hodges retired. Ransaw was part of the influx of African American artists who moved to Atlanta during the 1970s and 1980s, which included William Tolliver, Evelyn Mitchell and Paul Jones. In 1977, he was awarded a fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation to study art education at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. While there, Ransaw attended the Robert Blackburn Printmaking Workshop and Pratt Institute, and learned publication style writing at The New School for Social Research.

Afterwards, he returned to Morris Brown College and successfully advocated for the addition of a gallery on campus. Ransaw was selected in 1982 to design a mural to celebrate the college's centennial; and in 1987, was involved with the founding of the National Black Arts Festival, which was hosted in Atlanta every two years.

African American mural painting and decoration.

Morris Brown College--Faculty.

Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.).

African American artists--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section
A2011_026_001_006, TRT: 6:22:19 2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw met Dan Moore, Sr. in the early 1980s, and helped him to establish the original location of the APEX Museum at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. In the following years, Ransaw assisted Moore in acquiring the museum's first art collection. Ransaw also created a new gallery at Morris Brown College, and curated an

exhibit to attract spectators during the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta. In 2000, he founded the National Alliance of Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the nation's second largest black arts organization, and helped organize the group's first traveling exhibition, 'Visions from Within.' Under Ransaw's leadership, the group created the exhibit 'Coming by Force: Overcoming by Choice.' At the time of the interview, Ransaw was working on another exhibit titled 'Perception of Whiteness,' and writing two chapters for an art textbook. Ransaw also talks about his wife, Cheryl Johnson Ransaw, shares his advice to future artists and reflects upon his legacy.

Olympic Games (26th: 1996: Atlanta, Ga.).

Morris Brown College--Sports.

Art--United Negro College Fund.

Art patronage--United States.

Multiculturalism in art--United States.

African American artists--Societies, etc.