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

Overview of the Collection

Repository: The HistoryMakers® 1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616
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Creator: Ransaw, Lee

Title: The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw,

Dates: April 19, 2011

Bulk Dates: 2011

Physical Description: 6 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:48:36).

Abstract: Fine artist and art professor Lee Ransaw (1938 - ) is the former dean of arts and letters and chair of the fine art 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 Ransaw. 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. Ramsaw 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 Betacam SP videocassettes. Fine artist and art professor Lee Ransaw (1938 - ) is the former dean of arts and letters and chair of the fine art 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 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:

Lee Ransaw

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Lee Ransaw--Interviews
African American artists as teachers--Interviews

African American artists--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Morris Brown College

Spelman College

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 8/29/2011 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, April 19, 2011

Video Oral History Interview with Lee Ransaw, Section A2011_026_001_001, TRT: 1:29:55
2011/04/19

Lee Ransaw was born March 24, 1938 in North Little Rock, Arkansas. He was an adjunct professor at Spelman College and a full professor at Morris Brown College. Ransaw’s parents are Lee Andrew Lester from Brinkley, Arkansas and Silvia Hall from Ozan, Arkansas. Ransaw’s parents lived in Little Rock, Arkansas before separating when he was around five years old. After the separation, Ransaw’s mother married George Ransaw, an insurance salesman. His mother was educated at Philander Smith College for a year, and when they moved to the North, she attended beautician school. His mother met George Ransaw in Gary, Indiana. They married and moved to Indianapolis. Ransaw attended East Pulaski Elementary School. He describes his neighborhood in Indianapolis as a very nice neighborhood on the north side of the city, but that the city was largely segregated.

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 attended Public School #87 from fourth to eighth grade, where he was involved in sports. In order to attend school, black students had to be bused to 24th Street to Public School # 87. He attended the integrated Shortridge High School, one of the top prep schools in the city. Ransaw was in the third group of approximately twenty-five or thirty African American students allowed to attend. Ransaw’s transition to the integrated high school was a challenge but as an athlete, Ransaw was able to connect with some white students. There were also Civil Rights groups meeting in the city, but Ransaw was not interested in participating. His mother sent him to John Herron Art School for his first year of college, and before going to Indiana University.

African American education--Indiana.
School integration--Indiana.
Art--Study and teaching.

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

Lee Ransaw researched his family tree, and followed it back to 1834 on a plantation in Chickasaw, Mississippi. A foreman named Raven had children with a slave named Silvia Buckingham, out of which the Halls, Ransaw’s maternal family, emerged. The Hall family landed in Arkansas when George Hall, hopped a train without knowing its direction, while fleeing law enforcement. Later, he married Mary Catherine. Ransaw entered John Herron Art School in 1956. After the first year, he had enough money to attend Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. In 1957, he pledged Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity. Ransaw chose print making and graphic design as his focus. In 1960,
he earned his B.A. degree in art and was drafted into the U.S. Army. He was sent to Fort Gordon and was assigned to crypto school, where he learned to decipher secret codes. He was then assigned to Italy where he remained for about three years.

African Americans--Families.
African American students--Indiana University.
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 returned to Gary, Indiana in 1964, after being discharged from the U.S. Army, where he worked at the Inland Steel Mill and began graduate courses towards his M.A. degree at Indiana University in Gary, Indiana. He also taught elementary and high schools in Gary for a year, and at Jackson Junior High School in Louisville, Kentucky. Ransaw and the interviewer discuss black art during which he compares various forms of black expression in the 19th and 20th century. In 1978 while teaching at Morris Brown College in Atlanta Georgia, Ransaw received a Rockefeller Grant to study in New York City. Ransaw left the University of Wisconsin for Morris Brown, who made him an offer to join the faculty.

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 taught at Morris Brown from 1974 to 1977, advancing to Department Chair around 1976. While teaching at Morris Brown, Ransaw was awarded a Rockefeller grant to study at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, New York. During his grant, he took printmaking workshops and began collecting art. In 1979, Ransaw was made chair of the art department at Morris Brown, during which time he hired two new art instructors, and created the mural for Morris Brown’s one hundredth anniversary. In the early 1990s, Ransaw was preparing for a promotion and tenure, looking for ways to improve the art department at Morris Brown, putting on conferences and working with the National Art Educational Association on the minority concerns committee and the College Art Association.

African American mural painting and decoration.
Morris Brown College--Faculty.
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 discusses the 1996 Olympic Games held in Atlanta, Georgia. The Atlanta University Consortium campuses received funding to do special
projects. Morris Brown built a football stadium, and invited Fred Adjano from Nigeria to be an artist in residence at the college. He created a work for the administration building that highlighted education and teachers. Ransaw also received funds from the United Negro College Fund to create a new gallery, which received thousands of visitors daily during the summer games. In 2000, Ransaw founded the National Alliance of Black Artists from Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Ransaw married Sheryl Johnson-Ransaw in the late 1990s. When asked to give a message to future generations, Ransaw states the importance of the arts. He would like his legacy to be that he tried as much as he could, with what he had available at the time, and that he continued to strive for excellence.

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--Professional associations.