

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Byron Lars

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Lars, Byron, 1965-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Byron Lars,
<b>Dates:</b>	November 8, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	2 uncompressed MOV digital video files (1:03:57).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fashion designer Byron Lars (1965 - ) won widespread acclaim for his 1991 collection, first ordered by retailer Henri Bendel. Known for his menswear designs and pattern mixing, Lars also launched a women's line called Byron Lars Beauty Mark in 2001. Lars was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 8, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_094
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fashion designer Byron Lars was born on January 19, 1965 in Oakland, California to Gloria Gardner Bonds and Earnest Lars. Lars grew up in nearby El Cerrito, California, where his mother encouraged his creativity, and his father, who worked in construction, nurtured his interest in craftsmanship. Lars attended El Cerrito High School, taking advanced math classes in preparation for a career in architecture. In the tenth grade, a friend taught Lars to use a sewing machine; and Lars taught himself to make patterns. He designed his classmates' prom dresses in order to fund a school trip to Europe, and created a gown for his own senior prom

date. Upon graduation from high school, Lars completed a two-year fashion program at Brooks Fashion Institute of Technology in Long Beach, California, where he earned first place at the student design fashion show. In 1986, Lars enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, although he left before graduating.

Between 1987 and 1991, Lars used his patternmaking skills to obtain freelance work for Kevan Hall, Gary Gatyas, and Nancy Crystal Blouse Co., among others. He developed his first sample set of seven garments, which he marketed to high end retail buyers. In 1990, Lars received an order for forty pieces of his designs from Henri Bendel on Fifth Avenue in New York City. The following year, Lars received orders from Bloomingdale's, Neiman Marcus, and other high end retailers. His collection won widespread acclaim, and Lars was named *Women's Wear Daily's* Rookie of the Year. Faced with a rapidly growing business, Lars signed a licensing contract for his Shirt Tales line in 1995. Lars then entered into a contract with Mattel to design collectible Barbie dolls, and began designing Green T, an affordable clothing line he founded in 1999.

Lars was well-known for his menswear designs, especially men's dress shirting and pattern mixing, as well as his sensitivity to fit and cut, and his use of draping and sarong-inspired tying. His line, Byron Lars Beauty Mark, which launched in 2001, expanded to include plus sizing. Lar's Byron Lars Beauty Mark pieces were worn by celebrities such as Angela Bassett and First Lady Michelle Obama.

Byron Lars was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on October 6, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Byron Lars was conducted by Harriette Cole on November 8, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 2 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Fashion designer Byron Lars (1965 - ) won widespread acclaim for his 1991 collection, first ordered by retailer Henri Bendel. Known for his menswear designs and pattern mixing, Lars also launched a women's line called Byron Lars Beauty Mark in 2001.

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## 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®.

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## **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.

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## **Controlled Access Terms**

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### **Persons:**

Lars, Byron, 1965-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Lars, Byron, 1965---Interviews

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## **Organizations:**

## **Occupations:**

Fashion Designer

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

StyleMakers

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## **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 Byron Lars, November 8, 2016. 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).

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## **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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Byron Lars, Section  
A2016\_094\_001\_001, TRT: 1:32:32 2016/11/08

Byron Lars was born on January 19, 1965 in Richmond, California to Gloria Gardner Bonds and Earnest Lars. His mother was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and moved with her family to California's San Francisco Bay Area. There, Lars' grandmother, Tina Lee Robinson Gardner, worked as a domestic to support her husband, Colonel Gardner, while he attended the University of California, Berkeley. He went on to work as a computer scientist. Their son, Douglas Gardner, became a pimp, and died in his early thirties. Lars' father was also from Shreveport, where he was raised with two siblings. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps, and then worked as a concrete finisher in Richmond, where he met Lars' mother. As a child, Lars and his brother, Vincent Lars, were encouraged by their father to explore their creativity. Lars began his education at Grant Elementary School in Richmond, and then attended El Cerrito High School in El Cerrito, California, where he was assigned to the honors English class.

Video Oral History Interview with Byron Lars, Section  
A2016\_094\_001\_002, TRT: 2:31:25 2016/11/08

Byron Lars attended El Cerrito High School in El Cerrito, California. Around this time, he learned to sew from his neighbor in Richmond, California. He went on to design his high school classmates' prom dresses, which he created with high end fabrics. Lars' first mentor in the fashion industry was an African American saleswoman at the I. Magnin and Company store in Richmond. At this point in the interview, Lars remembers the fashion of the 1980s, including Valentino's innovative shoulder pad designs. Upon graduating from high school, Lars

completed a two-year fashion program at Brooks College in Long Beach, California. He then moved to New York City, where he enrolled at the Fashion Institute of Technology. There, his designs were criticized for their fuller size and shape. In 1987, Lars left the school and traveled to Paris, France in pursuit of employment. However, he was not hired at that time, and his sketches were stolen by the well-known European fashion house Versace.