

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ernestine Brown

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Brown, Ernestine, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ernestine Brown,
Dates:	March 15, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:50:56).
Abstract:	Art gallery owner Ernestine Brown (1935 -) was co-owner and director of the Malcolm Brown Gallery, which gained national and international recognition for increasing awareness and appreciation of the visual arts under her direction. Brown is active in numerous professional and civic organizations and has received many awards. Brown was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 15, 2004, in Shaker Heights, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_022
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Gallery director, arts advocate and civic leader Ernestine Turner Brown was born October 22, 1935 in Youngstown, Ohio. She was the first of three children born to Alma Hill and Isaac Turner. She attended Madison Elementary and East/North High Schools in Youngstown, Ohio and earned a bachelor's degree in education from Youngstown State University in 1959. Brown also completed post-baccalaureate work at Boston, Northwestern and Kent State Universities.

After graduating from Youngstown, Brown worked as a full-time business education teacher in the Cleveland Public Schools from 1960 until 1966, and then as a part-time instructor in business classes at Cuyahoga Community College until 1976. Since 1980, she has been the director and co-owner, with her husband water colorist Malcolm Brown, of the Malcolm Brown Gallery in Shaker Heights, Ohio. Under Brown's directorship, the gallery has gained national and international recognition for increasing awareness and appreciation of the visual arts by exposing new and seasoned audiences to a broader spectrum of art and artists. Among the renowned African American artists whose works have been showcased in the Malcolm Brown Gallery are Elizabeth Catlett, Romare Bearden, and Selma Burke. Articles about the gallery's exhibits have appeared in *USA Today*, *Black Enterprise*, and *Essence Magazine* among others.

In addition to serving a diverse audience of private collectors, Brown has worked to enhance and develop the art collections of public institutions and private corporations, including the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Coca-Cola Corporation. Brown is also a much sought-after speaker, addressing such topics as "Collecting Art: The African American Artist" and "the Role of the Gallery to Artists and Art Audiences."

Brown is active in numerous professional and civic organizations, including the Advisory Outreach Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Coalition of 100 Black Women, the NAACP and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She is

also the recipient of many awards and honors, including the “Salute to Excellence in Art” award from the National Council of Negro Women and the Cleveland Arts Prize “Special Citation for Distinguished Service to the Arts.”

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ernestine Brown was conducted by Regennia Williams on March 15, 2004, in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Art gallery owner Ernestine Brown (1935 -) was co-owner and director of the Malcolm Brown Gallery, which gained national and international recognition for increasing awareness and appreciation of the visual arts under her direction. Brown is active in numerous professional and civic organizations and has received many awards.

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:

Brown, Ernestine, 1935-

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Brown, Ernestine, 1935---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Malcolm Brown Gallery

Occupations:

Art Gallery Owner

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 Ernestine Brown, March 15, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Ernestine Brown, Section A2004_022_001_001, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

Ernestine Brown was born on October 22, 1935 in Youngstown, Ohio to Alma Hill Turner and Isaac Turner. Both sides of her family migrated from Alabama to Youngstown to work in the steel mills. Brown's maternal grandparents migrated soon after her mother's birth, during the years of World War I. Brown's father paid his fare north with money from picking cotton. Her parents met and married on the cusp of the Great Depression. They divorced during Brown's childhood, and she subsequently assumed more familial responsibilities as her mother continued to work in the steel mills. The family often traveled south on family vacations. Brown's maternal grandparents often watched over Brown and her two siblings. Brown grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood on the east side of Youngstown. She attended the Madison School and went to church at Philips Chapel C.M.E. Brown describes herself as a responsible, honest child who aspired to a television performer. She recalls the smells of Youngstown's Schwebel's Bakery.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernestine Brown, Section A2004_022_001_002, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Ernestine Brown participated in oratory competitions as a student at East High School in Youngstown, Ohio. She talks about employment opportunities for African American girls during the 1950s. As a teenager, Brown worked as a secretary for a local lawyer. She continued secretarial work while attending Youngstown University. In 1959, she graduated from Youngstown with a B.A. degree in education. Several schools rejected Brown's applications for teaching positions based on her race. In 1960, she began teaching business at Kennard Junior High School in the Cleveland Public School System. Brown attended professional development workshops at Boston University during the summers of 1962 and 1963. She met her husband, HistoryMaker Malcolm Brown, while studying at Boston University. In fall 1963, Brown transferred to the business education department at Cleveland's John Hay High School. She talks about the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the March on Washington, and President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernestine Brown, Section A2004_022_001_003, TRT: 0:29:54 ?

Ernestine Brown recalls the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s and recalls being forced to sign a restrictive covenant when she and her husband bought their first house in the Cleveland suburb of Shaker Heights, Ohio in 1967. Brown returned to work in 1977, after her three children were born. She worked as a distributor of education coordinator at John Hay High School in Cleveland, Ohio, before being transferred to Lincoln-West High School. In 1980, Brown and her husband HistoryMaker Malcolm Brown opened Malcolm Brown Gallery, an art gallery devoted to exhibiting works by African American artists, in Shaker Heights. Works by HistoryMaker Elizabeth Catlett were exhibited at the gallery in 1981; shows by Romare Bearden and Hughie Lee-Smith followed in quick succession. The Browns operate the gallery with a small staff. The Cleveland Museum of Art and the Langston Hughes Library have accessioned works by Malcolm Brown into their permanent collections. Brown talks about the role of art in society.

Video Oral History Interview with Ernestine Brown, Section A2004_022_001_004, TRT: 0:21:36 ?

Ernestine Brown contacted June Kelly, artist Romare Bearden's manager, soon after she and her husband, HistoryMaker Malcolm Brown, opened the Malcolm Brown Gallery in Shaker Heights, Ohio in 1980. Two years later, Bearden exhibited at the gallery. Brown and Kelly also helped Calvin Hill acquire works by Bearden, Hughie Lee-Smith, and HistoryMaker Elizabeth Catlett. Some local arts organizations have resisted collaborating with the gallery because of its for-profit status. In the early 1990s, the Cleveland Museum of Art acquired one of

Malcolm Brown's paintings through a private donation. Ernestine Brown serves on the Womens Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art, and she volunteers with service organizations such as National Coalition of 100 Black Women, The Links, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Brown hopes that smaller arts organizations will receive greater financial support in the future and that the future canon of American art will become more racially inclusive. She talks about her children.