

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Earl Reid

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Reid, James Earl, 1942-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid,
Dates:	August 3, 2004 and August 4, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:59:24).
Abstract:	Sculptor and painter James Earl Reid (1942 - 2021) was a renowned artist who served as an assistant professor at University of Maryland for eleven years. He was known for his legal case involving the Community for Creative Non-Violence, which brought international attention to the concerns for the rights of artists to retain creative and intellectual property over their work. Reid was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 3, 2004 and August 4, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_117
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Renowned sculptor James Earl Reid was born at Stump Hope Farm in Princeton, North Carolina, on September 9, 1942. In 1970, Reid was awarded his master's degree in sculpture from the University of Maryland College Park.

While attending the University of Maryland, Reid worked as a graduate teaching assistant, and remained there after earning his M.A. degree, rising to become an assistant professor over the next eleven years. In 1979, Reid received his first major commission for a work of art when the City of Baltimore asked him to create a sculpture of jazz legend Billie Holiday, who spent her childhood there; the sculpture was unveiled in 1985 in the Druid Hill section of Baltimore.

The same year as the as the Billie Holiday sculpture's unveiling, Reid found himself in the center of a controversy that would take him to the United States Supreme Court. Commissioned by the Community for Creative Non-Violence (CCNV), Reid had been asked to create a sculpture for a Washington, D.C., Christmas pageant; his submission, *Third World America: A Contemporary Nativity*, featured a homeless family holding a newborn child over a steam vent, and featured the words "And still there is no room at the inn," on the base. The struggle with the piece began early, when initially the National Park Service refused to put the piece on display. The bigger issue, however, arose with the CCNV, when both they and Reid filed competing copyright claims on the work of art. After an initial District Court ruling favored CCNV, the case was taken to the Supreme Court, where Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote the decision in favor of Reid and all independent contractors; the case brought international attention to concerns for the rights of artists to retain creative and intellectual property.

After his landmark case settled, Reid continued to create works of art, holding numerous one-man shows and participating in many group shows.

Reid passed away on July 18, 2021.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with James Earl Reid was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 3, 2004 and August 4, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sculptor and painter James Earl Reid (1942 - 2021) was a renowned artist who served as an assistant professor at University of Maryland for eleven years. He was known for his legal case involving the Community for Creative Non-Violence, which brought international attention to the concerns for the rights of artists to retain creative and intellectual property over their work.

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:

Reid, James Earl, 1942-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Reid, James Earl, 1942---Interviews

African American artists--Interviews

African American sculptors--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Sculptor

Painter

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 James Earl Reid, August 3, 2004 and August 4, 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 James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_001_001, TRT: 0:31:12 ?

James Earl Reid was born at Stump Hope Farm in Princeton, North Carolina, on September 9, 1942. His mother, Pernel Barnes White, was born circa June 15, 1921 in North Carolina to sharecroppers. She worked at an insane asylum in Goldsboro, North Carolina prior to moving to Baltimore, Maryland. His father, John Lee Reid, was also born in North Carolina, but Reid rarely saw his father after his parents separated when he was two years old. Later in life, Reid reconnected with his father. Reid remembers his maternal grandmother, Hattie Barnes, as well as his various aunts and uncles who lived in shacks in North Carolina but provided hospitality and good food when he visited them. Reid lived with his mother and older sister, Leora, in the Banneker public housing in Baltimore, Maryland. A philosophical and sensitive child, Reid contemplated issues of existence and racism. He recalls playing baseball with children in his neighborhood and watching the boxing match between Joe Louis and Charles Ezzard on television.

African American artists--Interviews.

African American sculptors--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_001_002, TRT: 0:29:42 ?

James Earl Reid describes the feeling of levitating and flying above his neighborhood as a child. As an adult, Reid tried to recapture the freedom of his childlike mind in order to create art that engaged his full sensory abilities. Reid remembers his mother drawing pictures for the children at Banneker projects in Baltimore, Maryland, while he copied cartoons from the newspaper on the lined paper that he took from school. During elementary school, Reid was a shy and observant child who enjoyed history. At age eight, Reid's family moved from the Banneker projects to the Cherry Hill neighborhood of Baltimore. In junior high school, Reid's art teacher, George Barrack, mentored his artistic talents. At Southern High School in Baltimore, Reid's class, in 1957, was among the first to integrate. There, Reid met Allen Kasmicki, an art teacher, who aided his artistic breakthrough. Reid enjoyed rock and roll music, particularly the guitar, and listened to Nat King Cole, Ray Charles, and Billie Holiday.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_001_003, TRT: 0:29:38 ?

James Earl Reid talks about how his guidance counselor and his art teacher, Allen Kasmicki (ph.), at Southern High School in Baltimore, Maryland encouraged him to pursue art as a career. Heeding the advice of the book "The Natural Way to Draw" by Kimon Nicolaides, Reid drew two high school boys in their swimming trunks for three hours a day, five days a week. Reid describes the advantages of drawing live models. In high school, Reid's first sculpture was of a bison. Although his mother said there was no such thing as a black artist, Reid persisted and drew inspiration from Renaissance artists like Michelangelo, Rodin, Bernini, and Raphael. More focused on art than social activities, Reid was the star of his high school's fine arts festival and won a scholarship to the Baltimore Institute College of Art. In high school, Kasmicki paid for Reid's art lessons with John Bannon and Reid later worked with Joe Sheppard from the Six Realists.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_002_004, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

James Earl Reid talks about how his teachers, the Six Realists, taught him the Maroget technique of oil painting at Maryland Institute College of Art in

Baltimore, Maryland. In 1962, Reid sold seven drawings at his first show called New Perspectives of the Six Realists Gallery. He was named a man to watch by 'Baltimore' magazine. Despite this early success, Reid's career did not take off because he was a representational, realist artist during a time when abstract expressionism was favored by the arts world. Reid comments on the few successful realist painters of the mid-20th century such as Andrew Wyeth and Norman Rockwell. Reid graduated from the Baltimore Institute College of Art in 1967 with his bachelor's degree in fine arts. In 1968, he worked as an assistant to Pierre du Fayette in Columbia, Maryland before enrolling in graduate school at the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland where he was the first black graduate student in the art department.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_002_005, TRT: 0:30:11 ?

James Earl Reid talks about the dynamic between art critics and consumers perpetuates trends in contemporary art. Reid comments on contemporary black artists Robert Colescott and Jean-Michel Basquiat. For his master's degree in fine arts at the University of Maryland at College Park, Reid completed a master's thesis exhibition entitled "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" which was a self-portrait inspired by the death of Lee Harvey Oswald on live television and the philosophy of Albert Camus. Reid recalls the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his desire to create a monument to honor Dr. King in the wake of the tragedy. Reid's sculpture of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. After finishing his graduate studies, Reid continued to teach art at the University of Maryland at College Park. He also taught at Maryland Institute College of Art, Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, and Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_002_006, TRT: 0:29:58 ?

James Earl Reid was commissioned to create sculptures of Billie Holiday by the City of Baltimore, Maryland in 1979. The sculptures were placed in the Baltimore neighborhood of Upton near where the Royal Theatre stood before it was destroyed. Drawing inspiration from the classic Holiday songs "God Bless The Child" and "Strange Fruit," Reid's sculptures conveyed Holiday's contribution as an entertainer and served as a comment on the black experience. However, because of the City's objection, key elements of the sculptures were excluded and Reid refused to attend the unveiling in protest of this censorship. In 1985, Reid collaborated with an anti-homeless organization to create a piece entitled Third World America, a contemporary nativity showing a black homeless family on a steam grate. A dispute over copyright between Reid and the organization led to the 1989 U.S. Supreme Court case, the Community for Creative Non-Violence vs. Reid. In an opinion written by Justice Thurgood Marshall, Reid prevailed.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_002_007, TRT: 0:27:22 ?

James Earl Reid talks about the evolution of his activism over the course of his career, ranging from being denied tenure at the University of Maryland at College Park to protesting the censorship of his Billie Holiday sculptures. Reid also comments on the impact of his copyright battle with the Community for Creative Non-Violence that led to the 1989 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in his favor. Reid describes his hopes and concerns for the black community and talks about how creating artistic representation of black heroes gives him a purpose. Reid talks about his regrets, his children, and reflects upon his legacy and artistry.

Video Oral History Interview with James Earl Reid, Section A2004_117_002_008, TRT: 0:31:16 ?

James Earl Reid narrates his photographs.

