

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Johnny Coleman

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Coleman, Johnny W.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Coleman,
Dates:	January 12, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:24:41).
Abstract:	Installation artist and art professor Johnny Coleman (1958 -) teaches art and African American studies at Oberlin College. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums, including Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art, the David Zapf Gallery in San Diego, the Akron (Ohio) Museum of Art, and the William King Art Center in Abington, Virginia. Coleman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 12, 2005, in Oberlin, Ohio. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_010
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Installation artist, sculptor, and college professor Johnny Coleman was born in Saugus, Massachusetts on January 17, 1958. The son of Florence McCoy and John H. Coleman, he graduated from Redlands High School in Redlands, California and later earned his B.F.A. degree from the Otis Art Institute of the Parson's School of Design and his M.F.A. degree from the University of California, San Diego.

Coleman is a tenured faculty member at Oberlin College where he teaches studio art and African American studies. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums, including Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art, the David Zapf Gallery in San Diego, the Akron (Ohio) Museum of Art, and the William King Art Center in Abington, Virginia. His published works include "Landscapes of the Mind: Psychic Space and Narrative Specificity" in *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* from the University of Minnesota Press.

Coleman has received many awards and honors, including grants from the Ohio Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, ART MATTERS, and the Russell Foundation. In 1997, he was named Outstanding Alumnus of the Year by the Otis Institute of Art and Design. In 2003, he received the Cleveland Arts Prize for Visual Arts.

Coleman lives in Oberlin, Ohio and is married to Annette Macios. They have two children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Johnny Coleman was conducted by Regennia Williams on January 12, 2005, in

Oberlin, Ohio, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Installation artist and art professor Johnny Coleman (1958 -) teaches art and African American studies at Oberlin College. His work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and museums, including Cleveland's Museum of Contemporary Art, the David Zapf Gallery in San Diego, the Akron (Ohio) Museum of Art, and the William King Art Center in Abington, Virginia.

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:

Coleman, Johnny W.

Williams, Regennia (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Coleman, Johnny W.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Installation Artist

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 Johnny Coleman, January 12, 2005. 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 Johnny Coleman, Section A2005_010_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Johnny Coleman was born on January 17, 1958 in Saugus, Massachusetts to Florence McCoy and John Coleman. When Coleman was six months old, the family moved to Redlands, California because his father had taken a counseling position at Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino, California. His mother was a social worker. Coleman grew up in Redlands with his younger brother, David. He spent much of his time outdoors, playing sports and in nearby orange groves, where a local farmer shot at him and his friends with salt-filled shotguns. Coleman attended Franklin Elementary School in Redlands; he and his black and Mexican peers were treated differently than his white peers. Coleman's younger brother was once slapped by a teacher as a first grader. Coleman's

family kept Time-Life books in their home, which inspired him, along with works by artist Charles White. He did not receive much formal art training during his childhood. Coleman talks about his grandparents, his parents' siblings and the music of his youth.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Coleman, Section A2005_010_001_002, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Johnny Coleman grew up in Redlands, California. He spent a lot of time outdoors and at the YMCA pool, where he later worked as a lifeguard. Coleman's family attended First Baptist and Second Baptist Church in Redlands; he evaded going as often as possible. Coleman attended Redlands High School, but was more interested in athletics and working than in academics. Despite his disinterest, he finished his coursework during his junior year and took classes at a community college while working as a cook for Redlands Community Hospital. Coleman enrolled at the University of California, Santa Barbara for one year. After being hired at Thrifty Drug Store, he remained there for several years, becoming its youngest store manager in California, all the while maintaining an interest in art and music. He quit Thrifty to take art classes at a community college in Santa Barbara after which he enrolled at Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design in Los Angeles. He took an interest in studying the work of black artists.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Coleman, Section A2005_010_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Johnny Coleman earned his B.F.A. from Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design in Los Angeles, California. While there, he worked as a carpenter and installation artist and was mentored by artist Ulysses Jenkins, who pushed Coleman to find his own artistic voice. Coleman earned his M.F.A. degree from University of California, San Diego in 1992. In this part of the interview, Coleman establishes a genealogy of the concept of black aesthetics, pointing firstly to sculptor Augusta Savage, who ran the largest community center in Harlem in the 1920s, as well Langston Hughes' seminal Harlem Renaissance essay 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,' and HistoryMaker Samella Lewis' descriptions of black aesthetics. Coleman also considers issues of white patronage and black art and the impact of black cultural leaders, such as HistoryMaker Dick Gregory and James Brown. He recalls the impact of seminal Black Arts Movement figures Faith Ringgold and Gil Scott-Heron.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Coleman, Section A2005_010_001_004, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

Johnny Coleman received recognition for his art early in his career; as an M.F.A. student at the University of California, San Diego, he had his first solo exhibition. By way of this show, he got involved with Gallery David Zapf. Coleman's art consisted primarily of sound installation work. He was interested in creating whole environments for the viewer. Coleman's work was influenced by other black artists and his own family history. For example, he created an installation about his younger brother being slapped by a white teacher after writing his name on a chalkboard. The piece also paid homage to a Maroon ancestor. Another set of work included three pieces that took Toni Morrison's 'Beloved' as their reference point. He used recycled and recyclable materials, such as wooden beams from condemned barns, his own cut-off dreadlocks, and bales of straw. Coleman has made some smaller, discreet works, including several pieces for Toni Morrison herself. He regards his installations as a type of prayer or ritual.

Video Oral History Interview with Johnny Coleman, Section A2005_010_001_005, TRT: 0:27:00 ?

Johnny Coleman used his family history as source material for some of his artworks. An ancestor of his was a Maroon in the southeastern United States; he escaped from the plantation where he was enslaved by constructing a tunnel and

cave where he hid and lived with his family for years. Coleman inscribed the full story on a large tablet of slate that was incorporated into his exhibit. He has also made installation pieces about his grandmother. Alongside his art career, Coleman was a professor at Oberlin College, where he taught both studio classes and seminars. He describes two of his courses, a studio class called Something from Something and a seminar called Blues Aesthetic, and considers his future as a teacher and artist. Coleman talks about his marriage to fellow artist and professor Nannette Yannuzzi Macias and their two children. Coleman closes the interview by reflecting upon his indirect route to art, his legacy, and his hopes for his children's futures.