

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Marie Johnson-Calloway

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Johnson-Calloway, Marie, 1920-2018
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway,
Dates:	March 29, 2005
Bulk Dates:	2005
Physical Description:	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:20:40).
Abstract:	Painter and art professor Marie Johnson-Calloway (1920 - 2018) was hired as the first African American public school teacher in San Jose. Calloway's paintings, based on her memories of life in the South, have been exhibited throughout the United States and Japan. Johnson-Calloway was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 29, 2005, in Oakland, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2005_083
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Marie Johnson-Calloway was born Marie Edwards on April 10, 1920, in Pimlico, Maryland. Johnson-Calloway attended an all girls' high school in Baltimore, Maryland, and received her teaching certificate from Coppin Teachers College in Baltimore in 1939. Receiving her B.A. degree from Morgan State University in 1952, Johnson-Calloway would later earn her M.F.A. degree from San Jose State University in California. In 1975, Johnson-Calloway received her doctoral equivalency degree from San Francisco State University.

During the early 1950s, Johnson-Calloway traveled around the United States with her first husband, U.S. Air Force doctor Arthur Johnson. While Johnson was stationed in Alaska, Johnson-Calloway held her first art exhibit. After Johnson-Calloway's husband left the service, her family moved to San Jose, California, where she was hired as the first African American public school teacher in San Jose. Continuing to paint while running San Jose's Mecca Art Gallery, Johnson-Calloway later became an art teacher for the Santa Clara School District. In 1969, Johnson-Calloway became an assistant professor at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, and San Jose State University. From 1973 to 1983, Johnson-Calloway worked as an associate professor in the art department of the San Francisco State University.

Johnson-Calloway's paintings, based on her memories of life in the South, have been exhibited throughout the United States and Japan. Some of Johnson-Calloway's exhibits included *Hope Street: Church Mothers*, *Mama's Room*, *Passages*, and *Marie Johnson-Calloway On Stage: A Retrospective, 1950-1999*. Many of Johnson-Calloway's creations are part of permanent museum collections and private collections. A sought after presenter and lecturer, Johnson-Calloway received awards from the Women's Caucus for the arts of Northern California, the San Francisco Library Foundation Award, the Pioneers of African American Art, and the National Women's Caucus for the Arts.

Johnson-Calloway passed away on February 11, 2018 at age 97.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway was conducted by Loretta Henry on March 29, 2005, in Oakland, California, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Painter and art professor Marie Johnson-Calloway (1920 - 2018) was hired as the first African American public school teacher in San Jose. Calloway's paintings, based on her memories of life in the South, have been exhibited throughout the United States and Japan.

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:

Johnson-Calloway, Marie, 1920-2018

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Johnson-Calloway, Marie, 1920-2018--Interviews

African American painters--Interviews

African American artists as teachers--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

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 Marie Johnson-Calloway, March 29, 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 Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway was born April 10, 1920 in Pimlico, Maryland. Johnson-Calloway's mother, Marie Mack Edwards, was born in 1890 in Charleston, South Carolina. Johnson-Calloway's grandmother, the daughter of a slave and slave master, formed a relationship with a white lawyer who set her up in a house and maintained contact with their children. Edwards apprenticed with couturier designer Pauline Seba and attended Claflin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina. Johnson-Calloway's father, Sidney Joseph Edwards, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and became a minister. After marrying, he and Johnson-Calloway's mother moved to Pimlico. He founded Berean Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland, and her mother taught black children in the community there until an official school was established. The family moved around Northwest Baltimore. Johnson-Calloway remembers the smell of hot rolls, attending school with her siblings, meeting an estranged paternal aunt who was a nun and her brothers' deaths.

African American painters--Interviews.

African American artists as teachers--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_002, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway skipped several grades and entered junior high school at nine years old. At Frederick Douglass High School in Baltimore, Maryland, she had influential teachers in drama and Latin. When her parents divorced, her father continued ministering to lower-income communities while her mother began attending a more middle-class church. While studying at Coppin Teachers College in Baltimore, Johnson-Calloway discovered her artistic ability. After graduating from Coppin, she was only able to work as a substitute teacher due to the Great Depression. She met and married Arthur Johnson, who was completing medical school at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington D.C. At the beginning of World War II, during her maternity leave, Johnson-Calloway worked at the War Production Board as a file clerk and studied art and creative writing at Morgan State College, where she became friends with HistoryMaker Samella Lewis. When her husband was drafted, they moved their family to a U.S. Army base in Columbus, Ohio.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_003, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway and her children accompanied her first husband, flight surgeon Arthur Johnson, to a U.S. Army base in Fairbanks, Alaska in 1952. They lived in a Quonset hut until base housing was available. Stuck indoors during the intense winters, Johnson-Calloway turned to painting scenes of Alaskan life to pass the time. Her first show was held in the lobby of the Northern Lights Hotel in Fairbanks. In 1954, Johnson-Calloway and her family left Alaska for California, not wanting to return to segregated Maryland. A black doctor in the San Francisco area suggested they settle in San Jose, where the growing African American community lacked its own doctor. Johnson-Calloway became San Jose's first African American teacher, her husband became its first African American doctor, and they were the first family to integrate their neighborhood. Johnson-Calloway befriended her white neighbors, continued making art, and began a master's program in art at San Jose State College in the late 1960s.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_004, TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway's daughter was playmates with race car driver HistoryMaker Willy T. Ribbs while growing up in San Jose, California. After receiving her M.F.A. degree, Johnson-Calloway was hired as an arts specialist for the Santa Clara Unified School District. She formed and presided over the local NAACP chapter. While participating in the Selma Civil Rights March, Johnson-Calloway met Viola Liuzzo, and her husband treated Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for foot blisters. During the 3rd Selma Civil Rights March, she helped organize a food drive to support the marchers and locals. She continued her graduate studies at Stanford University, but left after encountering resistance to her proposed panel that included 'Black Rage' co-author HistoryMaker Dr. Price Cobbs. She was hired as a joint professor of black studies and art at her alma mater, San Jose State University, where the faculty included 'Black Scholar' publisher Robert Allen and Operation Crossroads Africa member Leonard Jeffries.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_005, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway traveled to Ghana with Glide Memorial United Methodist Church Pastor Cecil Williams. Intrigued by the region's vibrant batik fabrics and cowrie shells, she began incorporating them into her art work. In 1973, Johnson-Calloway left her first husband and moved to San Francisco, California. She taught part-time at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, California, San Jose State University and San Francisco State University, where she was eventually hired full-time and remained until 1983. Johnson-Calloway exhibited her work in shows with artist and friend Betye Saar. Her individual exhibits included 'Hope Street,' an assemblage depicting scenes of African American life, at Oakland Museum of California. She remembers the origin of her assemblage work, which grew out of a home improvement project, and the evolution of her art from abstract to autobiographical. She received the Richard Florsheim Art Fund Award and the Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_006, TRT: 0:27:40 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway received acclaim for her three-dimensional assemblage pieces. Although these works offered a means for representing issues of identity, she also found herself drawn to abstract painting since it provided an outlet for expressing her emotions. Through her civic involvement with World Affairs Council in San Francisco, California, Johnson-Calloway met jazz musician Dizzy Gillespie, who became friends with her and her first husband and acquired one of Johnson-Calloway's paintings for his wife. Johnson-Calloway's son later reunited with Gillespie and his wife in New York City. Johnson-Calloway met her second husband, Charles Calloway, at a local church; their first date was at one of her art shows. Johnson-Calloway concludes by reflecting on her life, legacy, how she would like to be remembered and her family's artistic accomplishments. She also shares her hopes for the African American community, advice for aspiring young artists and a message for future generations.

Video Oral History Interview with Marie Johnson-Calloway, Section A2005_083_001_007, TRT: 0:27:00 ?

Marie Johnson-Calloway narrates her photographs.