

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with R. Gregory Christie

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Christie, Gregory, 1971-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie,
Dates:	April 16, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:46:24).
Abstract:	Illustrator R. Gregory Christie (1971 -) has created illustrations and graphic artwork for record labels, books, and magazines. He received the Coretta Scott King Award honor for his work for 'Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan' and for illustrating 'Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth.' Christie was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 16, 2007, in Brooklyn, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_140
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Illustrator and freelance artist Richard Gregory Christie was born on July 26, 1971 in Plainfield, New Jersey to Ludria V. St. Amant Christie and Gerard A. Christie. Raised by his mother, a Louisiana Creole, and his father, a pharmacist from the Bronx, New York, Christie was raised in the Scotch Plains community near the Jerseyland Resort. He attended St. Bartholomew the Apostle Elementary School where he demonstrated a talent for art early on. In 1985, Christie worked for Commercial Art and Supply while he attended Scotch Plains Fanwood High School. Graduating in 1989, he enrolled in New York City's School for Visual Arts (SVA). His first illustration was published by the *Star Ledger* in the summer of 1990. In 1993, Christie graduated from SVA with his B.F.A. degree.

In 1994, Christie illustrated the album cover of Justice System's *Summer in the City*. Soon, his work graced the covers of jazz labels from all over the world, including Joe Sample's *Old Places Old Faces* Warner Brothers, 1996; George Benson's *A Song for my Brother* Giant Step Records, 1997; and Coltrane *The Complete 1961 Village Vanguard Recordings* GRP Impulse, 1997. Christie's illustrations also appeared in numerous publications in Europe, Asia and America, including on the subway cars of the New York Metro Transit Authority. In 1996, he illustrated Davida Adedjouma's *The Palm of My Heart; Poetry by African American Children* which had an introduction by Lucille Clifton. The owner of G.A.S. (Gregarious Art Statements) Art Gifts, an online children's bookstore that sells the books, art and stationery connected to his published titles, he has also served as a regular contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine. Additionally, Christie has illustrated the biographies of many significant historical and cultural figures, including Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, and Sojourner Truth. He also has contributed to notable projects such as Karyn Parsons' Sweet Blackberry history films, featuring narration by Chris Rock, Queen Latifah and Lawrence Fishburne on Netflix and HBO.

Christie won six Coretta Scott King Awards, including for *Brothers in Hope; The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan*,

and for illustrating *Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth*. He has also been a recipient of an NAACP Image Award and a Caldecott Honor. In 2013, he illustrated the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Congo Square Poster and was chosen as the designer for the U.S. Post Office's Kwanzaa Forever stamp.

Christie was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 16, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with R. Gregory Christie was conducted by Larry Crowe on April 16, 2007, in Brooklyn, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Illustrator R. Gregory Christie (1971 -) has created illustrations and graphic artwork for record labels, books, and magazines. He received the Coretta Scott King Award honor for his work for 'Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan' and for illustrating 'Only Passing Through: The Story of Sojourner Truth.'

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:

Christie, Gregory, 1971-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Christie, Gregory, 1971---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Illustrator

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 R. Gregory Christie, April 16, 2007. 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 R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_001, TRT:

0:30:03 ?

R. Gregory Christie was born on July 26, 1971 in Plainfield, New Jersey. His maternal great-grandfather was a farmer and landowner in New Roads, Louisiana where his mother, Ludria St. Amant Christie, was born in 1932. She left Louisiana for the North where she attended nursing school and became a dietician. Christie's paternal great-grandmother was a Garveyite and, after migrating from Jamaica, opened a grocery store in Harlem, New York City; however, his great-grandfather was a philanderer whose pursuits of women put the store out of business. His paternal grandfather was charming; Christie enjoyed his visits. His paternal grandmother fled an abusive home in Maryland to resettle in New York. Christie's father, Gerard Christie, was born in Harlem in the early 1930s. He studied pharmacy at St. John's University in New York during the Korean War when few African Americans were pharmacists. His father and two brothers enjoyed drawing as a hobby; Christie was the only family member who pursued a career in art.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_002, TRT: 0:30:13 ?

R. Gregory Christie grew up in Scotch Plains, New Jersey and spent summers with his grandparents in Louisiana. Due to his family's Catholic background, Christie did not attend public elementary school with his neighbors but was sent to St. Bartholomew Academy where he was not taught African American history and regularly confronted racism. Christie transferred to Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School where he still felt like an outsider, even with its diverse student body. Like his father, he had eclectic musical interests, ranging from classical to hip hop. Since his father frequently worked late, Christie was primarily raised by his mother who taught him how to cook. His early artwork was inspired by his comic book interests. By the time he reached eighth grade, his teachers had begun encouraging him to develop his painting abilities. He remembers watching 'Kung Fu Theater' on Saturdays, shooting a bow and arrow and buying ninja stars which he played with in his neighborhood.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_003, TRT: 0:29:43 ?

R. Gregory Christie joined the Scotch Plains Fanwood Arts Association in the seventh grade to learn about artistic techniques from its guest speakers, although the membership was mainly older women. In high school Christie worked for an art supply store in Plainfield, New Jersey and was a finalist for the Governor's Award in Arts Education. After graduating high school in 1988, he attended the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York, New York and forged friendships with gregarious yet self-destructive artists. Christie had a summer internship at the Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey where he learned the process for reproducing art in newspapers. During his time in New York City, he also worked in the bookshop at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. In the early 1990s he was promoted to working as security for the museum. He received his B.F.A. from SVA in 1993 and decided to enter the commercial art world. Christie considers the entertainment value of art and the ways in which artists transcend boundaries.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_004, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

R. Gregory Christie developed a sense of his own values and ethics from navigating the diverse and challenging world of New York, New York as a young adult. He showed his art at Nell's nightclub parties in New York where he invited prominent people, such as Thomas Krens, to attend. At Nell's, he met the

music group Zapp who commissioned him to create an album cover called 'Summer in the City' featuring a young boy playing a saxophone while sitting on a fence. In 1996, he illustrated his first book, Lucille Clifton's 'The Palm of My Heart: Poetry by African American Children,' which developed his artistic style by teaching him to interpret poems through painting. He remained at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum until leaving to be with his mother during her final days. He describes the increasing homogenization and commercialization of New York City's art world since the 1980s. Christie shares his perspective on celebrity artists and his hopes to be remembered for his fine art as well as his commercial art.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_005, TRT: 0:29:15 ?

R. Gregory Christie collaborated with Lucille Clifton for the children's book 'The Palm of my Heart' and observed her process for teaching children how to write poetry. . He also illustrated another children's story for Lee & Low Books, 'Richard Wright and the Library Card.' While Christie has been represented by agents in the past, he ultimately decided to represent himself as an artist. He started live painting with Giant Step records and painted at nightclubs in New York. He recently completed a mural for the Sun Valley Center for the Arts in Ketchum, Idaho. He reflects upon learning about history while still remaining attentive to the present and the value of art generally and illustrating children's books specifically. Christie describes his use of acrylic and gouache in children's books and commercial work and his preference for working independently as an illustrator. He also describes his hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with R. Gregory Christie, Section A2007_140_001_006, TRT: 0:17:58 ?

R. Gregory Christie reflects upon his life and considers the effects of being separated from his brothers and father. He concludes by narrating his paintings.