

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Adger Cowans

PERSON

Cowans, Adger W.

Alternative Names: Adger Cowans;

Life Dates: September 19, 1936-

Place of Birth: Columbus, Ohio, USA

Residence: Bridgeport, CT

Occupations: Photographer

Biographical Note

Photographer Adger Cowans was born on September 19, 1936, in Columbus, Ohio, to Beatrice Watson and Wilbur Cowans. Having graduated with his B.F.A. degree in photography in 1958 from Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, he went on to study at the School of Motion Picture Arts and the School of Visual Arts, in New York City.

In 1958, Cowans enlisted in the United States Navy Reserves, working as a photographer. After his discharge in 1960, he began working at Life magazine as well as with well-known photographer Gordon Parks. In 1963, Cowans joined the Kamoinge Workshop and participated in solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally. He also worked for photographer Henry Clarke, expanding into commercial photography. With his membership in the International Cinematographers Guild, Cowans branched out into film, including working on various Hollywood films such as Cotton Comes to Harlem.

In 1979, Cowans joined the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists (AfriCOBRA) collective. His exhibitions have included I Sight: Adger Cowans and Toni Parks, with Toni Parks, daughter of Gordon Parks, in 1993, Illuminations: Paintings and Photographs at Castle Gallery, College of New Rochelle, New York in 1994, and Working Together: The Photographers of the Kamoinge Workshop at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York City, in 2020.

Cowans's photographs have appeared in Sacred Bond: Black Men and Their Mothers (Little, Brown), published in 2000; Personal Vision: Photographs (Glittari), accompanied by the 2018 exhibit Personal Vision: The Exhibition at Hearne Fine Art, in Little Rock, Arkansas; his autobiography, Art in the Moment: Life and Times of Adger Cowans (Noahs Ark Publishing), published in 2019; and Adger (21st Editions),

published in 2022.

Cowans received the Lorenzo il Magnifico alla Carriera at the Florence Biennale of Contemporary Art, the Martin Luther King, Jr., Visiting Scholars Award from Wayne State University, and the Gordon Parks Legendary Award in 2001. In 2017, Cowans was the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from Howard University.

Cowans lives in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Adger Cowans was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 29, 2022.

Related Entries

East High School [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

High School Diploma

Ohio University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

B.F.A.

School of Visual Arts [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

The School of Motion Picture Arts [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Gordon Parks [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1958 to ?]

Photographer

United States Navy Reserves [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1958 to 1960]

Photographer

Life Magazine [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1960 to ?]

Photographer

Henry Clarke [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Photographer

[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

[EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

The Kamoinge Workshop [MEMBEROF]

[from 1963 to ?]

Member

The African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists [MEMBEROf]

[from 1979 to ?]

Member

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