

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Wadsworth, Jarrell, 1929-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr.,
Dates:	May 20, 2001
Bulk Dates:	2001
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:16:49).
Abstract:	Painter Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr. (1929 -) helped form a collective called COBRA-Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists, which later became AFRI-COBRA, the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. AFRI-COBRA took as its central tenets black pride, social responsibility and the development of a new diasporic African identity. Jarrell's work has been shown at numerous places including the Smithsonian International Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. Jarrell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 20, 2001, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2001_044
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Revolutionary social artist Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr. was born in Albany, Georgia, in 1929, the youngest of six children. Jarrell credits his father, a furniture maker, and the rest of his family for supporting his childhood interest in art. After high school, Jarrell served in Korea, and then moved to Chicago. In 1954, Jarrell enrolled in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago majoring in advertising art and graphic design. Not long afterward, Jarrell lost interest in commercial art and took more drawing and painting classes.

Graduating from the Art Institute in 1958, Jarrell spent several years working as a commercial artist. By the early 1960s, Jarrell was exhibiting his work widely throughout the Midwest. Meanwhile, the explosive social atmosphere of the era left him wanting to create art that was pertinent to the social movements of the day, the Civil Rights Movement and black liberation struggle. Jarrell joined the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC), a group that created Chicago's Wall of Respect mural, a seminal piece in the 1960s urban mural movement. It was there that he met his future wife, Elaine Annette (Jae) Johnson, a clothing designer. With the eventual breakup of the Artists' Workshop of OBAC, Jarrell and fellow artists Jeff Donaldson and Barbara Jones-Hogu, among others, formed a collective called COBRA-Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists, which later became AFRI-COBRA, the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. AFRI-COBRA took as its central tenets black pride, social responsibility and the development of a new diasporic African identity.

In 1971, Jarrell was recruited by fellow AFRI-COBRA founder, Jeff Donaldson to teach at Howard University where he pursued his Master of Fine Arts degree. He continued there until 1977, taking a position at the University of Georgia as Assistant Professor. In 1988, with the interest in his work increasing, Jarrell retired from teaching altogether. Jarrell's work has been shown at numerous places including: the Smithsonian International Gallery, the

Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at festivals and exhibitions in Nigeria, Germany, Sweden, France, Haiti and Martinique.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on May 20, 2001, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Painter Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr. (1929 -) helped form a collective called COBRA-Coalition of Black Revolutionary Artists, which later became AFRI-COBRA, the African Commune of Bad Relevant Artists. AFRI-COBRA took as its central tenets black pride, social responsibility and the development of a new diasporic African identity. Jarrell's work has been shown at numerous places including the Smithsonian International Gallery and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago.

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:

Wadsworth, Jarrell, 1929-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Wadsworth, Jarrell, 1929---Interviews

African American painters--Interviews.

African American art--20th century.

Athens (Ga.)--Social life and customs.

Camp Polk (La.).

Art Institute of Chicago. School.

Howard University--Faculty--Interviews.

Organization of Black American Culture.

University of Georgia--Faculty--Interviews.

Art and society.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

AFRICOBRA (Fine Artists’ group)

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 Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., May 20, 2001. 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 Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_001, TRT: 0:30:30 ?

Artist Wadsworth Jarrell, the youngest of six children, raised in a rural area near Athens, Georgia, talks about his childhood and youth in the 1930s and 1940s, his family, schooling, and passion for art. Jarrell says his entire family had artistic ability and considers his parents to have been artists themselves: his father was a carpenter and furniture maker with his own furniture store in Athens, and his mother was a creative and prolific quilt-maker who encouraged her youngest son's special talent. He also tells of teachers who mentored him and recommended he study art. Finally he recalls his military service at Camp Polk, Louisiana, where he was the battery artist, and a brief stint in Korea.

African American painters--Interviews.

African American art--20th century.

Athens (Ga.)--Social life and customs.

Camp Polk (La.).

Art Institute of Chicago. School.

African American mural painting and decoration.

Howard University--Faculty--Interviews.

Organization of Black American Culture.

University of Georgia--Faculty--Interviews.

Art and society.

Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_002, TRT: 0:29:36 ?

AFRI-COBRA artist Wadsworth Jarrell discusses his decision to move to Chicago and attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Jarrell details his experience there and names some of the influential instructors and artists he encountered. Jarrell also talks about the beginning of his involvement with AFRI-COBRA and the Wall of Respect.

Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_003, TRT: 0:31:13 ?

Artist Wadsworth Jarrell talks about his career, artistic development and family life during the late 1960s-1970s, including his work on the 'Wall of Respect' mural on the South Side of Chicago, the formation and aesthetic and philosophy of AFRI-COBRA, of which he was a founder, and his teaching at Howard University, where he also expanded his knowledge of African art.

Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_004, TRT: 0:29:16 ?

Artist Wadsworth Jarrell talks about the artistic evolution of his painting since the 1970s. and his different influences and styles during the past decades. He describes his experiences teaching art at Howard University and the University of Georgia, the toy business he and his wife Jae ran in Georgia, his decision to leave teaching in 1988 to spend more time on his own art, and then to move to New York in 1994. He also talks about his close relationship with his wife and speaks with pride of the talent and creativity of his three grown children.

Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_005, TRT: 0:16:14 ?

Artist Wadsworth Jarrell gives his ideas about the role of the artist in society and his definition of "black art", explaining how his ideas have evolved since the time of founding AFRI-COBRA in the 1960s. He talks about how his parents and praises his wife as the person he most admires.

Video Oral History Interview with Wadsworth A. Jarrell, Sr., Section A2001_044_001_006, TRT: ?