

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ausbra Ford

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Ford, Ausbra, 1935-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford,
Dates:	May 17, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:58:26).
Abstract:	Sculptor and art professor Ausbra Ford (1935 - 2020) has taught at Chicago State University and lectured around the country. In support of his interest in the funeral art of Afro-Americans, Ford received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship as well as a grant from Chicago State University to conduct research on the funerary art of West and Central Africa. Ford was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 17, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_078
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Ausbra Ford's academic and sculptural work has been the result of his adept merging of scholarly research with an artist's creativity. He was born in Chicago, Illinois on February 28, 1935. He attended Coleman Elementary and DuSable High School before studying sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago where he earned a B.A. in 1964 and a M.F.A. in 1966.

From 1964-1968, Ford taught art courses for elementary schools in both the Gary and Chicago public school systems. He then served a brief stint as an associate professor at Southern University in Baton Rouge before returning to Chicago to become a full-time Professor at Chicago State University. In support of his interest in the funeral art of Afro-Americans, Ford received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship as well as a grant from Chicago State University to conduct research on the funerary art of West and Central Africa. Subsequent grants from the Chicago State University Foundation allowed him to continue pursuing his work in the field.

Ford's writing on funerary art has been published in journals such as *World Anthropology* and the *Morition Press*, and in the books *Two Centuries of Afro-American Art* and *African Influence in Funeral Art of Haiti*.

He has lectured at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and the Chicago Field Museum, as well as numerous colleges around the country. Ford sits on the Board of Directors of the DuSable Museum; is the President and one of the founders of the African American Visual Arts Roundtable; and is a member of both the Kemetic Institute of Northeastern Illinois University and the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations. His work has been exhibited both locally and nationally, in one man and group shows. Ford's pieces are part of the permanent collections of Chicago State University, the University of Suwon in the Republic of

Korea, the Southside Community Art Center in Chicago, the DuSable Museum of African American History, Northeastern Illinois University and Chicago's Hilton Hotel.

Ford passed away on August 31, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ausbra Ford was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 17, 2002, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sculptor and art professor Ausbra Ford (1935 - 2020) has taught at Chicago State University and lectured around the country. In support of his interest in the funeral art of Afro-Americans, Ford received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship as well as a grant from Chicago State University to conduct research on the funerary art of West and Central Africa.

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:

Ford, Ausbra, 1935-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Ford, Ausbra, 1935---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Sculptor

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 Ausbra Ford, May 17, 2002. 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 Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_001, TRT: 0:29:09 ?

Ausbra Ford was born on February 28, 1935 in Chicago, Illinois. Ford's mother, Carrie Stone Ford, was born on December 19, 1910 in Wadley, Georgia to

Bessie Stone and William Stone. Around 1924, her father began working in Chicago, Illinois under the pretense of having left his family in Georgia. After he had made enough money, he sent it to a cousin who lived in another town and who helped Bessie Stone and her family escape to Chicago in the middle of the night. Carrie Stone Ford attended Lucy Flower Technical School and became a dressmaker. Ford's father, Thomas Ford, Jr., was born in June 1902 on an Indian reservation in Mississippi. After fighting with his stepfather, he left Mississippi when he was ten or twelve and migrated north. He worked as a logger and as a Pullman Porter before starting his own trucking business for recycling glass.

Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_002, TRT: 0:30:22 ?

Ausbra Ford describes his grandparents and his childhood in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. Ford grew up close to his grandmother, Bessie Stone, and often listened to her tell stories of the traumas of slavery and lynching from her time in Georgia. Ford was raised in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois on the block of 47th Street and Wabash, where he remembers overcrowding and the constant presence of gang and police violence. Ford also remembers the social life at Bronzeville's Metropolitan Theater and Regal Theater, where he attended performances of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Ford attended Coleman Elementary School on 46th Street and Dearborn, where he graduated in 1949. At Coleman, Ford had teachers who instilled in him strict standards of discipline and introduced him to the writings of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Countee Cullen. While he excelled in math and science, Ford decided as a child that he wanted to become an artist or architect.

Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_003, TRT: 0:29:02 ?

Ausbra Ford describes his experience at DuSable High School and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1949, Ford enrolled at DuSable High School, one of two black high schools in the Bronzeville neighborhood. At DuSable, Ford encountered talented and motivated students who embraced the school's history and had teachers such as Captain Walter Dyett and HistoryMaker Dr. Margaret Burroughs. Musicians such as Gene Ammons, Dorothy Donegan, and Nat King Cole performed there and the students put on the annual Hi-Jinks fundraiser. Ford graduated from high school in 1953, the year before the DuSable Panthers competed in the Illinois state basketball championship. After graduating, Ford served in the United States Air Force loading and arming atomic bombs in the Korean War. After his service, Ford attended Ray-Vogue School for a year and then enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he received his B.A.E. degree in 1964 and his M.F.A. degree in 1966.

Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_004, TRT: 0:28:42 ?

Ausbra Ford describes the beginning of his academic career. After receiving his B.A.E. degree from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois in 1964, Ford became an art teacher at Chicago Public Schools while continuing to go to school. He received his M.F.A. degree in 1966 and taught art in Gary, Indiana Public Schools until 1968, when he was hired by Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana as an assistant professor. Ford returned to Chicago in 1969 to teach at Chicago State University. In 1971, Ford became the first professor from Chicago State University to receive a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship, which he used to fund his first trip to Africa. Around 1977, Ford began teaching part-time at the Northeastern Illinois University Center for Inner City Studies along with HistoryMakers Jacob H. Carruthers and Conrad Walter Worrill. During this time, Ford also joined the Kemetic Institute and the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations.

Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_005, TRT: 0:30:45 ?

Ausbra Ford describes the art of Africa and Brazil and the impact those traditions have had on his career. In 1985, Ford visited Brazil with the National Conference of Artists. In Brazil, he was able to see the influence of Yoruba culture on Brazilian art. In 1987, Ford travelled to Egypt for the first time with Dr. Anderson Thompson and Yvonne Jones of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations. In Egypt, he visited Karnak, the West Bank, Hatshepsut, Aswan, and Nubia. Ford returned to Egypt for four months in 1988. Ford describes two of the artworks in his studio, both mixed media sculptures of the Orisha named Oshun. Ford founded the African American Visual Artists Roundtable, an organization of Chicago artists which successfully worked with the Chicago Urban League to have their works displayed in the lobby of the Chicago Hilton Hotel.

Video Oral History Interview with Ausbra Ford, Section A2002_078_001_006, TRT: 0:30:26 ?

Ausbra Ford describes the lack of support for black artists in Chicago, Illinois. In 1991, the Harold Washington Library opened in Chicago, Illinois without any art from black Chicago-based artists. Ford protested this lack of representation and recognized the difficulty of organizing black artists and gathering support for visual arts within the black community. Ford reflects upon his legacy and talks about his two children and Thelma Ford, his recently deceased wife. He ends the interview by narrating his photographs.