

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Isobel Neal

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Neal, Isobel, 1933-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Isobel Neal,
Dates:	January 22, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:23:18).
Abstract:	Art gallery owner Isobel Neal (1933 -) has taught in public schools in Chicago and has volunteered on the boards of various cultural organizations. In 1986, she opened The Isobel Neal Gallery, which identified and cultivated a hidden community of African American art lovers while creating a venue for quality art. Neal was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 22, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_005
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Born Isobel Hoskins July 28, 1933 in New York City, Neal attended PS70 in Brooklyn and graduated from Franklin K. Lane High School in 1951. Neal studied at the University of Michigan from 1951 to 1953, but returned to Brooklyn and earned her B.A. degree in History from New York University in 1955. That same year, she married Attorney Earl Langdon Neal and moved to Chicago.

In Chicago, Neal taught at Mason, Shakespeare and Beethoven public schools beginning in 1955. From 1965 to 1975, she taught homebound students. In 1977 she received a M.A. in Anthropology/Archaeology from University of California at Santa Barbara. Neal also volunteered on the boards of various cultural institutions and organizations including: the Illinois Arts Alliance, DuSable Museum of African American History, the Illinois Humanities Council, New Regal Theatre, Cultural Center Foundation and Art Resources in Teaching. Her involvement with the annual "Black Creativity" art exhibit at Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry inspired her to develop her own gallery.

In 1986 Isobel Neal opened The Isobel Neal Gallery. Featured artists over the years have included: William Carter, Jonathan Green, Geraldine McCullough, Madeline Rabb, Elizabeth Catlett, Herbert House, Norman Lewis, Bennie Andrews, Reese Bennett and many others. The Isobel Neal Gallery identified and cultivated a hidden community of black art lovers while creating a venue for quality art. Neal retired from the gallery in 1996, passing the mantle of Chicago representation for many of the artists on to George R. N'Namdi. Still active as a curator of art shows, Neal lives in Chicago with husband, Earl, where she enjoys time with her four grandchildren.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Isobel Neal was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 22, 2004, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Art gallery owner Isobel Neal (1933 -) has taught in public schools in Chicago and has volunteered on the boards of various cultural organizations. In 1986, she opened The Isobel Neal Gallery, which identified and cultivated a hidden community of African American art lovers while creating a venue for quality art.

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:

Neal, Isobel, 1933-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Neal, Isobel, 1933- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Art Gallery Owner

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 Isobel Neal, January 22, 2004. 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 Isobel Neal, Section A2004_005_001_001, TRT: 0:30:15 ?

Isobel Neal was born on July 28, 1933 in New York, New York. Her mother, Sadie Dean Hoskins, was born in 1912 in Montgomery, Alabama. Neal's maternal great-grandmother was born into slavery and was five years old when slavery ended. Later she moved to Atlantic City, New Jersey with her daughter, Neal's grandmother, and worked as a seamstress. Neal's maternal great-grandfather was a white merchant. While Neal's maternal grandmother could have passed as white and attended Vassar College, she decided against moving to remain in contact with her mother. Neal's mother graduated from high school in New York City. She was a seamstress who taught sewing for Singer. Neal's father, Wilfred Hoskins, was born in 1900 in Falmouth, Jamaica. Industrious and

quiet, he owned a taxi cab and worked as a contractor selling housing supplies. Neal grew up Bedford-Stuyvesant, a mixed neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York where she enjoyed low-cost forms of entertainment such as reading and sewing.

Video Oral History Interview with Isobel Neal, Section A2004_005_001_002, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Isobel Neal attended P.S. 70 in Brooklyn, New York, New York and Franklin K. Lane High School in Queens, both of which were integrated schools. Neal graduated in 1951, and enrolled in the pharmacy program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In her second year Neal changed her major from pharmacy to history with a focus on secondary education. She met her husband HistoryMaker Earl Neal, who was attending the University of Michigan Law School. When Earl Neal was drafted by the U.S. Army in 1953, Neal transferred to New York University (NYU) to be near her parents; she completed her B.A. in American history in 1955. Though Neal enjoyed sketching, she did not pursue her interest in art; she planned to be a history teacher. When Earl Neal returned from the U.S. Army in 1955, the couple married and moved to Chicago, Illinois. In the 1970s, Neal began studying for her Ph.D. at the University of California, Santa Barbara but cut her studies short after her husband's appendix ruptured.

Video Oral History Interview with Isobel Neal, Section A2004_005_001_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Isobel Neal's husband HistoryMaker Earl Neal, had a successful law career. She began her career in Chicago, Illinois working for the Chicago Department of Welfare monitoring foster homes from 1955 to 1957. After earning her certification in elementary education from Chicago Teacher's College, she taught at Mason School which was so overcrowded students were required to arrive in shifts. After teaching at Shakespeare and Beethoven Schools in Chicago, Neal returned to college to earn credits to teach students homebound due to injury or illness; many of her students lived in high-rise public housing projects. In 1986, Neal chaired the month long Black Creativity Juried Art Exhibition. Impressed by the artists' work, she wanted to provide a space for black artists to present their work year-round. Located on Superior Street in Chicago, the Isobel Neal Gallery exhibited works by black artists such as HistoryMakers Elizabeth Catlett and Richard Hunt. Neal ensured the artists she featured never left without a sale.

Video Oral History Interview with Isobel Neal, Section A2004_005_001_004, TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Isobel Neal remembers the influence of African American art on Chicago, Illinois' gallery scene and city culture. In the late 1980s, after 'The Chicago Show' chose to feature only white artists, African American artists and gallery owners began to collaborate more frequently. As a gallery owner, Neal actively sought to educate patrons on African American art. The majority of Neal's interactions with clients were positive, though she had several challenging experiences negotiating prices with clients. Neal talks about Chicago mayoral administrations' support for the arts. Mayor Richard M. Daley's wife, Maggie Daley, and Lois Weisberg created Gallery 37, an arts-oriented, job training program. In the early 1990s Neal transferred ownership of her gallery to George N'Namdi to spend more time with her family. Neal describes her hopes and concerns for the African American art community and reflects upon her legacy as an educator and gallery owner. She publicizes a 2004 show featuring Chicago artists.

Video Oral History Interview with Isobel Neal, Section A2004_005_001_005, TRT: 0:26:43 ?

Isobel Neal remembers the opening night of the Isobel Neal Gallery in Chicago, Illinois, which her parents and family attended. The event was also covered by three television stations. Neal regrets that she did not open her gallery earlier in

her life. She shares advice for younger artists interested in showing their work in a gallery and describes how she would like to be remembered. Neal concludes by narrating her photographs.