

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Georgette Seabrooke Powell

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Powell, Georgette Seabrooke, 1916-2011
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell,
Dates:	November 8, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:26:00).
Abstract:	Art therapist, nonprofit chief executive, and painter Georgette Seabrooke Powell (1916 - 2011) was the last of the Black Renaissance painters of the 1930's Works Progress Administration. Her paintings appeared in over seventy-two major art exhibits. Powell was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 8, 2006, in Capitol Heights, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_135
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Art therapist, non-profit chief executive, and painter Georgette Ernestine Seabrooke Powell was born on August 2, 1916 in Charleston, South Carolina to Anna and George Seabrooke. Powell grew up in the Yorkville neighborhood of New York City. In the 1930s, she graduated from Washington Irving High School in New York City. She also studied art at the Harlem Art Workshop and the Harlem Community Art Center. In 1933, Powell began majoring in art at Cooper Union Art School in New York, and during this time she was selected to be a part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), Federal Arts Project.

As an artist through the WPA from 1936-1939 she created murals at Queens General Hospital and Harlem Hospital as well as and did some public art. In 1959, Powell's family moved to Washington, D.C., where she became immersed in Washington's arts society. Studying art therapy in the early 1960s, at the Metropolitan Mental Health Skills Center and the Washington School of Psychiatry, Powell became a registered arts therapist through the American Art Therapy Association. She taught art to promote skill building and self-esteem with mentally ill patients at D.C. General Hospital's Department of Psychiatry. In 1973, Powell earned her B.F.A. degree from Howard University. In 1975, she founded and directed the Tomorrow's Art World Center, Inc. to assist young aspiring artists. Powell was a member and President of the District of Columbia Art Association between 1974 and 1998.

Powell's artistry appeared in seventy-two major art exhibits between 1933 and 2003. She exhibited throughout the United States and in Venezuela, Nigeria and Senegal. Her exhibits have included: a one woman show, "Radiance and Reality," which she showcased at the Children's National Medical Center in Washington; and a 1995 show, "Art Changes Things" which was sponsored by the Smithsonian Institute. Her works hang in distinguished permanent collections across the country. An example is "Grandmother's Birthday," which was acquired by and hangs at the Johnson Publishing Company in Chicago, Illinois.

Georgette Ernestine Seabrooke Powell resides in Palm Coast, Florida and enjoys the company of her three children, grand-children and great-grandchildren.

Georgette Seabrooke Powell passed away on December 27, 2011 at the age of 95.

Georgette Ernestine Seabrooke Powell was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on November 8, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell was conducted by Robert Hayden on November 8, 2006, in Capitol Heights, Maryland, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Art therapist, nonprofit chief executive, and painter Georgette Seabrooke Powell (1916 - 2011) was the last of the Black Renaissance painters of the 1930's Works Progress Administration. Her paintings appeared in over seventy-two major art exhibits.

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:

Powell, Georgette Seabrooke, 1916-2011

Hayden, Robert (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Powell, Georgette Seabrooke, 1916-2011 --Interviews

African American women artists--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Art Therapist

Painter

Nonprofit Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers|CivicMakers

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 Georgette Seabrooke Powell, November 8, 2006.
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 Georgette Seabrooke Powell, Section A2006_135_001_001,
TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Georgette Seabrooke Powell was born on August 2, 1916 in Charleston, South Carolina to Anna Simmons Seabrooke and George Seabrooke, who both grew up in Charleston. There, Seabrooke Powell's grandmother died when her mother was young, and her grandfather married a Haitian woman. Seabrooke Powell's father was one of four sons, and admired his own father, a frugal dockworker who purchased several properties to pass on to his children. Seabrooke Powell's parents lived in Charleston until she was six years old. At that time, they moved to New York City, and lived in an African American section of the predominantly German Yorkville neighborhood. There, her father worked as a theater porter, while her mother was a domestic. Upon the recommendation of an African American nanny, Seabrooke Powell's mother enrolled her at New York City's P.S. 6. The school fostered Seabrooke Powell's interest in art, which she developed while watching her father draw, and also taught practical skills like sewing and cooking.

African American families--South Carolina--Charleston.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

Migration, Internal--Southern States.

African Americans--Education (Elementary).

African Americans--Education (Secondary).

Video Oral History Interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell, Section A2006_135_001_002,
TRT: 0:31:10 ?

Georgette Seabrooke Powell befriended her neighbors' children, who were interested in music and writing, and studied art at Washington Irving High School with her parents' support. There, she was usually the only African American student in her classes, and was denied a college scholarship based on her race. Seabrooke Powell graduated early, and continued to take art classes at her high school. She also participated in James Lesesne Wells' Harlem Arts Workshop, where she met artists like Palmer Hayden and Jacob Lawrence; Harlem Artists Guild president Gwendolyn Bennett; and art teacher Augusta Savage. Seabrooke Powell was forced to search for a job after her father died, but she was unsuccessful, even after seeking the help of NAACP director Walter White. Instead, Seabrooke Powell enrolled at Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, where she studied under artist John Steuart Curry, and received a silver medal for her painting of St. Mark's United Methodist Church.

Washington Irving High School (New York, N.Y.).

Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Art School.

Art--Study and teaching--New York (State)--New York.

Federal Art Project (New York, N.Y.).

Video Oral History Interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell, Section A2006_135_001_003,
TRT: 0:28:50 ?

Georgette Seabrooke Powell was hired by the Works Progress Administration

(WPA) while studying art at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art. Along with Vertis Hayes and Alfred Crimi, she was chosen to paint murals at Harlem Hospital under the direction of Charles Alston. The hospital director, Lawrence T. Dermody, objected to the murals' depiction of the black community; but, with support from the American Artists' Congress and a doctor, Louis T. Wright, the artists completed their work. Seabrooke Powell obtained permission for her mural, 'Recreation in Harlem,' to count for college credits; but, in her senior year, a new administrator refused to let her graduate. Instead, Seabrooke Powell painted for the WPA until the late 1930s. In 1936, she married podiatrist George Powell, and moved to Washington, D.C. However, he was unable to find work, and they returned to New York City. There, he became a firefighter, as his medical certification was not valid, and the couple had three children.

United States. Works Progress Administration (N.Y.).

Harlem Hospital (New York, N.Y.).

African American artists--New York (State)--New York.

African American families--New York (State)--New York.

African American mural painting and decoration--New York (State)--New York.

Federal Art Project (New York, N.Y.).

Video Oral History Interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell, Section A2006_135_001_004, TRT: 0:28:40 ?

Georgette Seabrooke Powell studied art therapy at Turtle Bay Music School in New York City. She convinced her husband to return to Washington, D.C. to practice podiatry, and she became an art therapy assistant at the District of Columbia General Hospital. Seabrooke Powell studied at the Washington School of Psychiatry to improve her work with the hospital's patients of color. She also opened Powell Art Studio, where she and her son, Richard Powell, taught classes and held exhibitions. At the advice of her son, Powell earned a B.F.A. degree from the University Without Walls program at Howard University, where she studied with artist Jeff Donaldson, who was researching Powell's art. She also travelled abroad with her husband on a student trip led by artist Lois Mailou Jones. In 1969, Seabrooke Powell founded the Operation Heritage Art Center to provide community art programming. After a comment from her neighbor, she changed its name to Tomorrow's World Art Center.

Art therapy.

Art therapists--Training of.

African American artists--Washington (D.C.).

District of Columbia General Hospital.

Video Oral History Interview with Georgette Seabrooke Powell, Section A2006_135_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30 ?

Georgette Seabrooke Powell hosted community art programs at Powell Art Studio in Washington, D.C., and collaborated with the Capitol City Artists organization to hold exhibitions and network with local artists. Seabrooke Powell presented her art at seventy-two exhibits in her lifetime, including at the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977. In 1979, President Ronald Reagan sent Seabrooke Powell a congratulatory letter, as she was unable to attend a reception held in her honor. In 1981, Seabrooke Powell returned to her hometown of Charleston, South Carolina for an exhibit entitled 'Forever Free' at the Charleston Black Arts Festival. She also collaborated on an exhibition with artist Allan Crite in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Seabrooke Powell reflects upon her life; changes in

her artistic style; her plans for the future; and how she would like to be remembered. She concludes the interview by narrating her photographs.

African American artists--Washington (D.C.).

Women artists--Washington (D.C.).

African American art.

Art centers--Washington (D.C.).