

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Samuel Akainyah

Overview of the Collection

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| Repository: | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com |
| Creator: | Akainyah, Samuel, 1953- |
| Title: | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, |
| Dates: | December 14, 2009 and July 18, 2008 |
| Bulk Dates: | 2008 and 2009 |
| Physical Description: | 10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:43:12). |
| Abstract: | Art gallery owner Samuel Akainyah (1953 -) was elected as the official artist of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1999. He owned Akainyah Gallery, and taught at Kennedy-King College. Akainyah was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 14, 2009 and July 18, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| Identification: | A2008_092 |
| Language: | The interview and records are in English. |

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Painter Samuel Akainyah was born in Ghana on September 5, 1953. His father was a Ghanaian Supreme Court justice, and his mother was a teacher. He was one of five children. Akainyah attended a boarding high school before moving to Chicago, Illinois, in 1975 and enrolling into the School of the Art Institute to study fine art and art history. He received his B.A. degree in 1979 and later received his M.A. degree. While in school, Akainyah completed a mural at St. Sabina Church, on Chicago's South Side. Akainyah also received his M.A. degree in diplomacy and international law from the Graduate Committee on International Relations at the University of Chicago.

After graduate school, Akainyah began using his African history knowledge and his painting skills to create highly expressive paintings. In the early 1980s, one of his frescos was sold at a celebrity auction and later became a poster for the NAACP. A decade later, "Akainyah: The Art of Liberation," became a traveling exhibition worldwide, paying tribute to Nelson Mandela and those who have died in South African prisons. In 1994, Professor Beverly Ross-Normand wrote and hosted a forty-minute television program for children entitled *Initiations*, which juxtaposed Akainyah's painting of the initiation of Ghanaian males against the rising gang subculture in America. A few years later, Akainyah became a faculty member in the humanities department at Kennedy-King Community College in Chicago. He has published three books including a 2008 autobiography.

Akainyah was honored by the City of Chicago and the State of Illinois when they proclaimed February 15, 1999, as Samuel Akainyah Day in Chicago. That same year, he was elected as the official artist of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. In 2005, he presented the President of Ghana with an 11' X 11' painting entitled, *From Whence We Came*, valued at \$80,000. A year later, he was named one of the fifty most influential African Americans in Chicago by *N'Digo* magazine. Akainyah has been a member of the Rald Institute and Ghana National Council of Metropolitan Chicago. He has also chaired the Black Creativity Art Competition at the Museum of Science and Industry.

Akainyah lives in Chicago and has his own art gallery. He is married to Kim Akainyah. They have three children.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Samuel Akainyah was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 14, 2009 and July 18, 2008, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 10 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Art gallery owner Samuel Akainyah (1953 -) was elected as the official artist of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1999. He owned Akainyah Gallery, and taught at Kennedy-King College.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

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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:

Akainyah, Samuel, 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Akainyah, Samuel, 1953- --Interviews

African American painters--Ghana--Interviews

Art teachers--Interviews

Art dealers--Illinois--Chicago--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 Samuel Akainyah, December 14, 2009 and July 18, 2008. 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 Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_001_001, TRT: 0:30:05
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Samuel Akainyah was born on September 5, 1953 in Kumasi, Ghana to Sabina Yorke and Alfred Akainyah. In Ghana, one of Akainyah's paternal ancestors owned a large coconut plantation that employed men from the surrounding area, and his paternal grandfather was a king of the Nzema tribe. Akainyah's father was born in Tikobo, Ghana, and was the first person from the town to attend law school, which he completed in England. Later, he helped develop the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, and served on the Supreme Court of Ghana. He married twice before meeting Akainyah's mother. Akainyah's maternal grandmother was a first cousin of Elizabeth Nyaniba, whose son was Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah. Born in Saltpond, Ghana, Akainyah's mother descended from Ghana's coastal Fante tribe. She attended one of Ghana's first colonial schools, St. Monica's School in Mampong; and became its first Ghanaian headmistress. Akainyah also talks about the tonal language of Ghana's Nzema people.

African American painters--Ghana--Interviews.

Art teachers--Interviews.

Art dealers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_001_002, TRT: 0:30:51
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Samuel Akainyah's mother, Sabina Yorke, was the headmistress of St. Monica's School, a boarding school in Mampong, Ghana, at the time when she met Akainyah's father, Alfred Akainyah. He was an accomplished lawyer in Kumasi, Ghana, and represented a young man who had been arrested for impregnating a student at St. Monica's School. Akainyah's parents divorced when he was young. Akainyah began his education at five years old. He started school several months late, after convincing his sister to jump with him from a balcony with an umbrella as a parachute. Akainyah went on to study at Nyaniba Middle Boarding School in Nkroful, Ghana, the hometown of Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah. In 1966, the Ghanaian military overthrew President Nkrumah, and the soldiers forced Akainyah and his classmates to watch as they destroyed the building where Nkrumah was born. Akainyah also talks about the burial rites and naming customs of the Nzema people, as well as the practice of polygamy among Ghanaian Muslims.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_001_003, TRT: 0:29:12
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Samuel Akainyah began his education at St. Monica's Primary School in Mampong, Ghana. At the time, his mother was the head of the affiliated boarding school, St. Monica's School. Akainyah went on to attend the Nyaniba Middle Boarding School in Nkroful, Ghana, which was named for Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's mother, Elizabeth Nyaniba. He was a student there in 1966, when a military coup overthrew President Nkrumah, and occupied the campus until Akainyah's mother demanded a retreat from military leader Akwasi Afrifa, who was her former student. At this point in the interview, Akainyah reflects upon Nkrumah's legacy, including his commitment to literacy programs; and the impact of the coup upon Ghanaians, many of whom avoided political involvement from that time. After the coup, St. Monica's School was

reorganized, and Akainyah's mother became a public school superintendent. Akainyah went on to attend Kwame Nkrumah Secondary School in Kumasi, Ghana; and Kumasi Academy in Ghana's Ashanti Region.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_001_004, TRT: 0:29:04
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Samuel Akainyah developed an interest in art while a student at St. Monica's Primary School, an Anglican institution in Mampong, Ghana. As a child, he painted in watercolor, although he abandoned the medium later in life. After studying at Nyaniba Middle Boarding School, Akainyah attended Kwame Nkrumah Secondary School, where he excelled in English, history and economics. Then, Akainyah was recruited to join the college of art at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. While studying there, he was influenced by artists like impressionist Claude Monet and cubist Pablo Picasso, and aspired to found his own artistic movement. Later, he used the concept of dualism, in which a painting reveals a different image depending on the viewer's perspective. Eventually, Akainyah left Ghana for the United States, as did many Ghanaians of his generation. He reflects upon this decision, and the economic and philanthropic opportunities in Ghana.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_005, TRT: 0:29:00
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Samuel Akainyah began his formal art education at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi, Ghana. There, he studied under Ablade Glover, who founded the Artists Alliance Gallery in Accra, Ghana; and landscape artist Albert Puplampu. After meeting David Mullins and Jean Mullins, who were visiting Ghana from the United States, Akainyah traveled to Chicago, Illinois; and, in 1978, decided to continue his studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He took courses with arts educator Ronne Hartfield, as well as Cuban artist Emilio Cruz, who influenced Akainyah to represent African history and culture in his artwork. In addition to admiring the inventiveness of Claude Monet and Pablo Picasso, Akainyah was inspired by African American artists like collagist Romare Bearden, muralist John T. Biggers and painter Jacob Lawrence. Akainyah also talks about Chicago's African American artists and gallery owners, including Richard Hunt and Isobel Neal.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_006, TRT: 0:30:00
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Samuel Akainyah painted and composed music from an early age. In 1982, he graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where his tuition had been funded by Father Michael Pflieger of Chicago's St. Sabina Church. Disheartened by the early responses to his art, Akainyah matriculated to the University of Chicago's graduate program in international relations, where he studied international law and diplomacy. During this period, Akainyah corresponded with Chicago Mayor Harold Washington, who hoped to establish an international bureau with Akainyah as the head of African relations. However, Washington passed away before the office was created. Akainyah continued to paint, and his artwork was selected by the Paramount Pictures Corporation to appear in 'The Father Clements Story.' Broadcast on NBC, the film starred Louis Cameron Gossett, Jr. and Malcolm-Jamal Warner. Shortly after, Akainyah began showing his art at auctions and festivals, including the National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_007, TRT: 0:34:00

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Samuel Akainyah earned a graduate degree in international relations at the University of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. There, he studied under professors Gidon Gottlieb, who taught public international law; Diane Wood, with whom he studied economic international law; and Akira Iriye, an East Asian studies scholar. For his final term paper, Akainyah described the political, security and policy challenges facing American multinational corporations in Africa. At this point in the interview, Akainyah describes the history of diplomatic relations between the United States and Ghana. He also explains his decision to remain in the United States, and reflects upon the trauma he experienced as a young boy, when the Ghanaian military overthrew President Kwame Nkrumah's administration. In Chicago, he was active in the Ghanaian immigrant community; which, at the time of the interview, included over 24,000 people. Akainyah also talks about the development of his artistic concept, which he referred to as dualism.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_008, TRT: 0:28:00
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Samuel Akainyah founded the Akainyah Gallery in the River North district of Chicago, Illinois. Akainyah's artwork attracted a diverse clientele, and often portrayed historical subjects. His paintings were commissioned by companies like Sears, Roebuck and Co. and BMW, and were exhibited at the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. At the time of the interview, Akainyah was showing his thirty-piece collection, 'Beyond Peace, Beyond Progress, Towards Global Cooperation,' at his gallery; and was creating a piece for his second book, 'Reflections from a Grateful Migrant,' which honored the United States' commitment to democracy. In addition to his art and writing, Akainyah taught at Chicago's Kennedy-King College, where he prepared students to attend art schools like Columbia College and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He also composed classical music. Akainyah talks about the lack of black-owned galleries in Chicago, and the need for an association of African American gallery owners.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_009, TRT: 0:27:00
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Samuel Akainyah talks about notable Americans, like muralist John T. Biggers and photojournalist Karega Kofi Moyo, whose experiences in Ghana inspired their careers in art, writing and education. At this point in the interview, Akainyah describes the history of slavery in Ghana, including Ghanaian resistance to the European slave traders. He talks about his family, including his wife, Kim Akainyah; and children, Lauren Akainyah, Brittanie Akainyah and Samuel Akainyah II. He also reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, as well as his hopes for the Republic of Ghana, which had considerable economic potential due to its mineral deposits, including its reserves of bauxite. At the time of the interview, Ghana provided over half the global supply of bauxite, which was refined to make aluminum.

Video Oral History Interview with Samuel Akainyah, Section A2008_092_002_010, TRT: 0:16:00
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Samuel Akainyah met his wife, Kim Akainyah, in Chicago, Illinois, while studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. They were introduced by her adoptive parents, Jean Mullins and David Mullins, whom Akainyah befriended in Ghana. At the time of the interview, Akainyah and his wife had been married for twenty-five years. Together, the couple had two daughters, Lauren Akainyah and Brittanie Akainyah; and a son, Samuel Akainyah II.

Akainyah reflects upon his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.