

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Amalia Amaki

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Amaki, Amalia K.
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki,
Dates:	February 15, 2006 and September 9, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2006 and 2007
Physical Description:	12 Betacame SP videocassettes (5:29:15).
Abstract:	Mixed media artist Amalia Amaki (1949 -) has served as the curator of the Paul R. Jones Collection of Art, and as assistant professor of art in the art history and black studies departments at the University of Delaware. She is also a scholar-in-residence in the fine arts department at Spelman College. Amaki was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on February 15, 2006 and September 9, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_017
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Amalia Amaki was born Linda Faye Peeks on July 8, 1949 in Atlanta, Georgia to Mary Lee and Norman Peeks, a former musician with the Deep South Boys of Macon, Georgia. Amaki developed a love for script writing, drawing, bold colors and textures at an early age. She instinctively knew that she would change her name. Amaki attended Georgia State University and majored in journalism and psychology. In 1970, she won the Sigma Delta Chi Award for Feature Writing and was the first and only African American on campus to join this journalism

organization. In 1971, Amaki received her B.A. degree. She also obtained her B.A. degree from the University of New Mexico in photography and art history and worked as a museum assistant at the University Art Museum for two years while she pursued her degree. In 1974, she changed her name to Amalia Amaki.

In 1985, Amaki went to France as an Emory University Foreign Study Fellow. She also became a contributing writer to *Art Papers* and an art critic for *Creative Loafing*; papers local to the Atlanta area. Amaki earned her M.A. degree in modern European and American art and a Ph.D. in twentieth century American art and culture from Emory University in the Institute of Liberal Arts. From 1987 to 2000, she taught art history at Spelman and Morehouse Colleges; Atlanta College of Art; Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia; and North Georgia College and State University, Dahlonega, Georgia. She served as a guest curator at the Southern Arts Federation in 1996; the Museum of Fine Arts at Spelman College in 1997 and 1998; the Marietta-Cobb Museum of Art in 1999; and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in 2004. In the summer of 2004, Amaki was a visiting scholar at the Student Art Centers International (SACI) in Florence, Italy. In 2001, she became Curator of the Paul R. Jones Collection of Art and Assistant Professor of Art in the Art History and Black Studies Departments at the University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware. Amaki was also a Scholar-in-Residence at Spelman College in Atlanta for the 2005 – 2006 school year.

Amaki's art captures the lives of African women of the Diaspora through media from everyday life (photography, quilts, buttons, boxes and household items). Her work redefines the lives of past and present African American heroines and heroes and contrasts their depiction in the mainstream media. She has published a number of articles including "Art: The Paul Jones Collection in Art" and *Everyday Life: The Paul Jones Collection*, an exhibition catalog by the Marietta-Cobb Museum of Art, Marietta, Georgia in 1999.

Amaki holds memberships in the College of Art Association, American Association of University Professors, Emory University Alumni Board of Governors, Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, High Museum of Art, Georgia Museum of Art, and Spelman College Museum of Fine Arts. Her solo works, *Amalia Amaki: Boxes, Buttons and Blues* have also been on exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Amaki splits her time in Atlanta, Georgia and Newark, Delaware.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Amalia Amaki was conducted by Denise Gines and Evelyn Pounds on February 15, 2006 and September 9, 2007, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 12 Betacame SP videocassettes. Mixed media artist Amalia Amaki (1949 -) has served as the curator of the Paul R. Jones Collection of Art, and as assistant professor of art in the art history and black studies departments at the University of Delaware. She is also a scholar-in-residence in the fine arts department at Spelman College.

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:

Amaki, Amalia K.

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Pounds, Evelyn (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

(Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Amaki, Amalia K.--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Mixed Media Artist

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 Amalia Amaki, February 15, 2006 and September 9, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 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 Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_001, TRT: 0:27:41 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki was born on July 8, 1949 in Atlanta, Georgia to Mary Hill Peek and Norman Peek. Amaki's maternal grandmother was Choctaw Native American, but denied her ancestry. Amaki's mother was born in 1914 and was raised on a farm inherited from Amaki's great-grandmother in Newnan, Georgia. Due to a childhood illness, Amaki's mother stayed indoors and became a skilled cook and homemaker while her siblings worked on the farm. Amaki's father was born in 1898 Greene County, Georgia and moved to Macon, Georgia as a small child.

Where Amaki's father's family was more outgoing, her mother's family was more reserved. Amaki's father at first aspired to be a singer, but worked at Walgreens, gardened and catered during the holidays to support the family. He became known for his cakes and other baked goods. Amaki describes her parents' personalities, Christmas celebrations, and how her parents met on Ashby Street in Atlanta, Georgia.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_002, TRT: 0:28:20 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki's paternal grandmother was of Choctaw Native American descent. Amaki's grandfather emphasized the importance of a college education, but her father aspired to become a singer after attending a Blind Willie Johnson performance. Amaki's father sang in the church choir and at various church functions, and later spent fifteen years touring with The Deep South Boys in the South and Midwest. One of eleven siblings of a close family, Amaki's mother developed a fear of tornados and thunderstorms after an encounter with a tornado as a child. Amaki describes how her mother and father met in Atlanta, Georgia. After marrying, and upon receiving a vision of storm clouds rolling away, Amaki's mother had six children, even though she was told as a teenager that she would never have children. Amaki grew up listening to Nat King Cole, Tony Bennett and Ella Fitzgerald. She describes her grandparents and shares her earliest childhood memory of her baby blanket.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_003, TRT: 0:28:20 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki first developed as an artist at John Hope-Charles Walter Hill Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia. Amaki's teachers asked her to design the school's bulletin boards after noticing her drawings of flowers and her creative penmanship. She later attended David T. Howard High School. Amaki grew up in a close-knit community with friendly neighbors who looked out for one another. She enjoyed Mary Ball Candy, and ate fresh fried fish and cornbread from her neighbors with her father's pound cake. During the summer, Amaki sold lemonade and hot dogs on Boulevard in Atlanta. She

attended Atlanta's Wheat Street Baptist Church, where her father's childhood, Reverend William Holmes Borders, was the pastor. Because African Americans were discouraged from shopping at Davidson's department store, Amaki and her family shopped at Rich's, Kessler's, Bakers Shoes, and Butler's shoe store. Amaki remembers her and her sisters dressing in identical dresses and having their hair done by a neighbor for Easter.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_004, TRT: 0:28:10 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki grew up with five sisters in Atlanta, Georgia. She describes the Sweet Auburn Avenue neighborhood of Atlanta, where the Royal Peacock, which showcased famous black performers in the 1940s and 1950s, WERD Radio, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Big Bethel A.M.E. Church were located. Amaki remembers the neighborhood seamstress who designed dresses and sold her clothing at Daniman's store, and her third grade teacher, Ms. Epps, at John Hope Elementary School in Atlanta. Amaki's eighth grade teacher taught her poetry by Nikki Giovanni and Georgia Douglas Thomas. From a young age, Amaki wanted to change her name from Lynda Faye after being teased about sharing the name of the local weatherwoman. At first, she chose Nikki Peek, after her favorite poet Nikki Giovanni. Unsatisfied with how the name sounded, she chose Amalia Amaki instead. Upon making the decision, Amaki learned that she was the only daughter her mother named, and that her mother had changed her own name as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_005, TRT: 0:30:20 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki grew up a tomboy and enjoyed playing marbles, jacks, and badminton and building log cabins. She and her sisters also played pretend hospital, church, and school. During the winter, the family played board games like Monopoly and Sorry, as her mother did not allow them to use playing cards or a Ouija board. Amaki received baby chickens for Easter, which were eventually cooked by her father. Amaki loved movies and aspired to be stuntwoman. At David T. Howard High School, Amaki was on the school paper, president of the honor society,

and a member of the science club, attending the state science fair. She was interested in careers as an artist and a journalist, pursuing journalism at the suggestion of her guidance counselor. Amaki planned to attend Columbia University in New York City, but enrolled at Georgia State College in Atlanta when her father passed away months before her high school graduation. Amaki also describes the Civil Rights Movement activities at Atlanta University Center.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_001_006, TRT: 0:29:30 2006/02/15

Amalia Amaki completed the Morehouse College Intensive Program in high school, where actress LaTanya Richardson Jackson was among her peers. Amaki applied to fifteen colleges including the Universities of California in Los Angeles and Berkeley and Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After receiving a Regents' Scholarship to attend Georgia State College, Amaki majored in journalism, studying under Dr. George Greiff. Amaki interned with a magazine during the summer and wrote award-winning features for *The Signal*, Georgia State University's newspaper. She was the first African American member of the school's Society of Professional Journalists. Despite experiencing discrimination from clubs on campus, Amaki joined a sorority and the black student union. Amaki remembers Andrew Young's visit at the university and a rally by the black student union after Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death. Amaki also recalls how the death of her childhood friend led her to dislike funerals.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_007, TRT: 0:29:10 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki was inspired to speak her mind and to pursue her artistic interests following Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. Amaki won the Sigma Delta Chi awards for journalism, although Georgia State University's newspaper, *The Signal*, was initially reluctant to publish her articles about black student life and civil rights protests. Amaki's classmates at Georgia State University included MARTA's assistant general manager, Ryland McClendon, and the former assistant attorney

general of Maryland, Valerie Watts. Amaki admired Haki R. Madhubuti and Vincent Harding, who she saw speak at universities in Atlanta. She graduated in 1971 with a dual B.A. degree in journalism and psychology and was honored for her civil rights activism. Amaki decided to forego graduate school and instead worked for Southern Airways. Her position in reservations allowed her to travel around the world to places like Bermuda, Paris, France, London, England, and Ethiopia.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_008, TRT: 0:29:41 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki attended the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque from 1978. She studied photography under Beaumont Newhall and Van Deren Coke, and met artist Georgia O'Keeffe through a mutual acquaintance. Amaki made friends easily in New Mexico and became immersed in the cultures and landscape. Amaki's favorite professors at the University of New Mexico were Betty Hahn, who taught her a non-silver photography technique called cyanotype, and Garo Antreasian who encouraged her to pursue printmaking. Amaki also experimented with abstract drawings. Upon graduating with a B.A. degree in fine arts in 1980, two of Amaki's art pieces were displayed at the university museum as part of the permanent collection. Amaki returned to Atlanta, Georgia and volunteered at Collections of Life and Heritage, Inc, where she met Paul Jones and became the curator of his African American art collection. Interested a career as a curator, Amaki decided to pursue a M.A. degree in art history at Emory University in Atlanta.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_009, TRT: 0:31:12 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki curated several shows for Paul Jones. While pursuing her M.A. degree at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, Amaki taught part-time at Atlanta's Spelman College and studied abroad in France. Amaki studied under Richard Long at Emory University. With her M.A. degree program completed, Amaki taught at Kennesaw State University and Morehouse College, both in Atlanta, and wrote articles for Creative Loafing and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Upon completing her

doctorate, Amaki became an assistant professor at Spelman College, where she worked with Sharon Pruitt and Mozell Spriggs. Amaki left Spelman College to teach and curate Paul Jones' collection at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. In 2004, Amaki taught at Studio Arts College International in Florence, Italy. She admired the artwork of Jim Alexander and Carrie Mae Weems. Amaki also describes how her parents inspired her to choose quilts as her medium.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_010, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki began drawing and working with yarn as a small child. Her parents and teachers encouraged her artistic interests by providing her with supplies. As a child, Amaki's depictions of musical instruments in yarn were displayed at Rich's department store in Atlanta, Georgia and later sold. Amaki also sold her drawings of wide-eyed children in her neighborhood. Through her mother's button collection, Amaki developed an interest in buttons, which she incorporated into her photograph collages. Amaki also used buttons to make life size art pieces inspired by her father's love of candymaking. She was fascinated with the history and personal stories behind buttons, which were used for currency and as mementoes. Amaki describes a button artwork that was commissioned for the 1996 Summer Olympics and displayed at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. She shares a story about how the piece helped a man to reunite with his estranged family.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_011, TRT: 0:31:10 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki was the curator of the Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware from 2001 to 2007. She recognized the impact of the collection on the students and faculty and realized how art crossed disciplines. In 2005, Amaki published a book of photography called 'Amalia Amaki: Boxes, Buttons, and the Blues,' co-written by Andrea D. Barnwell. Amaki exhibited her work at Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia, the Houston Center for Photography in Texas, and the National Museum of

Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. Paul Jones and actresses Victoria Rowell and Anna Maria Horsford are among Amaki's patrons. Amaki describes the history of buttons as currency and her future art book projects. She also reflects upon her legacy, and concludes the interview by describing her hopes and concerns for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Amalia Amaki, Section
A2006_017_002_012, TRT: 0:07:11 2007/09/09

Amalia Amaki narrates her photographs.