

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Preston Jackson

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Jackson, Preston, 1944-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 13, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:21:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Sculptor Preston Jackson (1944 - ) specialized in bronze and steel sculpture and painting. He taught at many universities, most recently as a professor of sculpture and the head of the figurative area at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago. Jackson also owned The Raven Gallery, home to the Contemporary Art Center in Peoria, Illinois. Jackson was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 13, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_168
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Sculptor, art educator and gallery owner Preston Eugene Jackson was born on March 1, 1944 in Decatur, Illinois. The son of Shirley Armstrong Jackson and foundry worker, T.J. Jackson, he grew up in Decatur where he began drawing at the age of seven. Jackson attended Oakland Elementary School and Stephen Decatur High School, where he ran the one hundred yard dash in 9.7 seconds. Graduating in 1962, he attended Millikin University while working at Revere Copper. In 1967, Jackson enrolled in Southern Illinois University where he earned his B.A. degree while playing jazz guitar with his group, Preston Jackson and the Rhythm Aces. Jackson, mentored by Marvin Klavin, obtained his M.F.A. degree from the University of Illinois in 1972.

From 1971 to 1972, Jackson served as an instructor of drawing and painting at Decatur's Millikin University. He was professor of art at Western Illinois University from 1972 to 1989. Jackson joined the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1989 as professor of sculpture and head of the Figurative Area. Appointed chair of the Sculpture Department in 1994, Jackson served in that capacity until 1996. Since 1995, Jackson has served as owner of The Raven Gallery, home of the Contemporary Art Center in Peoria, Illinois.

As an artist, Jackson specializes in bronze and steel sculpture and painting. Best known for his work with bronze castings, Jackson has also created two-dimensional pieces and large monuments. Jackson is recipient of five state public art commissions through the state's Capital Development Board. His works include a life size bronze Jean Baptiste Point du Sable in Peoria; bronze façade and doors for the Cahokia Mounds Museum; a Martin Luther King memorial bust for Danville, Illinois; "Let's Play Two," a bronze relief of Ernie Banks for ESPN Zone in Chicago; "Dr. Dan," a bronze bust of surgeon Dr. Daniel Hale Williams for Northwestern University and a cast bronze sculpture of Irv Kupcinet for the City of Chicago. Jackson's major exhibitions and shows include: "Duo Exhibit," 1995, in Rockford and "Bronzeville to Harlem," shown since 1997 in nine different cities. Inspired by African American oral tradition, Jackson created the exhibit, "Fresh from Julieanne's Garden" which has been

exhibited since 2004 in Chicago, Peoria, Madison, Wisconsin and other cities. Jackson's lectures and workshops have been presented at Oklahoma City, Chicago, St. Louis, Jackson, Mississippi, Decatur and Bloomington, Illinois. His work has been displayed across the United States in exhibitions, and he was named the 1998 Laureate of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois. Currently, he serves as a professor of sculpture and the head of the figurative area at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is owner of the Raven Gallery, home to the Contemporary Art Center of Peoria. Jackson is the sculptor of *The HistoryMakers* bronze award statuettes.

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# Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Preston Jackson was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 13, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Sculptor Preston Jackson (1944 - ) specialized in bronze and steel sculpture and painting. He taught at many universities, most recently as a professor of sculpture and the head of the figurative area at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago. Jackson also owned The Raven Gallery, home to the Contemporary Art Center in Peoria, Illinois.

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# 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®.

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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.

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# Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

## Persons:

Jackson, Preston, 1944-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Jackson, Preston, 1944- --Interviews

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African American sculptors--Interviews

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African American artists as teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

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Art dealers--Illinois--Peoria--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Sculptor

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

ArtMakers

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## 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 Preston Jackson, December 13, 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).

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## 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.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson, Section A2006\_168\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:17 ?

Preston Jackson was born on March 1, 1944 in Decatur, Illinois to Shirley Armstrong Jackson and T.J. Jackson, Sr. Jackson's paternal ancestor, Elijah Jackson, was a plantation and slave owner, and his paternal great great grandmother was a slave. She passed down stories of slavery, and the black and white sides of the family were reunited in the 1990s through the efforts of Jackson's nephew, Samuel Starks. Jackson's maternal family included Choctaw Native Americans, and were laborers in the timber industry. Jackson's parents were raised in Fruitvale, Tennessee, and met at a church function. After marrying, they moved to Decatur to escape the lynchings of the South. His father found work at Wagner Castings Co., then sent for Jackson's mother, and they began their family. His mother ensured that her ten children were educated in music and attended college. Jackson recalls visiting Tennessee with his father, where he saw the body of a man who was lynched, and had to avoid many sundown towns.

African American sculptors--Interviews.

African American artists as teachers--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Art dealers--Illinois--Peoria--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson, Section A2006\_168\_001\_002, TRT: 0:28:48 ?

Preston Jackson describes the sundown towns that surrounded his integrated neighborhood in Decatur, Illinois. He remembers painting his tricycle with his twin sister; the family's farm animals; the automobiles of the 1940s; and the smell of elm trees. Jackson attended the Oakland School in Decatur. Growing up, Jackson struggled in school due to his dyslexia, and began to draw pictures to help with his reading. One of his earliest sculptures was a clay alligator made at school. Jackson also struggled with his appearance, covering the bump on his nose with a piece of clay in elementary school. His family attended Decatur's Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, and his father was a minister in Mattoon, Illinois, but Jackson was not inclined to religion. He attended Stephen Decatur High School, where he ran track; played football; and was president of the art club. Jackson was also musically talented, and started a band. Upon graduating in the early 1960s, he attended night school at Decatur's Millikin University.

Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson, Section A2006\_168\_001\_003, TRT: 0:28:55 ?

Preston Jackson attended Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, where he experienced discrimination when he was failed without explanation. He transferred to Carbondale's Southern Illinois University, where he befriended basketball star Walter Frazier. To pay tuition, Jackson worked at Revere Copper and Brass Inc. He also toured southern Illinois as a bassist in a western band; played with Big Twist and the Mellow Fellows; and performed with his group, Preston Jackson and the Rhythm Aces. He recalls the Katherine Dunham Company visiting campus, and experiencing culture shock among a large population of African Americans from Chicago, Illinois. He was friends with civil rights activist Charles Koen, and lived with Koen while the government was investigating him. Jackson enrolled in the M.F.A. degree program of the

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where he studied sculpture with Bruce Breland and Larry Bernstein. Jackson describes the political climate of the 1960s, and his emotional breakdown.

Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson, Section A2006\_168\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:12 ?

Preston Jackson began to focus on sculpture in his final semester at Southern Illinois University, after seeing the work of Peter Fagan and Frank Gallo. He studied at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where his work was influenced by his experiences with Gallo and Val Gray Ward. He recalls the attendance of his wife, who was living in Decatur, Illinois, at his graduation. Jackson worked as a substitute teacher for Millikin University's sculpture professor, Marvin Klaven, who influenced Jackson's work. Klaven found Jackson a position as professor at Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois. After thirteen years, Jackson obtained a professorship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago with the help of Frances Whitehead, Isobel Neal and Richard Hunt. Jackson also recalls his earliest art exhibitions in Decatur. He describes the philosophy behind his art, and several of his works, including 'Fresh from Julieanne's Garden,' 'A Masquerade' and The HistoryMakers' award statue.

Video Oral History Interview with Preston Jackson, Section A2006\_168\_001\_005, TRT: 0:25:01 ?

Preston Jackson reflects upon the state of the art world in Chicago, Illinois for African American artists like Richard Hunt and Ed Dwight. Although he did not participate, Jackson describes the impact of black artist coalitions on Chicago's art community. Jackson's work and exhibitions were based in Chicago and southern Illinois. He comments that, at the time of the interview, artists of color were beginning to receive more commissions. Jackson was in the process of creating his 'Bronzeville' sculpture for Chicago's McCormick Place. As a professor of sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Jackson feels that education is useful although not necessary for aspiring artists. Jackson describes his longstanding practice of taekkyeon, a Korean form of martial arts. He talks about his family, and shares his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Jackson concludes the interview by reflecting upon his life, legacy and how he would like to be remembered.