

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Tracy Reese

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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>	Reese, Tracy, 1964-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 2, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:41:43).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fashion designer Tracy Reese (1964 - ) launched her namesake line in 1996, and went on to create Tracy Reese Plenty, Frock! and Tracy Reese Black Label. Her clients include First Lady Michelle Obama, Beyonce and Sarah Jessica Parker. Reese was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 2, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_093
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fashion designer Tracy Reese was born on February 12, 1964 in Detroit, Michigan. As a child, Reese's mother, a modern dance teacher, taught her how to sew and make clothes. Reese graduated from Cass Technical High School in Detroit in 1980, and moved to New York City to enroll in an accelerated program at the Parsons School of Design, which she completed in 1984. After graduating from the Parsons School, Reese worked for French fashion designer Martine Sitbon at the firm of Arlequin. Reese went on to work at a number of top fashion houses, eventually becoming head of the women's portfolio for 1980s fashion icon Perry Ellis. In 1996, Reese launched her own ready-to-wear label, Tracy Reese, which was noted for its femininity and retro-influenced styles. Reese opened a storefront in New York City to exclusively sell her product line. In 2000, Reese expanded her brand with the creation of her mass market line, Tracy Reese Plenty, and her home furnishings line, Plenty, which was followed in 2006 by the dress-focused line Frock! That same year, Reese opened the flagship Tracy Reese store in New York City. In 2009, Reese launched her luxury line Tracy Reese Black Label, and, two years later, opened the second Tracy Reese store in Tokyo, Japan. In 2012, First Lady Michelle Obama, a longtime fan of Tracy Reese designs, wore a dress custom-made by Reese during her speech at the 2012 Democratic National Convention. Reese also designed clothing for singer Beyonce Knowles and actress Sarah Jessica Parker. For Fall 2016, Reese created a short film called 'A Detroit Love Song,' which she presented at Fashion Week off-runway. Also that year, Reese announced that her designs would be available in an expanded range of sizes, making them more inclusive of all American women.

Reese was inducted into the Council of Fashion Designers of America in 1990, and joined its committee in 2007, becoming its sole African American member. In 2007, she was appointed to the board of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Reese also served as the Turnaround Artist for the Barnum School in Bridgeport, Connecticut through the President's Committee of the Humanities and Arts.

Tracy Reese was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 2, 2016.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Tracy Reese was conducted by Harriette Cole on December 2, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Fashion designer Tracy Reese (1964 - ) launched her namesake line in 1996, and went on to create Tracy Reese Plenty, Frock! and Tracy Reese Black Label. Her clients include First Lady Michelle Obama, Beyonce and Sarah Jessica Parker.

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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:

Reese, Tracy, 1964-

Cole, Harriette (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Reese, Tracy, 1964---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:

Fashion Designer

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### HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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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 Tracy Reese, December 2, 2016. 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 Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_001, TRT: 1:27:01 ?

Tracy Reese was born on February 12, 1964 in Detroit, Michigan to Patricia Dayle Reese and Claude Reese. Her maternal grandmother, Mary Cleveland, was born in Meridian, Mississippi. She raised Reese's mother in Detroit, where she worked for Michigan's first black secretary of state, Richard H. Austin. Reese's father was born in Lowndes County, Alabama to Essie Bates Jones and Isaac Reese, Sr. He joined the U.S. Navy, and later attended Wayne State

University, where he met Reese's mother. After marrying, Reese's parents raised three daughters. Her mother taught dance at Wayne County Community College, and her father obtained a master's degree from Michigan State University, and later became the Chrysler Corporation's first black plant manager. When Reese was three years old, her family moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where they integrated their neighborhood. They later returned to Detroit, where they lived in another predominantly white community. Reese's parents eventually divorced.

Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_002, TRT: 2:29:42 ?

Tracy Reese learned to sew from her mother, Patricia Dayle Reese. She created her first garment, a pair of elastic waist pants, at eight years old. Reese began her education in the Detroit Public Schools Community District. She went on to study at Cass Technical High School, a diverse magnet school in Detroit, Michigan. There, she was a member of the National Honor Society and the fashion club. She focused on the arts, and was mentored by art teacher Irving Berg. She also took painting classes at Your Heritage House, Inc. With encouragement from the art department head, Cledie Taylor, Reese applied to New York City's Parsons School of Design in 1980, and received a scholarship to attend the fashion program. Because of her advanced design knowledge, she was allowed to skip the first year of the program. The only other student in her class to do so was Marc Jacobs, who became Reese's close friend and helped her obtain a position at the innovative clothing boutique Charivari.

Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_003, TRT: 3:31:22 ?

Tracy Reese attended the Parsons School of Design in New York City, where she studied under fashion designers like Issey Miyake. There were few women in the program, and the instructors often favored the male students. At this point, Reese talks about her friend and former classmate, designer Marc Jacobs. During his early career, Jacobs met his business partner, Robert Duffy, and designed a collection for Reuben Thomas Inc. Reese graduated in 1984, and was hired as an assistant designer at the contemporary brand Arlequin. There, she worked under designer Martine Sitbon and merchandiser Meryl Mandelbaum to produce collections for multi-brand stores like Ann Taylor. In 1987, Reese left Arlequin and launched her own label. The collection was featured in the Aubrey Company showroom, where it was purchased by stores like Barneys New York. Reese also remembers the emergence of brands like DKNY, and the textile trends of the 1980s.

Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_004, TRT: 4:33:36 ?

Tracy Reese's fashion line was sold in stores like Ann Taylor in 1987, but due to financial problems, she stopped production after one year. Reese was then recruited by her friend, Marc Jacobs, to help with the production of his 1988 Miami collection. After showing the line, Jacobs was recruited to work at Perry Ellis, and offered Reese a position at Perry Ellis Portfolio. There, she designed coats and shoes, and met designer Tom Ford. In 1989, Reese joined Magaschoni, where she designed cashmere knitwear and silk pieces. In 1990, Reese received New York Fashion Week sponsorship from Essence magazine director Harriette Cole. She also joined the Council of Fashion Designers of America (CFDA). At this point in the interview, Reese talks about the CFDA and its African American membership. Reese left Magaschoni in 1995. She worked as a consultant for brands like Liz Claiborne and Jones New York until 1996, when she launched the Tracy Reese collection of contemporary dresses.

Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_005, TRT: 5:34:41 ?

Tracy Reese launched the Tracy Reese label in 1996, and her first dress

collection was sold in Saks Fifth Avenue stores that year. After partnering with Om Batheja, Reese established contacts with garment factories in India and founded T.R. Designs, Inc. In 1997, they launched the Plenty line, which was sold in stores like Anthropologie. Around 2005, Reese shifted production of both her labels to China. In 2006, she created the affordable dress line Frock!, and opened her flagship store in New York City's Meatpacking District. The retail space featured all of her brands, as well as a collection of handbags and shoes. In 2009, Reese designed a dress for First Lady Michelle Obama that was featured on the cover of People magazine. Reese went on to design Obama's dress for the 2012 Democratic National Convention, and dressed celebrities like singer Beyonce Knowles and actress Sarah Jessica Parker. In 2016, Reese created a short film called 'A Detroit Love Song,' which showcased the history of her brand.

Video Oral History Interview with Tracy Reese, Section A2016\_093\_001\_006, TRT: 6:05:21 ?

Tracy Reese chose a diverse cast of models for her 2015 spring fashion show, which showcased her label's inclusivity of all ethnicities, ages and body types. At this point in the interview, Reese talks about diversity in the fashion industry, and reflects upon her life and legacy. She concludes the interview by sharing her advice to aspiring fashion designers.