



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Lyle Ashton Harris

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Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Lyle Ashton Harris
<b>Date:</b>	2017 March 27-29
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.harris17
<b>Creator:</b>	Harris, Lyle Ashton, 1965- (Interviewee) Fialho, Alex, 1989- (Interviewer)
<b>Extent:</b>	6 Items (Sound recording: 6 sound files (8 hr., 6 min.); digital, wav) 95 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Lyle Ashton Harris, 2017 March 27-29, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Lyle Ashton Harris, 2017 March 27-29, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a>

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and administrators.

### Available Formats

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

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## Biographical / Historical

Lyle Ashton Harris (1965- ) is an artist who works in video, photography, and performance in New York, New York. Alex Fialho (1989- ) is a curator and arts writer and works as Programs Director for Visual AIDS in New York, New York.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview with Lyle Ashton Harris, conducted 2017 March 27 and 29, by Alex Fialho, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Harris's studio and home in New York, New York.

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## Scope and Contents

Harris speaks of his childhood in the Bronx; his family's influence on his race-consciousness; living in Tanzania for two years as a child and the effects on his understanding of race and sexuality; his grandfather's extensive photographic archive; contact with the South African diaspora through his step-father; attending Wesleyan University; formative experiences in London, Amsterdam, and New York in the mid-1980s; his education and development as a photographer; attending CalArts and encountering West Coast AIDS activism; encountering systemic racism in Los Angeles; close friendships with Marlon Riggs and Essex Hemphill; exhibitions of his work in New York in the early 1990s; the production of his Ektachrome Archive and his impulse to photograph daily life; his work on the Black Community AIDS Research and Education (Black C.A.R.E.) project in Los Angeles; participating in the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program; being diagnosed with HIV and remaining asymptomatic; attending the Dia Black Popular Culture Conference in 1992; photographing and mounting "The Good Life" in 1994 and "The Watering Hole" in 1996; issues of blackness and queerness in his photographic work; his residency at the American Academy in Rome in 2000; moving to Accra, Ghana for seven years in 2005; his pedagogy as an art professor; his thoughts on the lack of voices of color in the Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic Oral History Project and in the larger power structures of the art world; and his hope that his artistic legacy will be evaluated in its proper context. Harris also recalls Jackie and Robert O'Meally, Jay Seeley, Ellen O'Dench, Francesca Woodman, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jim Collier, Robert Mapplethorpe, Allan Sekula, Hazel Carby, Isaac Julien, Catherine Lord, Millie Wilson, Todd Gray, John Grayson, Tommy Gear, Marlon Riggs, Essex Hemphill, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Nancy Barton, Vickie Mays, Connie Butler, Greg Tate, Henry Louis Gates, Houston Baker, Nan Goldin, Jack Tilton, Simon Watson, and others.

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

### Subjects:

- AIDS (Disease) and the arts
- AIDS activists
- African American art -- African influences
- African American artists
- African American educators
- African American photographers
- Artists (LGBTQ)
- Gay artists
- Racism

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- American Academy in Rome -- Students
- Baker, Houston A., Jr., 1943-
- Barton, Nancy, (Artist)
- Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 1960-1988
- Butler, Cornelia H.
- California Institute of the Arts -- Students
- Carby, Hazel V.

Collier, Jim  
Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.  
Geer, Tommy  
Goldin, Nan, 1953-  
Gonzalez-Torres, Felix, 1957-1996  
Gray, Todd, 1954-  
Grayson, John, 1943-  
Hemphill, Essex  
Julien, Isaac  
Lord, Catherine, 1949-  
Mapplethorpe, Robert  
Mays, Vickie M.  
O'Dench, Ellen  
O'Meally, Jackie  
O'Meally, Robert G., 1948-  
Riggs, Marlon T.  
Seeley, J.  
Sekula, Allan  
Tate, Greg  
Tilton, Jack  
Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project  
Watson, Simon  
Wesleyan University (Middletown, Conn.) -- Students  
Whitney Museum of American Art  
Wilson, Millie  
Woodman, Francesca, 1958-1981

Occupations:

Performance artists -- New York (State) -- New York  
Photographers -- New York (State) -- New York  
Video artists -- New York (State) -- New York

Places:

England -- London -- Description and Travel  
Ghana -- Description and Travel  
Netherlands -- Amsterdam -- Description and Travel  
New York (N.Y.) -- Description and Travel  
Tanzania -- Description and Travel