

# SAY IT LOUD: AAMARP, 1977 TO NOW

GBH archival  
footage, 1969–2000



## ***Say Brother – Black Arts (1969)***

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** But the point, the key point here, though, is to remember that all of us who are in the performing arts or in the visual arts suffer the same problem.

We are, you know, all disorganized, really.

And the other problem is that we are Black in a country that has never really appreciated what Black people can do.

What I'm saying is that when people talk about organization, Black people must do the organizing.

We must organize ourselves so that this young lady can sing and he can read his poetry and Ali Youssef can play his music and the young ladies up there can dance.

And, you know, Elma's talking about organization when she talks about the National Center, you're talking about organization when you're talking about Black Music Incorporated.

And until we realize that key point, you know, we all must understand that all of us are suffering because we are Black in a white country.

Now, specifically what I'm talking about is that there is great talent in the Black community.

We know this because white people are constantly stealing everything we have and packaging it and calling it whiteness.

Witness The Beatles, you know. Witness Cream.

This is all Black music.

It's all Black music.

There's a great thing now in color, in art.

Where does that come from?

It comes from Africa.

The great feeling for color in Africa, the great organization of art.

You know, this new geometric thing originated in Egypt.

They were the first to understand the relationship of objects to art.

Not the Greeks, not the Romans.

This is our history.

We have to know all of those things.

We have to organize ourselves.

And until we really start organizations — if we had a package going in this country where all Black artists belong to Black organizations, the only way white people would get to see their Black people, whom they love so much in music and in dance and in art, is through us.

And until we come to that single realization, you know, we are still the man's fools.

## **Interview recorded for *Say Brother* (1987)**

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** The program itself has been in existence since 1978, but the actual beginning of AAMARP was in 1977.

In terms of the artists exhibiting together as a group, when we exhibited the City Hall in the City Hall Gallery, I think I believe it was in August of 1977.

And it was at that point that the university, after some discussion with the press, began to put up the walls that we had been waiting on for some time.

Then AAMARP began in 1978 officially as a program with an opening exhibition in November, which attracted about 1,200 people.

And of course everybody was totally amazed, and they just couldn't believe that that AAMARP was what it was.

They couldn't believe that all these Black artists were all together on one floor and they had a gallery and a multipurpose room and, and that sort of thing.

**Interviewer** Do you think, Dana, at that time that people were almost surprised that that many talented Black artists existed in Boston or do you think they weren't surprised by that?

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** I think that they were surprised.

I think that they were surprised more at the caliber of the work than that there were talented Black artists who were at AAMARP because I don't think that people had seen African American art housed in, you know, a Boston artist housed in a place like that where it could be viewed in a professional manner and where the show had been hung professionally.

And it was a very beautiful show.

So most people were were absolutely astounded when they saw the exhibition.

## ***La Plaza – Murals, Murals (1979)***

**Interviewer** Wen-ti Tsen, born in Shanghai, China. He went to school in France and England. He has travelled widely throughout Europe and the Middle East and Far East. He has exhibited in the Greater Boston area. His work includes posters, murals, video, audio visual, projects.

Arnold Trachtman, born in Massachusetts. One of his exhibits in 1970 at Harvard University at the time of the Cambodian invasion was closed due to controversy over a series of paintings on the war in Vietnam and the civil rights struggle. He is now working on a series of paintings dealing with busing.

Dana Chandler, well known muralist and a painter whose current exhibit at Harvard will be on until February 1979. He is director of the African American Master Artists-in-Residency program at Northeastern University, where he is responsible for the critically acclaimed Collective Exhibit, which closed December 23rd.

Why don't we start with you, Dana?

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** All right, we found it —

Those of us who were involved in it, I really should just speak for myself.

I found it very exciting.

Nyna [Polumbaum] called me and talked to me about doing murals because she said that I was one of the major mural painters in the city, which was a nice thing to call me.

And she thought that I might want to be involved in that, which of course was quite true.

And so we arranged after some meetings at her house to have the mural put together initially in terms of the panels in my studio space at Northeastern University and also to do the preliminary drawing for that in my studio space at Northeastern University.

Quite a bit of the, the real organization of the drawing process, and quite a bit of the dialogue that got to do with or went around organizing, putting together, the mural itself was a result of some of the other people who are sitting here, one of the prime organizing forces, I think was Wen-ti in

terms of making sure that it was a collective effort.

And some of the dialogue was at times rather heated.

But it was a lot of fun.

And I wish we could do a lot more of it.

You know, I hope that we'll be able to do a lot more of it in the future.

**Interviewer** Arnold let's have your perceptions.

**Arnold Trachtman** Well, my perception was that it would be very difficult to do a collective work since we had all been schooled as individual artists with individual personalities.

And I was interested to see how this thing was going to work.

As it turned out, we wish we could do another one after we've worked out some of the rough spots.

We could, we could become a team if we had another opportunity.

That was the whole idea.

And I think that's how the Chilean muralist eventually worked so effectively. We stumbled over ourselves and our individual egos, But I think ultimately we all came out richer for the experience.

**Interviewer** Good, Wen-ti.

**Wen-ti Tsen** Yeah, I was, I've been working now for a long time on the idea of working collectively as artists.

But this actually was the first opportunity when Arnie called me up, that we can work with real artists rather than community workers to do a project like this.

And that was a totally different kind of experience because we're all kind of schooled in different ways, and we have to resolve a lot of our differences in style and ideas.

And quite often artists have not been very politically schooled.

So it's lucky that we have, you know, several of us here who were really concerned about society.

So, you know, it worked out very well because of that basis.

**Arnold Trachtman** Well, well one of the things that we did is we all began working on what we thought a section of it might be like.

And then we came back with our little designs and see how they fitted together in a kind of collage, a layout.

And then we made changes so that the thing could all work.

But obviously we all had to have a section which we were responsible for.

After we had talked about the content of the mural, which was long and arduous.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** We were very, very clear that the mural had to be similar in many ways to what had been already done in Chile.

So with that as a basis and understanding that some muralists were going to come in later on and also work on the mural with us, we began our design process.

And, like I said earlier, sometimes the discussions got very heated.

But as we began to be much more involved in, in the process of working together and began to develop some real friendships with each other, the, the work went a lot faster and got a lot more exciting and we got a lot more committed to what it was that we were doing.

It's a very exciting process, and I must reiterate that we hope we can do that kind of thing again.

I think that artists need to work more with each other anyway.

**Announcer** The Boston Walls, in spite of their Black Power rhetoric, were sponsored by the City Neighborhood Arts Program, Boston Summerthing Festival, organized in 1968 to help cool out the long, hot summer.

Summerthing coincided with the desires of socially conscious Black artists like Dana Chandler and Gary Rickson, who painted the first two Boston Walls together.

As Dana Chandler told a reporter back then, "there is no Black art in the Museum of Fine Arts. So we are going to utilize the walls of buildings in our community for our museum."

They were Black people painting murals about themselves and their situation.

They thought Black art was not a decoration, but a revolutionary force.

From 1968 to 1970, half the Summerthing murals were located in the Black community, painted by artists like Chuck Mills, Al Smith, Lloyd Cater Jr., Sharon Dunn, Yenti Bell, Rickson, and Chandler.

By 1971/72, only a handful of powerful social statements like James Brown's anti drug wall were still being sponsored and the last political Summerthing sponsored walls were painted by Chandler in 1972.

By 1973, with the easing of the political situation, Summerthing mural money was drawn out of the ghetto and put into exercises in abstract decoration, obscure sculpture projects, and wall paintings of the kind that museum curators like but ordinary people have trouble relating to.

## **Interview recorded for *Fifty Years Modern: Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art (c. 1986)***

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** I think that Boston was probably the second city to take that on.

And so Gary Rickson and I and a couple of other folks began to paint murals on the walls, and we painted murals on the walls all over the city, so that probably there were about 10 or 15 murals done by Black artists in Boston by 1971/72.

But it was certainly a way of saying to our folks that, hey, here we are, you do have visual artists, they can paint, they do do significant works.

But it was interesting to see that once we began that mural process, then all of a sudden it was quite all right for the Museum of Fine Arts and other places to have exhibitions of the works of Black artists because, Oh my, they really can paint, can't they?

Hilarious.

You know, I still have a great deal of cynicism about that because none of us ever became wealthy.

What I can remember about that period of time was getting a full color page in the *New York Times* and being in New York after it came out.

And one of the artists in New York walked up, said, "how did you manage to pull that off? You know, we've been trying for years. And there you are, the whole page."

I said, don't worry about it.

It's not going to get me a nickel.

It's not going to get me a dime.

It won't even get me any more exhibitions.

And that's exactly what happened.

So we were very clear that in terms of white society, our efforts were only were meaningless except for how much good news it would make for the moment.

And then after that, we would be very quickly forgotten inside of white society.

And certainly that's exactly what happened.

## ***Say Brother – Environment Magazine*** **(1990)**

**Announcer** Boston artists would soon be among the leaders of America's new public art movement.

**Gary Rickson** Out of the public murals that were done around the country, here we did 72 murals in about four years.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** One of the open avenues, because of what had happened during the 60's, the urban insurrections of the 60's, was that the mayors of big cities at that time were always looking for ways to keep the city cool.

Yes, that was the phrase they liked to use.

We want to keep the city cool, and one of the ways to keep the city cool was to have some kinds of activities going on, cultural activities going on in the communities where they felt that that kind of coolness needed to happen.

So hence artists like myself and Gary Rickson and some others got an opportunity to do murals in the city.

**Announcer** The first of the Boston murals was completed by Gary Rickson and Dana Chandler in 1969.

It was painted on a wall at the corner of Massachusetts and Columbus avenues.

## ***Say Brother – Art, Artists, and the Collector (1984)***

**Dennis Didley (Vusumuzi Maduna)** As Black minority artists, we have to be about convincing and demonstrating that work is as good and can be better than our work that's being produced by people who are coming out of the European mold.

**Marcia Lloyd** That being in the landscape is a very quiet experience and it's a very peaceful experience for me.

But I find the landscape very, very interesting in that it's always changing.

I see it as a real workshop for studying on the formal issues about painting that I'm really interested in, which is the light and color, atmosphere and distance.

**Rudolph R. Robinson** My purpose, if I use that term artist, is to somehow function as a chronicler of the community and of the things that I see.

## ***Interview recorded for Say Brother– For the Love of Art (1984)***

**Rudolph R. Robinson** I feel that the artist, as in the African society, works more as an integral part of the community and he serves a purpose beyond being an interpreter in the European fashion to interpret or to make commentaries or to express himself.

## ***Interview recorded for Ten O'Clock News (1984)***

**Ellen Banks** I started to work with Scott Joplin and this has been really exciting because I found that the structures of this really underrated Black composer visually are quite exciting and that they are standing and that I can put a Joplin next to a Bach and people say isn't that superb?

## ***Say Brother – Art, Artists, and the Collector (1984)***

**Interviewer** How is it that you paint landscapes?

**Marcia Lloyd** What I like about working in the landscape is that I can't control the various elements of light in space.

I can select various aspects and I can choose where I want to be in relationship to the space, but the sun is always changing and the weather's always changing and so I find it a very dynamic situation, not a static situation at all.

## ***Greater Boston Arts – October (2000)***

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** You don't remember this, but way back when I was a student, just barely started to be a student.

You know, you had an exhibition and I came next.

I said one day I'm going to be as good at this as Richard.

Yeah.

**Richard Yarde** Oh, please.

My mother was really my first mentor.

She was the woman who brought me materials and things to work with.

And the Wilson family were friends and so she wanted John to tutor me and he came to the house and at that time I was interested in boxing.

And so he came to the house and he watched me go through a few moves and he said, you know what, I think this kid would be better off as a boxer than a painter.

**John Wilson** The only African American artist I knew when I was a kid was Allan [Rohan] Crite because I was always interested in art through the Roxbury Boys club.

A friend and I went found out where he lived in knocked on his door and it was very inspiring to me to see an African American dedicating himself to expressing his feelings and doing this and making this a life's work.

# ***Say Brother – Black Artists: Building Toward a Renaissance***

**Announcer** Across town, the African American Master Artists-in-Residency Program, or AAMARP, has been underway for four years.

AAMARP is a one-of-a-kind program based at Northeastern University where 15 artists currently have studio and exhibition space.

Jamaican Bryan McFarlane was brought into the group by director Dana Chandler.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** The idea and was to provide African American artists with a space in which to create works at the level that they're capable of creating works, which is a very unusual process here in America because as you know, very few African American artists have a setting like this where they can work in conjunction one with the other and there can be a cross fertilization.

**Announcer** Chandler says, in fact, the only hope for Afro-American artists lies in sticking together.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** It becomes imperative that African American artists join hands, link up through their own or through other organizations in order to find places where their works can be shown.

And of course that means that we find ourselves exhibiting in non-traditional kinds of settings: churches, bazaars, boys clubs, girls clubs, the YM and YWCA's, that sort of thing, rather than in the galleries of Newbury Street where we have found that our work is not exactly welcome.

**Allan Rohan Crite** Art is a form of communication.

Rather it is communication.

And it's a form of communication which extends far beyond the life of each individual artist.

And because of that, you might say the community of the artist extends down through the years.

**Announcer** These works by Afro-American visual artists are the expression of a culture that has endured through centuries.

It is a culture little understood or accepted.

**Dennis Didley (Vusumuzi Maduna)** I'm still trying to develop a personal genuine synthesis between certain traditional African, Black African sculptural forms and what my experience has been as an African American and that's what I'm attempting to do with my work.

First with the smaller mask type forms and also some larger pieces like a freestanding piece of sculpture.

**Announcer** It may be tough going now, but 41 year-old Dennis Didley foresees a lot of opportunity for Black Boston artists in the next five to ten years.

In fact, he predicts a cultural explosion on the horizon.

**Dennis Didley** Boston's very fortunate, you know, to have as many talented Black artists as it has.

I mean, and talking to other, you know, Black artists from the country, we have something exciting happening here in Boston.

People have been talking about another Renaissance around Black art in Boston, very heavy.

## ***Say Brother – Masterworks (1983)***

**Announcer** John Wilson, professor of art at Boston University, is sculpting a work of art that is soon to be forged somewhere in America into the American landscape.

And as you can see, he is truly a master at work.

This is a head — an eight foot presence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Wilson was commissioned by the City of Buffalo, New York to place this monumental sculpture in a Memorial Park this fall.

He has been working on this piece for nearly a year.

**John Wilson** All of his eloquence and his thinking quest is focused in this head.

And so I want people to, I want to get the sense of communication.

I painted and I did graphics and graphic art, printmaking and some lithography etchings during this time, especially as I got into my career.

I always wanted to do things three-dimensionally, but since I didn't have the training and the know-how I would always think about it and continue painting and my work in terms of my drawings and paintings actually became very sculptural.

**Interviewer** What do you want a person to feel and experience when he sees that head on the grounds of the National Center of Afro American Artists?

**John Wilson** You know, when I think about it, my obsession with this head and making this head become a larger-than-life size image that confronts might very well relate to the sense of creating something that is a strong, powerful image that cannot be ignored, that must be confronted, that exists on its own terms and that is Black, that is, that has a life force and that you can't ignore.

**Interviewer** Is that a girl or boy?

**John Wilson** At one point I was doing this totally from memory, and I realized that I really wanted to do some research and to start with some concrete form.

And so I asked a young woman who was a friend of my daughter's actually to pose so that I could actually do research and to take off from some specific structure from a specific person.

When I say take off, that's exactly what happens because I said I used the characteristic shapes and forms of her specific head.

But I have transformed them, and I'm going to make the thing become much more generalized.

In other words, it's not going to be a portrait of this specific person.

## ***Say Brother – For the Love of Art (1987)***

**Susan Thompson** Every year hundreds of people come through here.

It's a nationally known organization.

**Hakim Raquib** I work pretty much in isolation, but since I've been here, the benefits have been enormous just in the interaction with the other artists. I mean, that to me is the prime reason.

**Rene Westbrook** In terms of peace of mind, an artist who doesn't have a space to work can't create as freely as they would like. When having a place to work.

**Rudolph R. Robinson** AAMARP is very supportive in many ways, but essentially it's a place to work.

**Kofi Kayiga** I work at night essentially so I have no distraction and this is available day and night so that whenever I feel the need I'm here even I don't really need the habit of working.

So being a part of the group it provides also a community, an opportunity to meet people of color who have similar creative ideas.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** The actual beginning of AAMARP was in 1977 in terms of the artists exhibiting together as a group.

So most people were were absolutely astounded when they saw the exhibition, but they were astounded with great pride and it was just wonderful to watch all of these adults and children walking around with these great big smiles on their face and and lifting their shoulders up.

They were so proud to know that the work was not only good work, but it was work which compared with anybody's. That you didn't really have to in any sense say, well, that looks like this or this looks like the other.

It was in and of itself valid.

So that was really very exciting.

It was a very exciting experience for me.

**Hakim Raquib** Well, there's some great benefits of being part of this residency program.

One, I'm able to do the kind of work that I've always wanted to, that is develop some fine prints, and as an artist as well as a photographer, I'm able to do some experimenting here without too much interruption in my life.

And having the space set up the way it is, the interaction with other artists is a prime requisite for me.

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** Our way is to provide a space for the artist that has a three-year lease attached which allows them to come in and do work in a space which is not is something they have to pay for.

So they have a rent free space for three years with security, 24 hour access.

And once in a while when our budget allows us to, we can do some kinds of stipend kinds of things.

Sometimes we can buy a piece of equipment for the artists, or we can get them some paints, or we can frame their work, or we can house an exhibition and pay for the whole process.

You know, the hanging of the exhibition, the reception, the making of the information that goes out.

So that when they've finished up with this exhibition, they have a document which talks about all the things that they've accomplished over a set number of years.

Those are the kinds of things that we do for the artists who are in this program.

**Rene Westbrook** For eight years I worked out of the same space I went to bed in. I worked out of my bedroom for eight years.

And I can't tell you the the wonder and the benefits.

Again, I use that word because it's quite proper in this instance.

The program has some very gifted people in it, and I think it will launch a great many careers in the future.

I know that the one-woman show I just finished would not have happened if I had not been here at AAMARP.

**Susan Thompson** Being around so many other artists, a lot of artists in here they're just masters and you grow by being in contact with them, by talking with them, and that's all part of the learning experience.

## ***Say Brother – Arts Magazine (1997)***

**Barbara Ward** Because a doll for me, art for me, was always there.

I've been doing it since I was a child, so I never understood the effect it would have.

I know it by the letters I get.

I know it by the the calls I get from students who've been through my workshops.

It isn't the doll, it's the love.

It's the healing and everything that goes through art.

It's like a transference of you to somebody else, and that's what art is.

It's such a sharing experience that I really don't even know today the impact that it has; except that I'm making a decent living at it.

And that's a very good impact.

I am making my living at doll making.

**Interviewer** That's great, That's great.

**Barbara Ward** And teaching.

**Interviewer** What about the work at the YWCA?

**Barbara Ward** The YWCA, again, it was a piece where somebody approached me and said, would you create or come up with a concept of a Third World multicultural visual statement?

We discussed it and it was hard because I really didn't know what to do and I had to really think it out.

And that's a combination of four life-size figures that basically are adorned and appliqued in fabrics from China, Latin America, Africa, Boston, Massachusetts.

It's a combination of all.

And that again, stretched my mind, stretched my ability.

It was wonderful because it was a historical... again, it's that is the community process that comes into the work that I do that keeps me going because what I do is very involved with people and I love it.

**Interviewer** We hope you keep it going.

**Barbara Ward** I love it.

## ***Say Brother – The Art of Photography*** **(1976)**

**Interviewer** What initially attracted you to photography?

**Hakim Raquib** Well, essentially a way to express myself and to escape a lot of bad experiences that I've had.

Actually, this is how I got into photography.

I was living in New York and there was a program being offered in Boston, so I came here.

The program, by the way, was the Roxbury Photographers Program, which was a community based photography school set up by MIT photography professors.

And that's where I began my experiences.

## ***Say Brother – Arts Magazine (1994)***

**Don West** Everything we do should have some kind of a purpose to further humanity, to further the positive growth of humanity and the goodwill towards each other and to try to dissolve the negativity that we experience, which is a lot of it in our immediate society and around the world.

Just problems, conflict, confusion.

To try to bring cohesion and unity into the experience of living, and taking photographs in certain angles and ways and attitudes can perhaps help that process.

## **Interview recorded for *Say Brother* (undated)**

**Dana C. Chandler Jr.** So look forward to that people, and bring your families.

We're going to have a good time.