

PERSONAL HISTORY

1935 Born, London, England to Mark and Esther Cohen.

1947 Arrives in the U.S. with parents, who changed their surname from Cohen to King; family settles in Detroit, Michigan.

1949 Saturday art classes at the Detroit Museum; summer school at the Detroit Society for Arts and Crafts.

1951 Honorable Mention in the Michigan State Art Show – the youngest exhibitor that year. Studies Albers' color theory at Cass Technical High School under instructor Donald Thrall, who had been a Black Mountain College student. Basil is expelled from Cass for chronic truancy.

1951-56 Attends Black Mountain College with breaks during which he hitchhikes through the U.S. At college, studies writing with Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, Robert Creeley, painting with Esteban Vicente and Joseph Fiore, meets John Cage, Paul Taylor, Viola Farber; important friendship with Stefan Wolpe. Through college contacts meets Willem deKooning, Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, Philip Guston, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Frank O'Hara, Paul Blackburn, and many other painters and poets in New York. Attends functions at The Club. Drinks at the Cedar Bar. Returns to Black Mountain with plans to buckle down and graduate just as the school is forced to close.

1957-58 Roams through the U.S. with stays in Needles and San Francisco, California (where he meets Allen Ginsberg, David Meltzer, Bob Kaufman, Jack Spicer, George Stanley and others in the "San Francisco Renaissance"); and at the Archie Bray Foundation in Helena, Montana, where studies with Peter Voulkos.

1958 Returns to San Francisco and resumes painting. Meets and marries Martha Davis. She is 20, he is 22.

1959 Moves with Martha to New York City. Finds studio space in an empty office building on Whitehall Street. Meets LeRoi Jones, Hettie Cohen Jones, Gilbert Sorrentino, Hubert Selby, Jr., Robert Kelly, George Economou. Friendship with LeRoi is intense.

1960 Sublets top floor loft at 168 ½ Delancey Street; meets Bob Thompson, Red Grooms, Mimi Gross and other members of The Delancey Street Museum. Friendship with Jim Rosenquist. Works as studio assistant for Gottlieb, Newman, Rothko. Carves frames at Dain & Schiff.

1961 Moves to large loft on Ferry Street; George Stanley and later Marian Zazeela are co-tenants. A solo show at the Allen Stone Gallery is cancelled because of the advent of Pop Art. (Jay Milder and others experienced the same sudden treatment.) Art for covers of Ron Lowenstein's poetry collection and for the first three issues of LeRoi Jones' *Yugen* magazine.

1962 Following eviction from Ferry Street in city sweep against artists in illegal lofts, moves studio to small sublet on 4th floor of 168½ Delancey Street and living quarters to squalid apartment on Avenue D, previously occupied by Joel Oppenheimer. Sale of two abstract paintings to Lita Hornick enables a move to a better domestic apartment at 57-59 2nd Avenue at 4th Street. Many works are lost in the turmoil.

1963 Daughter Mallory Lambert born on February 2. Exhibits in group shows at Dorsky, American Gallery, A.M. Sachs Gallery, Jansen Graphics Gallery, Zabriskie, and Great Jones Street Gallery with little personal satisfaction. Feels out of step with his generation. Henry Geldzahler visits studio and recommends making a series following just one of his paintings, a proposal impossible for Basil to follow. Loses sublet studio on Delancey when the primary tenant reclaims the space.

1964 Basil has a breakdown. Daughter Hetty Malke born July 10. Later that year, following more than a year of no studio and no work, rents space in the former flats storage area in the now vacant Anderson (Yiddish) Theater, across 2nd Avenue from the apartment and begins to paint again.

1965 Toward end of the year, a painting called "Venus" is a breakthrough into a new approach. Friendship with Frank O'Hara increasingly important.

1966 Meets critic Gene Swenson and forms close bond, both personal and in terms of his new work. Frank O'Hara dies shortly after promising to find Basil a supporter and a gallery. However he proposed that Baz should not show his work for seven years during which time Frank would establish his worth and promote his work.

1969 Gene Swenson, another important supporter of Basil's work, dies. LeRoi Jones leaves downtown to become Amiri Baraka in Harlem. Other members of their group disperse, divorce, and leave the Lower East Side or the arts entirely. Basil and Martha buy a small 4-story row house in what is now Park Slope, Brooklyn. At the time of purchase, the building had been a single-room occupancy residence for eight. Basil gives the 1st floor to his parents, uses the 2nd floor as studio and storage space, with the family occupying floors 3 and 4.

1970 "Algate Narcissus" a mural sized painting has a one-day show at Judson Memorial Church. Gallery owner David McKee visits on recommendation of Eila Kokkenin, then an assistant curator of drawing at the Museum of Modern Art. Basil begins teaching at Fordham and briefly Cooper Union. Decides to complete Gene Swenson's plans for an exhibition at NYU's Loeb Student Center along with painters Philip Wofford, Carol Haerer, and sculptor Ivan Micho. Show is panned in *Art News*.

1971 Friendship with younger writers Harry Lewis and David Glotzer; the three found a magazine, *Mulch*, based on Basil's ideas about juxtaposing poetry, cultural theory, history, photographs, film scripts, and painter's documents along with Harry's enthusiasm for anthropology and the social sciences. Early issues contain posthumous papers by painters John Graham and Hans Hoffman. Close friend, poet Paul Blackburn, dies.

1972-74 Blackburn's earlier recommendation leads to an offer to serve as artist-in-residence at Thomas Jefferson College of Grand Valley State Colleges, Michigan. Mulch Press formed to publish books. TJC hosts a national poetry festival where Basil meets Carl Rakosi and Ted Enslin, both to become important friends. Robert Duncan visits the college, house and studio. Later, Henry Geldzahler visits the college on Basil's invitation; again rejects his aesthetic and warns him of the consequences. In 1974 Grand Rapids Art Museum hosts a small show of Basil's paintings and sculptures.

1974 Returns to Brooklyn as his art output has trickled to near nothing due to expanded TJC work. Basil interviews John Wieners for *Mulch* magazine but the tape recorder malfunctions leaving six inaudible cassettes. Visitors to 4th Street, Brooklyn include John Wieners, Hubert Selby, Jr., Irving Sandler, Jim Rosenquist, David McKee. Exhibits sculptures and ink drawings on music paper at University of Kansas Museum of Art, Lawrence KS.

1975 Borrows money for half share of 50 Hudson Avenue, Brooklyn, for larger studio space. Visitors to Hudson Avenue include Glenn Horowitz (rare book dealer), Joan Mondale (Vice President's wife) with her art advisor Mary Anne Tighe, Amiri Baraka, Ron Padgett, Louise Ault (widow of George). Begins "Poets"- a massive quick sketch portrait series. Sitters include: Baraka, Bill Berkson, Paul Auster, Allen Ginsberg, Armand Schwerner, and many more. Last issue of magazine is published. Mulch Press taken over by David Glotzer. (It will fold in 1978).

1977 "Basil King - Paintings" shown at Kirkland Art Center, Clinton, NY. Despite multiple invitations no art critics attend.

1979 Exhibits "Brides of Algate" - graphics and paintings at Fifth Street Gallery, NYC.

1980-82 Begins to use baseball imagery for paintings and finishes his posthumous portrait of Blackburn with his wife. "Paul and Joan" and related preparatory works are shown at the Poetry Project at St. Marks Church, NYC. In 1982 a disastrous flood at 50 Hudson Avenue damages a dozen paintings and destroys some 30 large drawings. Acrimonious relations with the co-owner lead to sale of the building.

1983 Rents 3,000 square feet of studio space on 39th Street, near Brooklyn's Bush Terminal. Starts "The Cards" -- paintings and drawings based on playing cards originally discussed with Jack Spicer in California. An intense friendship with John Yau culminates in promises of major assistance by writing a critique of his work, helping him obtain a NYC gallery and the possibility of a teaching job at Bard College.

1984 Martha starts *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*, a free poetry "zine" in which she publishes her own and Basil's work, among many others. She will continue it until 1992. Trees from Prospect Park and baseball players continue to occupy him. "Pastorale" is selected for "Diamonds Are Forever," a Smithsonian-sponsored exhibition of baseball art that toured for 2 years. (Catalog available.) Dorothea Rockburne, Esteban Vicente, Meredith Monk, Ping Chong, Russell Banks, Bob Holman, Fielding Dawson, Robert Bertholf, Ron Padgett, Ralph Lemon, are among the studio visitors. Meredith and Ping are painted as "Queen of Diamonds/Jack of Hearts."

1985-88 All promises of assistance and promotion are aborted in 1985 when Yau reports he has been advised to support the work of already established artists and an important poet. Basil and Martha plunge into work and take a month to visit England. It is Basil's first visit since leaving in 1947. On return, he begins to write poetry. From here on, poetry as well as painting are daily practices. Important friendship with poet/scholar George Butterick develops and results in publication of his first collection of poems *Split Peas*, by a small press run by two Butterick protégés. George Butterick dies in 1988. Another loss.

1989-93 Former Mets pitcher Tom Seaver purchases baseball painting, "Pastorale" from the "Diamonds Are Forever" exhibition. Plans by Gallery 53 in Cooperstown to mount a major baseball art show in Chicago featuring Basil's work -- with Tom Seaver willing to provide promotional appearances -- collapses due to the 1994 players strike that squelched major league baseball for that season. "Paintings from the Cards" is exhibited at Granary Books Gallery, NYC. Basil begins his long poem "Mirage" while subbing for a fellow teacher in Newark which entailed long travel time. It is published by Marsh Hawk Press.

1994-2000 Makes more "Mirage" art and texts. Continues "The Cards". Completes a first set of "The Green Man" paintings. Trips to England, Wales, Belgium, Switzerland, Slovenia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Venice, Trieste, Maine, and California, meeting writers, giving readings, seeing art. British cousin Malcolm Wiseman starts Stop Press and publishes *The Compleat Miniatures* and *Devotions* with poetry and art in 1997. In 1999 Mirage art and texts are exhibited at Gotham Book Mart. Leaves 39th Street studio for the top two floors of his 4th Street house. *The Poet* combining sketches of poets with Basil's brief stories about each is published by Spuyten Duyvil Press in 2000. Studio visitors include Jack Tilton, Fielding Dawson, David Rattray, Vincent Katz.

2001 A needed renovation on the 4th Street house requires moving out for six months. While temporarily at daughter Mallory's house in Jersey City, Basil has only a work table as his studio space. He completes "The Rimbaud Project", a series of 94 mixed-media works on paper for every verse in "Illuminations," "Drunken Boat," and "A Season in Hell." Important trip to Rome that spring. *Warp Spasm* with poetry and art and *Identity* are both published by Spuyten Duyvil. At home in Brooklyn the 9/11 attack scatters fragments of burned paper on streets and backyards, and a stench familiar to Basil from wartime London drifts over the neighborhood for weeks.

2002-03 Trip to Spain for opening of "Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art" at Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sophia, Madrid, curated by Vincent Katz, which includes a student work from the 1950s and a painting from Basil's "Mirage" series. (Catalog available.) Painting series include "Cities," "Europa," "War and Peace," and "Family Photos." Completes "The Towers" a series in ink, charcoal, and colored chalks on paper. *Mirage: a poem in 22 sections* published by Marsh Hawk Press. Skanky Possum publishes his long poem "Twin Towers" as a chapbook.

2004 Basil is invited to do an art work at Bob Holman's Bowery Poetry Club - to include "Rimbaud Praise Day" with poets reading Rimbaud in translations and original French. He creates "Rimbaud's Seaside," a 12' x 15' work on paper that further integrates abstraction and figuration. Unstorable and ephemeral, Basil and Martha cut it into pieces when the 3-month show is over, distributing fragments to friends and supporters. The Praise Day event is dampened by puzzling negative publicity from The Poetry Project. A visit to San Francisco early in May, at the invitation of the San Francisco State Poetry Collection, includes meetings with old and new S.F. colleagues and a solo reading, which in turn sparks a final afternoon with Carl Rakosi who died that June at age 100.

2006 Basil's painting medium now incorporates molding paste, chalks, ink, and charcoal along with oils and oil crayons. Writing "Learning to Draw" commences. Works on paper include "Snow Mixed with Rain," "Hard Stuff," "Whispers," "Index," "Thumbs," "Water Falls," and other series. Assembles an anthology of his poems in homage to painters. Begins paintings for "Basil's Arc" and continues "Family Photos." Important trip to Vancouver, British Columbia. Slides of "Rimbaud's Seaside" exhibited there and received with excitement.

2007 An anthology of Basil's poems on painters, *77 Beasts: Basil King's Beastiary*, published by Marsh Hawk Press. Completes some 50 mixed media paintings for "Basil's Arc" and publishes Arc texts in Ed Foster's literary magazine, *Talisman*. Trips to Winston-Salem, Asheville, and Durham, North Carolina (where he meets former Black Mountain student, Irwin Kremens). The painting "We Are the Framers" completed, more works for "Arc," and a new series of oil paintings and mixed media on gesso-textured paper, called "My Nijinsky." Publication of excerpts from *Learning to Draw* poetry in various literary magazines. Visitors to the studio include outsider art critic Tom Patterson.

2008 "My Nijinsky" (101 pieces) completed. Vincent Katz publishes a section of *Learning to Draw* as a chapbook. Mark Lamoureux's press Cy Gist issues the chapbook "Wild Cards." Basil begins "Looking for the Green Man" -- suites of drawings and mixed media paintings on sized paper and large canvases. Studio visitors include Raymond Foye, Kimberly Lyons, Burt Kimmelman.

2009 "Looking for the Green Man" continues. *Learning to Draw* continues. Serves as visiting artist in the Naropa Summer Writing Program which afforded a fine re-meeting with A.B. Spellman and Joyce Johnson after a gap of 25 years. Renewed contact with Amiri Baraka.

2010 A new series is focused on face cards. Prepares exhibition of the older "Green Man" paintings at Poets House. Exhibition opens in March. Completes "The Kings"

and begins “The Queens” with many multimedia graphics and 14 large oils. A review of “The Green Man” by Tom Patterson published online in Andrei Codrescu’s “Exquisite Corpse” web-zine.

2011 - Paintings include a large Queen of Spades series. The “House of Cards” canvas is finished. A book-length collection of 22 sections is published as *Learning to Draw/A History* by Skylight Press in the U.K. in September. A group of four supporters (Highfill, Katz, Kimmelman, and Lyons with Martha King) form “The Friends of Basil King” to call attention to Basil’s work. Their first project is a short film on him and his art. They raise money and commission filmmaker/artist Nicole Peyrafitte and her film-student son Miles Joris-Peyrafitte. Visitors to the studio include Barry Schwabsky, Lily Wei, Paolo Javier, William Benton, Andrew Levy, Tom Fink, Madeline Tiger, Ammiel Alcalay, George and Susan Quasha, and others.

2012 - Filming is done in January at 4th Street. Nicole and Miles choose text from *Mirage*, as read by Basil, for the voice-over narrative. Reading at the Poetry Project to celebrate publication of *Learning to Draw* is well received. On September 22, The Friends debut “Basil’s Arc: The Paintings and Poetics of Basil King” at Anthology Film Archives. In addition the day-long event includes Highfill, Schwabsky, Perafitte, and others reading King’s texts, a video by George Quasha, a music video on the Green Man by Daniel Staniforth and Rebsie Fairholm, and panel discussions led by Harry Lewis, Andrew Levy, Vincent Katz, and Kimberly Lyons. Capacity crowd.

2013 The Friends commit to a follow-up project, a book of essays drawn mainly from the presentations at “Basil’s Arc” edited by Burt Kimmelman. Painting continues to rock between the abstract and the figure. In August an essay on Basil’s work by poet/critic Tim Keane is published on the *Hyperallergic* blog. A fall tour to England includes presentations and screenings by Basil and Martha at Kent, Sussex, and Oxford universities plus visits to Laurie Duggan, John Hall, Colin Still, Elaine Randall and others as well as some continued personal research on the Green Man. Visits Paris in November—and begins a new series in mixed media on paper that morph from pure abstraction into bird images.

2014-15 Publications include book-length *The Spoken Word/The Painted Hand* and new chapbooks from Cy Gist and Lunar Chandelier. Madeline Tiger’s appreciation of Basil’s work published online in *Jacket2*. Meets

composers Bryce Dessner and Richard Reed Parry and works with director Maureen Towey on their production *Black Mountain Songs* for the 2014 Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival. Basil appears as “Narrator” reading his own and other brief texts. Bird imagery expands in both large and small formats, on paper and on canvas. Begins the “Bird Script” series, blending human, bird, and animal forms. Visitors to the studio include Laurie Duggan, Mark Lamoureaux, Kimberly Lyons, Patricia Spears Jones, Seth Stewart, Brian Butler. Trip to Minnesota includes showing of *Basil King: MIRAGE* at the Walker. Discussions begin about exhibition at the Black Mountain College Museum + Art Center.

2016 Solo show "*Basil King, Between Painting + Writing*" presented at Black Mountain College Museum + Art Center, Asheville. The opening includes a gallery talk, a screening of *Basil King: Mirage*, and a writing workshop for students with Basil and Martha. "Basil King's Birds" is featured in the Black Mountain College Festival of 2016 hosted by St. Andrews University, Laurinburg, NC. Lost & Found, the CUNY Poetics Documents Initiative partnering with The Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church hosts a celebration of the work of Paul Blackburn and Basil leads off the evening with a reading and reminiscence of Blackburn.

2017 Solo show, "*Basil King: Bird Scripts*," opens in February at the John Molloy Gallery, New York City. *History Now*, a new book in the series *Learning to Draw* is published by Marsh Hawk Press. Martha features Basil in a reading from it at her reading series, Prose Pros at SideWalk Cafe. Basil participates in Celebrating Allen Ginsberg at Howl! Happening, in a group reading including Bob Holman, Hettie Jones, Bob Rosenthal, David Henderson, and Simon Pettet. During the event, 17 Basil King drawings, *The Allen Ginsberg Suite, 1972*, are projected on a large screen,

2018 Participates in *The Legacy of Black Mountain College*, at Turchin Center for the Visual Arts in Boone, NC. Exhibition includes 12 recent paintings along with broadsides, drawings, books and magazines in which Basil and Martha's literary and art works have appeared. Basil gives a talk on his experiences as a BMC student, its impact on his development, and his perspectives on the continued interest in Black Mountain ideas. The online journal *Talisman Issue #46* focuses on critical responses to Basil's

art and poetry with 13 essays on his work by poets and scholars. Martha King's memoir - *Outside / Inside: Just outside the art world's inside*, is published by BlazeVox.

2019-2021 *Disparate Beasts: Basil King's Beastiary, Part Two* published by Marsh Hawk Press, 2020. [See here for a reading of the work filmed by Don Yorty](#). *Light Abstracts the Smallest Things: The Aesthetics of Basil King - Essays on King's Art and Poetry* edited by Burt Kimmelman, is issued by Talisman House Publishers. In COVID-19 pandemic fashion - [Basil and Martha King host a Virtual Studio Visit and Reading in January 2021](#). An essay on Basil's work by Peter Valente, "Language is Everything," published in *spoKe* 8, (2021). Studio visitors include art historians Katherine Markoski and Jennifer Sichel.

2022 *After Thought: Paintings & Poems by Basil King* published by Granary Books as a special limited edition artist's book. All copies sold to institutions including: The Beinecke Library (Yale), Butler Library (Columbia University), Special Collections at Stanford University, The Getty, Library of Congress, and University of Chicago. *There Are No Ghosts There Are Portraits*, is co-published by Pinsapo Press and Lost & Found CUNY Poetics Document Initiative. Readings include Downstairs @ La MaMa, [FiveMyles Gallery](#) (Brooklyn) Record Shop (Brooklyn), [Lunar Chandelier Press a Virtual Reading: Basil King + Charles Borkhuis](#). Basil King art is on the cover of *Hurricane Review* #19, with six more works throughout. Basil's essay "The Past is as Present as I Want the Future to Be" is one of 25 essays in *On Becoming a Poet* by writers associated with Marsh Hawk Press. In this period his art focuses on foundational shapes--circles, squares, oblongs, triangles and on "homages" again honoring his deep love of painting and the people who paint. Studio visits include collectors Julie and Michael Gustafson.

2023 *In Delacroix's Garden*, a collaboration by Basil King and Yuko Otomo is published by Spyuten Duyvil (2023). [The Brooklyn Rail presents: 6 Rue de Fürstemberg: A Rail Reading curated by Yuko Otomo & Basil King \(March 2023\)](#). Studio visits include art historian Gilles Heno-Coe.

2024 Interviewed by British podcaster Bob Chaundy with a 60 minute interview on his bi-weekly [Considering Art](#) series. Studio visits include art historian Erica DiBenedetto. New work includes: *Small Family Portraits*, a series of 9 works, all faces from Basil's childhood on birch wood panels, and *The Tablets (2024)*, a series of 9 works on birch wood panels in memory of Armand Schwerner 1927-1999. Words in Paint and Paint in Words - a collaboration King has long sought.

2025 Interviewed by Marie Warsh and Steve Zehentner for The Lower East Side Biography Project. Studio visits include art historian Diana Tuite. New work includes: *Birds - Out of the Box*, a series of seven large format paintings on paper, and *Refill*, also large format paintings on paper.