

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; 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, California 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 he is employed by Peter Voulkos to teach beginning pottery.
- 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.

- 1961 Moves to large loft on Ferry Street; George Stanley and later Marian Zazeela are co-tenants
- 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. Sale of two abstract paintings to Lita Hornick enables a move to a better domestic apartment at 57-59 2nd Avenue. 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 that was not possible 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 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.
- 1969 Gene Swenson dies. LeRoi Jones leaves downtown to become Amiri Baraka in Harlem. Basil and Martha buy a row house in what is now Park Slope, Brooklyn. At the time of purchase, the building had been a single-room occupancy residence for six; Basil uses the 2nd floor rear as studio space.
- 1970 David McKee visits on recommendation of Eila Kokkenin, then an assistant curator of drawing at the Museum of Modern Art with an interest in John Graham, Francis Bacon, and the late work of Philip Guston. Basil begins teaching at Fordham and briefly at Cooper Union. Decides to complete Gene Swenson’s plans for an exhibition at NYU’s Loeb Student Center 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 Leaves New York City for a teaching job at Grand Valley State Colleges in Michigan. *Mulch* Press formed to publish books. The college hosts a national poetry festival where Basil meets Carl Rakosi and Ted Enslin, both to become important friends. Robert Duncan visits house and studio. Later, Henry Geldzahler visits college on Basil's invitation; again rejects Basil's aesthetic and warns him of the consequences.
- 1974 Returns to Brooklyn. Interviews John Wieners for *Mulch* magazine but the tape recorder malfunctions leaving six inaudible cassettes. Visitors to studio on 4th Street Brooklyn include Irving Sandler, Jim Rosenquist, David McKee.
- 1975 Borrows money to buy half share of 50 Hudson Avenue, Brooklyn, for a larger studio space. Among visitors to Hudson Avenue are 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" - quick sketch portrait series. Sitters include: Baraka, Bill Berkson, Paul Auster, Allen Ginsberg, Armand Schwerner, and many more. *Mulch* magazine ceases publication end of year. *Mulch* Press is taken over by David Glotzer. (It will fold in 1978).
- 1981-82 Begins to use baseball imagery for a series of paintings. In 1982 a near-disastrous flood at 50 Hudson Avenue damages a dozen paintings and destroys some 30 large drawings. Acrimonious relations with 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 from ideas originally discussed with Jack Spicer in California. An intense friendship with a rising poet/art critic culminates in major promises of assistance in obtaining a New York gallery, publishing a critique on his work, and a prestigious teaching job.
- 1984 - 92 Martha starts *Giants Play Well in the Drizzle*, a free poetry magazine, publishes her own and Basil's work, among many others. She will continue it until 1992. Basil finishes posthumous portrait of Blackburn and his wife, "Paul and Joan." Trees from Prospect Park and baseball players continue to occupy him. "Pastorale" from his baseball series is selected for a major national exhibition of baseball art, "Diamonds Are Forever." Studio visitors include Dorothea

Rockburne, Esteban Vicente, Meredith Monk, Ping Chong, Russell Banks, Bob Holman, Fielding Dawson, Robert Bertholf, Ron Padgett, Ralph Lemon, and others. 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 the critic reports he has been advised to support the work of several already established artists and an important poet, instead. Basil and Martha both plunge into work to stave off despair and take a month to visit England. It is Basil's first visit since leaving in 1947. On return, he begins to write poetry. Important friendship with poet/scholar George Butterick develops and results in the first publication of a collection of his poems, *Split Peas*, by a small press run by two Butterick protégés. George Butterick dies in 1988. Another crushing loss.
- 1993-94 Former Mets pitcher Tom Seaver purchases baseball painting, "Pastorale" from the "Diamonds Are Forever" exhibition. Plans by Gallery 53 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 the season.
- 1993 - 2000 Moves studio to Park Slope house, taking over the top two floors, as painting and writing spaces. Begins "Mirage" art and texts. Continues "The Cards"; completes first set of "The Green Man" paintings and texts. Trips to England, Wales, Belgium, Switzerland, Slovenia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Venice, Trieste, Maine, and California meeting writers, giving readings, seeing art. Visitors to studio include Jack Tilton, Fielding Dawson, Vincent Katz, Dorothea Rockburne. British cousin Malcolm Wiseman starts Stop Press and publishes *Compleat Miniatures* and *Devotions* in 1997.
Finally able to do massive renovation on house in 2001, which requires moving out for six months but will result in improved studio space.
- 2001 In temporary quarters at daughter Mallory's house in Jersey City, Basil has only a work table as 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* and *Identity* published by Spuyten Duyvil Press. Back to Brooklyn in August where enlarged painting studio is now open to a skylight. The 9/11 attack scatters fragments of burned papers in streets and backyards, and during the weeks following a stench familiar to Basil from wartime London continues to drift over the house.
- 2002 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.)

- 2002-05 Painting series include "Cities," "Europa," "War and Peace," and "Family Photos." Completes "The Towers" series in ink, charcoal, and colored chalks on paper. Writing has become a daily practice. *Mirage: a poem in 22 sections* published by the collective Marsh Hawk Press.
- 2006 - Major change in painting medium, now incorporating molding paste, chalks, ink, and charcoal along with oils. Creates a 12' x 15' mural on paper at The Bowery Poetry Club, "Rimbaud's Seaside." The work further integrates abstraction and figuration. Basil and Martha cut it into pieces when the 3-month show is over, distributing fragments to friends and supporters. Writing *Learning to Draw/A history* 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 titled *77 Beasts: Basil King's Bestiary*. Begins paintings for "Basil's Arc" and continues "Family Photos." Important trip to Vancouver, British Columbia. "Rimbaud's Seaside" exhibited there as a slide show, received with excitement.
- 2007 - *77 Beasts* 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* 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. So does Mark Lamoureux. 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. Writing *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 gap of 25 years. Renewed contact with Amiri Baraka.
- 2010 - Begins a new series focused on the 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 Queen of Spades series. Large “House of Cards” canvas is completed. A book-length collection of 22 sections from “Learning to Draw” 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 326A 4th Street. Nicole and Miles use text from *Mirage*, read by Basil, as the voice-over narrative. Reading at the Poetry Project to celebrate publication of *Learning to Draw* well received. On September 22, The Friends present “Basil’s Arc: The Paintings and Poetics of Basil King” at Anthology Film Archives. In addition to the first public screening of *Basil King: MIRAGE*, the day-long event includes poets 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 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 included 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 along with 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 to bird images.
- 2014 - 15 Publications include book-length *The Spoken Word/The Painted Hand* and 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 MaureenTowey on their production *Black Mountain Songs* for the 2014 Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival. Basil appears as “Narrator” reading his own works as well as other brief texts. Bird imagery expands in both large and small formats, on paper and on canvas. Begins the “Bird Script” series in spring of 2015, 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 exhibitions at the Black

Mountain Museum and Arts Center, St. Andrews University, the N.C. School of the Arts, and the Turchin Center for Visual Arts, all in North Carolina.

Basil celebrates his 80th birthday, May 30, 2015.