Vaughn Clay grew up in Kenmore, New York, a suburb of Buffalo. At Kenmore High School West, he pursued a major in Art. Vaughn continued his education as an Art major at Westminster College, earning a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art. Following this, he pursued a Masters of Art Education degree at the University of Pittsburgh. During his time at Pitt, he enrolled in studio courses at Carnegie Mellon University, and he also completed studio courses at Columbia Teachers College in New York City, in addition to studying art history at Columbia University. Vaughn's educational journey continued as he obtained a Doctorate of Art Education Degree from the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, PA, where he further delved into art history and studio courses. He also expanded his knowledge by taking graduate art history and studio courses at the George Washington University and the National Gallery of Art. Vaughn was a selected participant in a Title III Summer Program and recognized as the Museum and the Art Teacher in the Summer of 1966.