



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Josef Albers

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Josef Albers
Date:	1968 June 22-July 5
Identifier:	AAA.albersj68
Creator:	Albers, Josef (Interviewee) Fesci, Sevim (Interviewer)
Extent:	24 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Josef Albers, 1968 June 22-July 5, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Josef Albers, 1968 June 22-July 5, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives' 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 others.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

Josef Albers (1888-1976) was a painter and educator in New Haven, Connecticut.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Josef Albers conducted 1968 June 22-July 5, by Sevim Fesci, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

This interview was conducted in New Haven, Connecticut. Albers speaks of his childhood in the industrial area of Westphalia, Germany; his father's influence as a house painter and set designer; his young interest in technical toys; his educational history, beginning at the Royal Art School, an art teacher prep school; his education in art history

in conjunction with fine arts; his brief experience teaching in public schools; his time studying at the Applied Art School in Essen while living and teaching in Berlin; and the beginning of professional career after having passed his exam in Berlin in 1915.

Scope and Contents

He discusses the influence of the European movements/artists, Die Brücke; Schmidt-Rottluff, Heckel, and Kirchner; his move to Munich and time spent working with Stuck (the teacher of Kandinsky and Klee); his eventual shift to the Bauhaus working in collage and stained glass under Itten; his refusal to do the traditional apprenticeship at the Bauhaus and surprising success with stained glass while striking out on his own; his initial experiments while working in the new studio for stained glass at the Bauhaus with frosting (a.k.a. thermometer style); his move from collage to montage; his disbelief in the use of past art as a source for current art; his distaste for the concept of art as self-expression; his use of repetitive forms in his painting as a method of "solving the problem;" his belief that the spectator makes the vision of the artist more lively; his belief that he teaches philosophy (how to see) not technique (how to paint); the fine line between influencing students and creating disciples; color as the most relative medium in art and a study of ourselves; his use of squares (the most man-made form), beginning in 1949; the role of art in society to reveal visually the attitude of our mentality; and his belief as to the future of art as being a further consideration of order.

General

Originally recorded on 1 sound tape reel. Reformatted in 2010 as 4 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hrs., 11 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art, American
- Die Brücke (Dresden)
- Painters -- Connecticut -- New Haven -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Bauhaus
- Heckel, Erich, 1883-1970
- Itten, Johannes, 1888-1967
- Kirchner, Ernst Ludwig, 1880-1938
- Schmidt-Rottluff, Karl, 1884-1976
- Stuck, Franz, Ritter von, 1863-1928

Occupations:

- Art teachers -- Connecticut -- New Haven -- Interviews
- Collagists

Stained glass artists