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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Boris Bally

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Boris Bally
Identifier:	AAA.bally09
Date:	2009 May 26-27
Extent:	4 Sound discs (Sound recording (5 hr., 55 min.); digital) 109 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Bally, Boris Riedel, Mija, 1958- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art 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 administrators.

Available Formats

Transcript available online.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

Boris Bally (1961-) is a metalsmith and designer who lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island. Bally was educated at Carnegie Mellon University and Tyler School of Art.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Boris Bally conducted 2009 May 26-27, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Bally's home and studio, in Providence, Rhode Island.

Scope and Contents

The artists speaks of his current studio in Providence, Rhode Island; working without a studio assistant; the benefits of working with studio assistants without an art-school background; apprenticing with Swiss metalsmith Alexander Schaffner when Bally was 19; his own de facto apprenticeship program with his studio assistants; his parents as role models; his vision at age 19 for his career plan; his early interest in CAD; growing up with Swiss-born parents, both with art/design backgrounds; visiting Switzerland as a child; his father's studies with Buckminster Fuller in the late 1950s; his mother's class with L. Brent Kington, whom Bally later studied with; growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; his first home metal shop at nine years old; his first formal metal class at about 14 years old; making and selling jewelry throughout his teens; informal apprenticeship with Jeff Whisner; his father's design firm, launched in his last year of high school; summer studying at the Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Arts; year-long apprenticeship in Switzerland; watching Schaffner make and sell a wide variety of objects, which later informed Bally's own perspective; his continuing relationship with Schaffner; undergraduate studies at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; studying with Daniella Kerner and Vickie Sedman at Tyler; transferring to Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to study with Carol Kumata; making a "happiness machine"; transition from jewelry to larger sculptures; using found and scavenged materials; meeting Rosemary Gialamas (Roy) and their eventual elopement; moving to the Boston area; work as an industrial design model-maker; the New York art scene of the 1980s; representation with Archetype Gallery, New York, New York; slow but steady artistic recognition and commercial success of his functional objects; Sliding Perfections, flatware; teaching Gialamas metalsmithing and collaborative works by the two; early teaching experience in adult education classes in Cambridge, Massachusetts, then at Massachusetts College of Art, Boston; return to Pittsburgh in 1989, where Bally took a teaching position at Carnegie Mellon in the design department; studio on Bigelow Boulevard; difficulties in his marriage; a commission from the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Massachusetts, and the beginnings of his traffic sign pieces in a collaborative piece with Gialamas; starting his platters series; the dissolution of his marriage to Gialamas in 1993; meeting Lynn, whom he later married; his love of teaching and his teaching philosophy; teaching at Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina; move to Providence, Rhode Island, to devote his time to studio work; the pros and cons of craft and arts schools versus university settings; the intersection of art, design, and industry: his Humanufactured line of products; functional work in the late '80s, and the influence of a trip to Haiti in the 1980s; bottle cork pieces; Trirod vessels; "More than One: Contemporary Studio Production" exhibition, American Craft Museum, New York, New York, 1992-94; philosophy of making; working in series form; truss pieces; perforation pieces and Vessel with a Silver Heart (1993); armform series; "Jewelries, Epiphanies" exhibition, Artists Foundation Gallery at Cityplace, Boston, Massachusetts, 1990; inclusion in *One of a Kind: American Art Jewelry Today*, by Susan Grant Lewin. (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); series Dig Wear and Eat Wear bracelets; Calimbo vessel and the Fortunoff prize; gold Tread Wear brooches in the mid-1990s; creating his first chair; moving from hand-made solo work to furniture and a design and production focus; starting to patent his designs in the mid-1990s; further exploration of design and technique in his chairs; "GlassWear: Glass in Contemporary Jewelry," Museum of Arts and Design, New York, New York, 2009; Pistol Chalice and work with the Pittsburgh gun buyback program; traveling exhibition for the project; Gun Totem; Brave necklace; BroadWay armchair; Subway chair; new techniques for graphics on the furniture; his relationship with former scrapyard Paul Warhola, brother to Andy Warhol; commission work, and the importance of commerce in his career and worldview; commission for Comedy Central television network; the changing craft market and the boom times of the 1980s; work with galleries, including: Patina, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Velvet da Vinci, San Francisco, California; Snyderman-Works, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Nancy Sachs Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri; the Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, Massachusetts; seeing one of his pieces used on a set for a daytime television soap opera and in the movie *Sex and the City*; the recent "green" (environmentally conscious) trend; blurring boundaries of design and art and craft; growing acceptance of artist-made and -designed multiples; pros and cons of computer technology in art and craft; the pros and cons of the DIY (do-it-yourself) craft movement; influential writers, including Rosanne Raab, Marjorie Simon, Steven Skov Holt and Mara Holt Skov, Bruce

Metcalf, Toni Greenbaum, Matthew Kangas, Gail Brown; his involvement in the Society of North American Goldsmiths; making metal benches for his children. He also recalls Heather Guidero, Julian Jetten, Pam Moloughney, Dennis Kowal, Ursula Ilse-Neuman, Bob Ebendorf, Jason Spencer, Rob Brandegeee and Ava DeMarco, Stefan Gougherty, Flo Delgado, L. Brent Kington, Curtis Aric, Ralph Düby, Steve Korpa, Joe Wood, Joe Ballay, Yves Thomann, Andy Caderas, James Thurman, Nicholas (Nico) Bally, Elena Gialamas, James Gialamas, Elvira Peake, Ronald McNeish, Johanna Dahm, Jerry Bennet, Kathleen Mulcahy, Nelson Maniscalco, Tom Mann, Otto Künzli, Stanley Lechtzin, Christopher Shellhammer, David Tisdale, Dean Powell, Daniel Carner, Donald Brecker, Robert Schroeder Phil Carrizzi, Lucy Stewart, Elisabeth Agro, Rachel Layton, Sarah Nichols, Peter Nassoit, Dan Niebels, Mary Carothers, Ward Wallau, Ivan Barnett and Alison Buchsbaum, Jonathan Bonner, Raymond and Patsy Nasher, Beth Gerstein, George Summers Jr., Pavel Opocensky, Buddy Cianci, David Cicilline.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 11 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 56 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- New York (State) -- New York
- Art and computers
- Decorative arts
- Designers -- Rhode Island -- Interviews
- Furniture making
- Jewelry making
- Metal-work -- Study and teaching
- Metal-workers -- Rhode Island -- Interviews
- Models and modelmaking

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Agro, Elisabeth R.
- Ballay, Joe, 1938-
- Bonner, Jonathan, 1947-
- Carnegie-Mellon University (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) -- Faculty
- Carnegie-Mellon University (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) -- Students
- Cianci, Vincent Albert, Jr., 1941-2016
- Comedy Central (Firm)
- Dahm, Johanna
- Ebendorf, Robert, 1938-
- Fuller, R. Buckminster (Richard Buckminster), 1895-1983
- Gialamas, Rosemary, 1962-
- Greenbaum, Toni
- Holt, Steven, 1957-

Ilse-Neuman, Ursula
Kangas, Matthew
Kington, L. Brent (Louis Brent), 1934-2013
Kowal, Dennis
Kumata, Carol
Künzli, Otto, 1948-
Lechtzin, Stanley, 1936-
Massachusetts College of Art -- Faculty
Metcalf, Bruce, 1949-
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Nasher, Patsy
Nasher, Raymond
Penland School of Crafts -- Faculty
Raab, Rosanne
Schaffner, Alexander
Simon, Marjorie
Skov, Mara Holt
Snyderman Gallery
Society of Arts and Crafts (Boston, Mass.)
Society of North American Goldsmiths
Tyler School of Art -- Students
Velvet da Vinci Gallery
Warhola, Paul
Wood, Joe, 1954-
Works Gallery

Occupations:

Sculptors

Functions:

Artists' studios

Geographic Names:

Haiti -- description and travel
Switzerland -- description and travel