



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with James Bassler

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with James Bassler
Date:	2002 February 11-June 6
Identifier:	AAA.bassle02
Creator:	Bassler, James W., 1933- (Interviewee) Emanuelli, Sharon K. (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	125 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with James Bassler, 2002 February 11-June 6, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with James Bassler, 2002 February 11-June 6, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

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

James Bassler (1933-) is a fiber artist of San Pedro, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of James Bassler conducted 2002 February 11-June 6, by Sharon K. Emanuelli, for the Archives of American Art, as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Scope and Contents

Bassler speaks of his early childhood; traveling with his father, a major league baseball catcher; his early interest in fiber through his father's hooked rugs, which he worked on during the off season; his early education; his sister Sally and a course she took from Laura Andreson where they dug for clay at UCLA; working at Douglas Aircraft; drafted into the Army; his travels through Europe while in the Army; his wife Veralee Osborn Bassler; his education at UCLA with professors such as Bernard Kester, Laura Andreson, Cornelia Breitenbach, and fellow student Neda Al Hilali; teaching at Emerson Junior High School; the Egg and Eye Gallery; his siblings, Barbara Bassler Johnson, Sally Bassler Chest, and John Bassler. Bassler also discusses living in Oaxaca from 1970-1975; returning to the U.S. and then moving to Tennessee to teach at Appalachian Center for Crafts; the camaraderie at the Craft Center; his experience with commissions; the impact of the music of John Cage; his teaching techniques; artistic process; political issues that influenced his artwork, such as the Exxon Valdez Oil spill [Shroud] or the Persian Gulf War [Soiled]; his relationships with dealers and galleries, Barbara Okun, Christa Thurman, and currently the Gail Martin Gallery in New York; the spontaneity of Willem de Kooning's artwork and a recent exhibit "Willem de Kooning: Tracing the Figure" at the Museum of Contemporary Art [MOCA], Los Angeles, February 10-April 28, 2002; the Peruvian influence upon his work and experiments with dyeing and batik; a piece he was working on for Jack Lenor Larsen's 75th birthday; exhibitions to which he loaned pieces of his collection; significant books he has read and uses in his classes, such as James Burkes' "Connections," and Jared Diamond's "Guns, Germs and Steel"; the "Art in Embassy" Program and his exhibit in Poland; the benefits of a university education; the Ann Blinks Research Group; his enjoyment of the weaving process; lack of signatures on his artwork; new technology; visiting the "Andy Warhol Retrospective," MOCA, May 25 - August 18, 2002 and solving his artistic block there; the difficulty in being a perfectionist; important artist friendships with Olga de Amaral, Ruth Asawa, Trude Guermonprez, Dominic Di Mare, and Lenore Tawney; and finally his reactions to Craft in America, a symposium which Emanuelli coordinated the agenda for. Bassler also recalls Ina Conradi-Chavez, Edward Durell Stone, Carol Shaw-Sutton, Roger Herman; Larry Pittman; Judy Mitoma; Victoria Vesna; Robert Brady, Phil Fike, Susan Petersen, Eudora Moore, Edith Wyle, Patricia Anawalt, Ed Rossbach, Mildred Constantine, Mary Kahlenberg, Martin Puryear, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mary Dusenbury, Robert Rauschenberg, Wayne Thiebaud, Adrian Saxe, Kaye Spilker, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 6 sound cassettes and 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 23 digital wav files. Duration is 10 hr., 7 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- Political aspects
- Decorative arts
- Fiberwork -- California
- Textile crafts
- Weaving

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
University of California, Los Angeles -- Faculty
University of California, Los Angeles -- Students