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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Garry Knox Bennett

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 Garry Knox Bennett
Date:	2002 February 1-2
Identifier:	AAA.bennet02
Creator:	Bennett, Garry Knox, 1934- (Interviewee) Adamson, Glenn (Interviewer) Bennett, Sylvia (Interviewee) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	157 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Garry Knox Bennett, 2002 February 1-2, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Garry Knox Bennett, 2002 February 1-2, 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

Garry Knox Bennett (1934-) is a woodworker from Oakland, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Garry Knox Bennett conducted 2002 February 1-2, by Glenn Adamso, in Oakland, California, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Scope and Contents

Bennett describes his childhood and being raised by his maternal grandparents; what high school was like, working in the wood and metal shops for three hours at a time; attending California College of Arts and Crafts where he discovered sculpture; his marriage to Sylvia Mangum; the A-frame house he built in Lincoln, California; living off the land in Lincoln and country life; being diagnosed with beri-beri, a vitamin deficiency; moving his family back to Alameda when they realized how much they missed living in town. Bennett describes his first studio in Alameda, a former lavatory in the shipyard; the beginnings of Squirkenworks [now known as Gold Seal Plating], and his business venture with Rick Street.

Scope and Contents

Bennett also discusses his relationship with current partner Gary Spencer and switching from the paraphernalia business to jewelry and plating; the first clock he produced and showing them at Gump's in San Francisco; the other galleries he was selling through including Zara Gallery [now Joseph Chowning], Snyderman Gallery, and Esther Saks; his friend and fellow furniture maker Don Braden, who introduced him to Art Carpenter; his involvement in the Baulines Guild with artists such as Grif Okie, Don Braden, and Tom D'Onofrio; and his first meeting with Wendell Castle and their collaborative work at Penland School of Crafts.

Scope and Contents

He discusses the significance of the piece "Nail Cabinet," and the numerous places it has traveled; the ColorCore show in 1984, "Material Evidence: Mater Craftsmen Explore Colorcore;" the first Workbench show and Warren Rubin, the first owner of Workbench; the Peter Joseph Gallery; the "100 Lamps" show and how he began by making 25 lamps; and the Furniture Society. Mr. Adamson then does a 10-minute exercise with Bennett; he names people and asks the associations Bennett has with them, including Howard Hack, Mel Ramos, J. B. Blunk, Merryll Saylan, Marvin Lipofsky, Bob Stocksdales, James Prestini, Wendy Maruyama, Gail Fredell, Tage Frid, and numerous others.

Scope and Contents

Sylvia Bennett discusses her "invaluable" participation in her husband Garry's career; she was instrumental in the numerous administrative aspects with which an artist must deal. The conversation then expands to include Garry and they discuss the book, "Made in Oakland: The Furniture of Garry Knox Bennett," which went through several phases. Sylvia's portion of the interview concludes with her involvement with the Oakland Museum. Mr. Bennett and Mr. Adamson then continue the interview, discussing the museums that have pieces of Bennett's work, including the Jewish Museum in San Francisco, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Renwick, and others. The interview concludes with discussion of "Made in Oakland," and describing the pieces included and what kind of work they entailed.

Scope and Contents

Bennett also recalls the following people: Dale Nish, David Elsworth, Phil Hanes, Paul Sasso, Leon Paulos, Rosanne Somerson, William Harper, John Dunnigan, Tommy Simpson, Dennis Fitzgerald, Ned Cooke, Jack Hopkins, Donald Fortescue, Jim Krenov, Bernice Wollman, Judy Coady, and others.

General

Originally recorded 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 20 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hr., 10 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Woodworkers -- California -- Interviews.

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America

Occupations:

- Cabinetmakers -- California -- Interviews