



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ilya Bolotowsky

Archives of American Art
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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
General.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Ilya Bolotowsky
Date:	1968 March 24-April 7
Identifier:	AAA.boloto68
Creator:	Bolotowsky, Ilya, 1907-1981 (Interviewee) Cummings, Paul (Interviewer) Diller, Burgoyne, 1906-1965
Extent:	197 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

These interviews are 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 others. Funding for the interview was provided by the New York State Council on the Arts.

Restrictions

ACCESS RESTRICTED; written permission required.

Biographical / Historical

Ilya Bolotowsky (1907-1981) was a Russian-American abstract painter in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Interview of Ilya Bolotowsky conducted 1968 March 24-April 7, by Paul Cummings, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Bolotowsky, a lively raconteur, recalls a host of episodes from his personal and professional life. He speaks of his childhood in Russia and Azerbaijan; the effects of war and communism; the family's flight as refugees into Georgia and then to present-day Istanbul; and his early education with a private tutor and at a Jesuit school in Istanbul. Bolotowsky recalls his family's emigration to the United States by ship in 1923; his first impressions of New York City; and early visits to the city's museums. He relates numerous anecdotes about faculty and fellow students at the National Academy of Design, including Ivan Olinsky, Raymond Neilson, Charles Hawthorne, Amedee Ozenfant, and William Henry Johnson.

Scope and Contents

He speaks of various early exhibitions of his work, including those with the Art Students League, G.R.D. Studio, and the J.B. Neumann Gallery. He also describes a stay at Yaddo in 1934.

Scope and Contents

Bolotowsky recounts his participation in the Public Works of Art Project as a teacher of art to delinquent children; later work on the mural project of the Works Progress Administration; the picketing of WPA offices, providing anecdotes about Max Spivak and Joseph Vogel; military service during World War II, first working on a Russian dictionary of technical terms and then as a liaison officer with the Soviet Air Force in Nome, Alaska.

Scope and Contents

Upon his return from the military, Bolotowsky immediately resumed his painting career, and describes his involvement with artists' organizations such as the American Abstract Artists, the American Artists' Congress, the Concretionists, the Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors, and the Ten; he mentions in these contexts such personalities as Byron Browne, Burgoyne Diller, Werner Drewes, Arshile Gorky, Clement Greenberg, Balcomb and Gertrude Greene, Harry Holtzman, Fernand Leger, Piet Mondrian, and Meyer Schapiro.

Scope and Contents

Bolotowsky gives an extensive description of his experiences filling in for Joseph Albers for a year at Black Mountain College, and goes on to discuss his subsequent teaching positions at the University of Wyoming (including a discussion of the impact of the Wyoming landscape on his painting), Brooklyn College, Southampton College, and SUNY New Paltz. He devotes great attention to the development of his painting, his understanding of neo-plasticism and abstraction, and his efforts in filmmaking and playwriting.

General

Originally recorded on 2 sound tape reels. Reformatted in 2010 as 12 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hr., 37 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art and state
- Concretionists (Group of artists)
- Emigration and immigration
- Experimental films
- Federal aid to the arts -- United States

Painters -- New York (State) -- Interviews
Painting, Abstract -- New York (State) -- New York
Philadelphia Ten (Group of artists)
Playwriting
World War, 1939-1945

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Albers, Josef
American Abstract Artists
American Artists' Congress
Art Students League (New York, N.Y.)
Black Mountain College (Black Mountain, N.C.)
Browne, Byron, 1907-1961
Dlugoszewski, Lucia, 1931-2000
Drewes, Werner, 1899-1985
Federation of Modern Painters and Sculptors
G.R.D. Studio (New York, N.Y.)
Gorky, Arshile, 1904-1948
Greenberg, Clement, 1909-1994
Greene, Balcomb, 1904-1990
Greene, Gertrude, 1904-1956
Hawthorne, Charles Webster, 1872-1930
Holtzman, Harry
Johnson, William H., 1901-1970
Léger, Fernand, 1881-1955
Mondrian, Piet, 1872-1944
National Academy of Design (U.S.)
Neilson, Raymond P. R. (Raymond Perry Rodgers), 1881-1964
Neumann, J. B. (Israel Ber)
Olinsky, Ivan G. (Ivan Gregorewitch), 1878-1962
Ozenfant, Amédée, 1886-1966
Public Works of Art Project
Spivak, Max, 1906-1981
United States. Works Progress Administration
Vogel, Joseph, b. 1911
Yaddo (Artist's colony)

Occupations:

Filmmakers
Playwrights

Places:

Wyoming