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Oral history interview with Irena Brynner

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Irena Brynner
Identifier:	AAA.brynne01
Date:	2001 April 26-27
Extent:	67 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Brynner, Irena Fisch, Arline M. 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.

Biographical / Historical

Irena Brynner (1917-2003) was a jeweler from New York, New York. Arline M. Fisch (1931-) is a metalsmith from San Diego, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Irena Brynner conducted 2001 April 26-27, by Arline M. Fisch, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Brynner's home and studio, New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Brynner speaks of her childhood in Vladivostok in Primorski Krai, Russia; her artistic family including her cousin Yul Brynner; fleeing from Russia to Darian (on the southern tip of the Liaotung peninsula, in the Kwantung Leased Territory of Manchuria); her art studies in Lausanne, Switzerland; her father's illness during World War II; moving with her mother to San Francisco in 1946; her studies with Ralph Stackpole and Franz Bergman in San Francisco; her relationship with architect Frank Merwin; teaching

art in Catholic schools in San Francisco; her decision to make jewelry after seeing Claire Falkenstein's sculpture; working as an apprentice to Caroline Rosene and Franz Bergman; forming the Metal Arts Guild with Bob Winston, Merry Renk, Florence Resnikoff, Margaret De Patta, and others; and introducing forging and three-dimensional jewelry in the Metal Arts Guild. She also talks about her move to New York City in 1957; acting as her own agent; "open-air art shows" in San Francisco; her first show at Walker & Eberling; starting her own shop; teaching at the Craft Students League and at MoMA's Institute of Modern Art, at Victor D'Amico's invitation, circa 1962; her friendships with students and clients; her book, "Jewelry as an Art Form" (New York : Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1979) and its influence; learning to work with a Henes water welder; the treatment of women artists in America; her move to Geneva, Switzerland, in 1972, and the difficulties of starting a shop there; and her return to New York and reestablishing her career in the United States. Brynner also discusses her interest in singing, her voice lessons, her public performances of Russian classical music, and her health.

Scope and Contents

She comments on the intuitive development of her jewelry; the influence of Margaret De Patta; learning wax techniques from Bob Winston at Mills College; her progression from geometric to organic forms; her large-scale sculpture; her invention of "wrap-around earrings"; her use of niobium in the 1980s; drawing inspiration from Antonio Gaudi, Alberto Jacometti, and others; involvement with the community of artists in the San Francisco Bay Area; the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG); craft periodicals; her exhibitions at the Little Gallery of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts, the Musée de l'horlogerie et de l'émaillerie in Geneva, the Renwick Gallery in Washington, D.C., and others; her work in museum collections; serving as a juror; and writing her memoir. Brynner recalls Georg Jensen, Grete Daniels, Trudy Jeremias, Aaron Faber, David Campbell, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 41 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Decorative arts
Jewelers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Sculptors -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Women artists

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Bergman, Franz

Campbell, David Robert, 1907-1963
Craft Students League -- Faculty
Daniels, Grete
De Patta, Margaret, 1903-1964
Faber, Aaron
Jensen, Georg Arthur, 1866-1935
Jeremias, Trudy
Metal Arts Guild
Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.) -- Faculty
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Renk, Merry, 1921-2012
Renwick Gallery
Resnikoff, Florence Lisa Herman
Rosene, Caroline Gleick, 1907-
Society of North American Goldsmiths
Stackpole, Ralph, 1885-1973
Winston, Robert, 1915-