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Oral history interview with Harlan Butt

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Harlan Butt
Identifier:	AAA.but09
Date:	2009 July 27-28
Extent:	7 Items (Sound recording: 7 sound files (5 hr., 19 min.); digital, wav) 90 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Butt, Harlan W., 1950- 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

Harlan W. Butt (1950-) is an artist, metalsmith, and educator in Denton, Texas. Mija Riedel (1958-) is a writer and independent scholar in San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Harlan W. Butt conducted 2009 July 27-28, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Butt's studio, in Ptarmigan Meadows, Colorado.

Scope and Contents

Harlan Butt speaks of the influence of Asian art on his work; the use of text and imagery in his work; the use of pattern in his work; his undergraduate minor in weaving; the influence of Asian religion and mythology; series The Earth Beneath Our Feet , Garden Analogies, and Snakes in Heaven; his childhood growing up in Hopewell, New Jersey, near Princeton; undergraduate work at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; discovery of Buddhism and Eastern religions; his mother's death when he was 20; studying with Stanley Lechtzin and Elliot Pujol at Tyler; graduate school at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale; interest in Japanese tea ceremony; more exploration of Zen Buddhism; use of color in his work; studying with L. Brent Kington; reliquary series; move to Connecticut in 1974; second trip to Japan in 1984 to co-curate Kyoto Metal: An Exhibition of Contemporary Japanese Art Metalwork; introduction to Japanese system of artisan apprenticeship; early efforts as a writer and poet; the influence of poet Gary Snyder; summer teaching position at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence; teaching job at San Diego [California] State University in the mid-1970s; rattles and pipes series; exploring the Western landscape; the power of the snake image; taking a teaching position at University of North Texas, Denton (1976-); first trip to Japan in 1980; differences in artisanal/metalworking practices in Japan and the United States; teaching workshops at various craft schools, Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina; Haystack School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine; and Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, Tennessee, compared with teaching in a university; the pros and cons of the gallery system; work with the Nancy Yaw Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan; the challenge of commission work; National Parks Project, Denton Center for the Visual Arts, Denton, Texas; the role of haiku and text in his pieces; series 1,001 Views of Mt. Mu; series Snakes in Heaven; the influence of his wife and children; trip to India and organizing Colour & Light: The Art and Craft of Enamel on Metal, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai, 2001; trip to Australia; involvement with the Society of North American Goldsmiths, Enamelist Society, and American Craft Council; subtle issues of environmentalism in his work; his affinity for metalsmithing and enameling. He also recalls [Rudolf] Staffel, Robert Winokur, Italo Scanga, Jan Brooks, Mike Riegel, Rachelle Thiewes, Eleanor Moty, Albert Paley, Shumei Tanaka, Ken Glantz (Ken Chowder), Randy Thelma Coles, Sandy Green, Mickey McCarter, Gene Pijanowski, Hiroko Pijanowski, Toshihiro Yamanaka, Helen Shirk, Ana Lopez, and Sarah Perkins.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound mini discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 19 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Study and teaching
Art, Asian
Buddhism
Metal-workers -- Texas -- Interviews
Weaving -- Study and teaching

Types of Materials:

Interviews

Sound recordings

Names:

American Craft Council
Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts -- Faculty
Brooks, Jan
Enamelist Society
Glantz, Ken
Haystack Mountain School of Crafts -- Faculty
Japanese tea ceremony
Kington, L. Brent (Louis Brent), 1934-2013
Lechtzin, Stanley, 1936-
Moty, Eleanor
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Paley, Albert
Penland School of Crafts -- Faculty
Pijanowski, Eugene, 1938-
Pijanowski, Hiroko Sato, 1942-
Pujol, Elliot
Rhode Island School of Design -- Faculty
San Diego State University -- Faculty
Scanga, Italo, 1932-2001
Shirk, Helen Z., 1942-
Snyder, Gary, 1930-
Society of North American Goldsmiths
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale -- Students
Staffel, Rudolf, 1911-2002
Tyler School of Art -- Students
University of North Texas -- Faculty
Winokur, Robert, 1933-

Occupations:

Art teachers -- Interviews

Geographic Names:

Australia -- Description and Travel
India -- description and travel
Japan -- Description and Travel