



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Jerome Caja

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Jerome Caja
Identifier:	AAA.caja95
Date:	1995 August 23 and September 29
Creator:	Caja, Jerome, 1958-1995 (Interviewee) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)
Extent:	77 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Jerome Caja, 1995 August 23 and September 29, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Jerome Caja, 1995 August 23 and September 29, 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

Jerome D. Caja (1958-1995) was a painter and sculptor of San Francisco, California. Caja grew up in Ohio, and studied at the Cuyahoga Community College and Cleveland State University before enrolling at the San Francisco Art Institute. His art was an expression of his involvement in the flamboyant San Francisco drag queen community, using raw materials such as eyeliner, lipstick and nail polish.

Scope and Contents

An interview of artist Jerome Caja conducted 1995 August 23-1995 September 29, by Paul J. Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Discussion of Caja's illness from AIDS; his loss of sight and the role of memory in "seeing"; the effects of AIDS on his work; his working procedures, goals; the meaning of his work; support of his family, while not acknowledging his homosexuality; attitude toward audience; art as communication of self; the San Francisco gay community and his experiences as a gay artist; growing up in Cleveland with ten brothers, his strong religious background; art training at Cleveland State.

Scope and Contents

Moving to San Francisco; experiences at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he received an MFA in 1986; his teachers Sam Tchakalian and Richard Shaw; switching from ceramics to painting; recollections with Anna van der Meulen (present at this session) of their meeting and friendship; influences on his work, especially lifestyle as a drag queen; clowns in his work; desire for anonymity; theme of gender in work; his friend Charlie who died in 1991, the subject of a memorial show "Remains of Day" at Southern Exposure Gallery in San Francisco; importance of religion in his work; mysticism, philosophy in work; small works, miniatures and his bottle cap paintings; exhibitionism in life and art; his inclusion in the "Bad Girls West" exhibition at UCLA; the future of his works and participation in history.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 39 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Artists (LGBTQ)
- Communities (LGBTQ)
- Crossdressers
- Drag queens
- Gay artists
- Painters -- California -- San Francisco -- Interviews
- Sculptors -- California -- San Francisco -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings