



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William Douglas Carlson

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with William Douglas Carlson
Identifier:	AAA.carlso09
Date:	2009 June 24-25
Creator:	Carlson, William, 1950- (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	7 Items (Sound recording: 7 sound files (4 hr., 6 min.); digital, wav) 89 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with William Douglas Carlson, 2009 June 24-25, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with William Douglas Carlson, 2009 June 24-25, 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

William Douglas Carlson (1950-) is a glass artist and educator in Miami, Florida. Carlson was educated at Alfred University.

Scope and Contents

An interview of William Douglas Carlson conducted 2009 June 24-25, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Carlson's home, in Miami, Florida.

Scope and Contents

Carlson discusses his move to the University of Miami in 2003 after 27 years at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign; his recent site-specific installation *Procellous Wall* at the Lowe Art Museum in Coral Gables, Florida; the change in his work since his move to Miami, finishing a series of pieces that began in 2000 dealing with language, and his sense of being in a transitional period with his work; growing up in a small town in Ohio, and his early use of adhesives, the field his father worked in, as the spur for his later work in laminating glass; classes at the Art Students League in New York City and Woodstock, New York; attending the Cleveland Institute of Art; spending the summer of 1971 in Stanwood, Washington, helping set up the Pilchuck Glass School, then returning to set up a glass program at the Cleveland Institute of Art with Christine Federighi; the lure of glass, and the danger that its beauty can overshadow artistic substance, which led in part to his decision to mix it with other materials; the influence of minimalism and of Russian constructivism, architecture and modern design; graduate studies at Alfred University, Alfred, New York; accepting a teaching job at the University of Illinois in 1976; work with lamination and expanding scale in his work; use of Vitrolite; large-scale installation work, beginning in the early 1980s, including *Optional Refractions* and *Allele*; reflection on the deliberate, design-focused nature of his work; his language series beginning in 2000; the series *Pragnanz*; philosophy of teaching; the value of intensive learning environments such as craft schools compared with the cross pollination of ideas available at a larger university; the imperative for craft to integrate new materials, technology, and ideas while retaining the importance of the hand; the role of galleries and collectors, and involvement in larger art and craft venues, including the May Show and SOFA; his stint as a judge in a barbecued rib cook-off; the effect of seminal exhibitions such as like "Objects: USA," [1969] and "Poetry of the Physical" (1986) in setting a standard of professionalism for and providing visibility to makers; impact of his international travel; a turn away from pure design and towards a more poetic ambiance in the language series; the use of projected light and his use of cast prismatic shadows in his installation *The Nature of Things* in Jacksonville, Florida; the issue of scale in his work; artists whose work he admires, including Frank Stella, Richard Serra, Michael Heizer, Tony Smith, Gordon Matta-Clark, William Daley; studio glass as an international movement; involvement with various craft organizations, and wrestling with the definition of a craft artist; preparations to move to Massachusetts and spend some contemplative time thinking about and working on new directions. He recalls Brent Young, Dale Chihuly, Jamie Carpenter, Christine Federighi, Richard Marquis, Eric Hilton, Andre Billeci, Dan Dailey, Doug Heller and Bonnie Marx.

General

Originally recorded on 2 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 4 hr., 6 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Constructivism (Art)
- Glass art -- Study and teaching
- Glass art -- Technique
- Glass artists -- Florida -- Interviews
- Minimal art

Types of Materials:

- Interviews

Sound recordings

Names:

Alfred University -- Students
Art Students League (New York, N.Y.) -- Students
Billeci, Andre
Carpenter, James, 1949-
Chihuly, Dale, 1941-
Cleveland Institute of Art -- Students
Dailey, Dan, 1947-
Daley, William, 1925-
Fereighi, Christine
Heizer, Michael, 1944-
Heller, Doug, 1946-
Hilton, Eric
Lowe Art Museum
Marquis, Richard, 1945-
Marx, Bonnie
Matta-Clark, Gordon, 1943-1978
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Pilchuck Glass Center (Stanwood, Wash.)
Serra, Richard, 1938-
Smith, Terry, 1960 June 15-
Stella, Frank
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign -- Faculty
University of Miami -- Faculty
Young, Brent