



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Vija Celmins

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Vija Celmins
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.celmin09
<b>Date:</b>	2009 February 11-October 15
<b>Creator:</b>	Celmins, Vija, 1938- (Interviewee) Brown, Julia K., 1951- (Interviewer)
<b>Extent:</b>	45 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Vija Celmins, 2009 February 11-October 15, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Vija Celmins, 2009 February 11-October 15, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a>

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## 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 is available on the Archive of American Art's website.

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## Biographical / Historical

Vija Celmins (1938- ) is a multimedia artist in New York, New York. Julia Brown (1951- ) is an independent scholar in San Antonio, Texas.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Vija Celmins conducted 2009 February 11-October 15, by Julia Brown, for the Archives of American Art, at the Celmins' home and studio, in New York, New York.

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## Scope and Contents

Celmins speaks of her family's Latvian roots; experiencing World War II as a child; surviving and overcoming the trauma of World War II; the difficulties of being a refugee and moving to the United States; the influence of books on her imagination and art; expressing herself through drawing after moving to Indiana; learning

English; studying art at the John Herron School of Art; attending summer school at Yale University; moving to California to obtain her MFA at UCLA; using art to grapple with and understand both her past and her emotions; experimenting with various mediums; discovering the pencil as an art material; the difficulties of printmaking; experimenting with abstraction and Pop art; deciding to drop painting and collage work; finding her own artistic philosophy and practices; her love of nature and its impact on her work; not conforming to the male-dominated, L.A. art scene; her decision to leave L.A. for NYC. Celmins also speaks about Tony Berlant, Chas Garabedian, Ed Ruscha, David Stuart, Philip Guston, Chuck Close, Willem de Kooning, Brice Marden, Joan Mitchell, Robert Irwin, and Jasper Johns.

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## General

Originally recorded on 2 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 5 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hr., 33 min.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

### Subjects:

- Multimedia (Art)
- Women artists
- Women painters

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Occupations:

- Multimedia artists -- New York (State) -- New York
- Painters -- New York (State) -- New York