



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Bernard Chaet

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# Table of Contents

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Collection Overview .....        | 1 |
| Administrative Information ..... | 1 |
| General.....                     | 2 |
| Scope and Contents.....          | 1 |
| Scope and Contents.....          | 2 |
| Biographical / Historical.....   | 1 |
| Names and Subjects .....         | 2 |
| Container Listing .....          |   |

## Collection Overview

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Repository:</b>      | Archives of American Art  |
| <b>Title:</b>           | Oral history interview with Bernard Chaet   |
| <b>Identifier:</b>      | AAA.chaet97   |
| <b>Date:</b>            | 1997 June 18-August 15  |
| <b>Creator:</b>         | Chaet, Bernard (Interviewee)<br>Brown, Robert F. (Interviewer)  |
| <b>Extent:</b>          | 5 Items (sound files (3 hrs., 30 min.); digital, wav file)<br>92 Pages (Transcript)   |
| <b>Language:</b>        | English .   |
| <b>Digital Content:</b> | <a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Bernard Chaet, 1997 June 18-August 15, Transcript</a><br><a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Bernard Chaet, 1997 June 18-August 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 Archives of American Art's website.

### Restrictions

This transcript is open for research. Access to the entire audio recording is restricted. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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## Biographical / Historical

Bernard Chaet (1924-2012) was a painter and teacher from New Haven, Connecticut and Rockport, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview with Bernard Chaet conducted 1997 June 18-August 15, by Robert Brown, for the Archives of American Art, at Chaet's home in Rockport, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Contents

Chaet briefly speaks of his life growing up in the Dorchester neighborhood of Boston and his family, in particular his father, before segueing into his early beginnings as an artist and his acceptance into the School of the Museum of Fine Arts; he discusses his training there, as well as the three-year interim after he quit and before he completed his education at Tufts University when he worked alone; he refers to his teacher and the head of the Department of Painting at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Karl Zerbe, often, including his falling out with Zerbe, citing this as the reason his quit the school; he recalls his relationship with Boston art gallery owner Boris Mirski, who supported him from an early stage and sent him to Europe when he was young, the evolution of his relationship with Mirski, and the reason for their eventual falling out; Chaet describes his trip to Europe, where he traveled for several months with friends, at length, including the art museums and the suffering he witnessed in Italy and Spain, as well as accidentally meeting Picasso in Antibes, and the influence the trip had on his work; he recalls how he became an art teacher, how he was hired by Josef Albers at Yale, his tenure at Yale, some of the students there, including Chuck Close, Nancy Graves, and Richard Serra, as well as the internal politics and his accomplishments; he discusses his own evolution as an artist, including his use of watercolors, as well as his return to certain themes, such as his painting of cows (and how, more generally, artists do return to themes throughout their lives), and the balance between teaching and being an artist; Chaet mentions the beginnings of Artists Equity and Cold War politics. Chaet also recalls his wife, the artist Ninon Lacey, his former roommate, the artist David Aronson, and art world figures: Hyman Swetzoff, Edith Halpert, Dorothy Adlow, Charles Sawyer, Jackson Pollock, Pablo Picasso, Hyman Bloom, Willem de Kooning, Rico Lebrun, and others.

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## General

Originally recorded on 3 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 5 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 29 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:

Painters -- Massachusetts -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews  
Sound recordings

Names:

Albers, Josef  
Boris Mirski Gallery (Boston, Mass.)  
Yale University. School of Art  
Zerbe, Karl, 1903-1972

Occupations:

Art teachers -- Connecticut -- New Haven -- Interviews  
Painters -- Connecticut -- Interviews