



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Michael Cohen

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. 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.

Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

# 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 Michael Cohen
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.cohen01
<b>Date:</b>	2001 August 11
<b>Creator:</b>	Cohen, Michael, 1936- (Interviewee) Williams, Gerald, 1926-2014 (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
<b>Extent:</b>	37 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Michael Cohen, 2001 August 11, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Michael Cohen, 2001 August 11, 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.

### Restrictions

For more information on how to access this interview contact Reference Services.

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## Biographical / Historical

Michael Cohen (1936-) is a ceramist from Amherst, Massachusetts. Gerry Williams (1926-) is the editor of Studio Potter from Goffstown, New Hampshire.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Michael Cohen conducted 2001 August 11, by Gerry Williams, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at his home, in Pelham, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Contents

Cohen speaks of his childhood, living outside of Boston, Massachusetts; his first adventures in art; attending Mass Art; his attraction to clay; his mentors; his first job with Bill Wyman; joining the Army; his travels; his unhappy experience at Cranbrook Academy of Art; his first studio in his mother's basement; enjoying his first summer at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and the other schools of craft; how his pottery is meant to be functional; his fear of dying at 59 and the great sculptural work he did in that year; exhibition shows and how they have changed over the course of his career; why he's moved to primarily making tiles; apprenticeship and the benefits of paying your apprentices; how expensive being in the pottery business has become; various teaching and workshop experiences; local pottery guilds he is a part of; the creation and design of his studio space; technological advances in the field and the distinctive tools he loves to use; specialized periodicals that he reads or looks at; what makes a pot beautiful; limitations in clay; commissions and the lack of benefits involved with commissions; the permanent collections of museums that he is a part of; how he thinks he will be remembered; his most memorable exhibitions; where he gets his ideas from; social and political issues he's involved in and how he does not include them in his work; the craft organizations; curators he's enjoyed working with; his ex-wife Harriet Goodwin and how their collaboration was important to his work. Cohen also recalls Francis Merritt, Bernard Leach, Peter Voukos, Ron Burke, John Glick, Bob Sedestrom, and others.

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## General

Originally recorded on 2 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 4 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hr.; 6 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:

- Ceramics -- Equipment and supplies
- Ceramics -- Study and teaching
- Ceramics -- Technique
- Ceramics. -- Economic aspects
- Decorative arts

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- Burke, Ron
- Cranbrook Academy of Art
- Glick, John Parker, 1938-
- Goodwin, Harriet
- Haystack Mountain School of Crafts
- Leach, Bernard, 1887-1979
- Massachusetts College of Art
- Merritt, Francis Sumner, 1913-2000
- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
- Sedestrom, Bob

Voukos, Peter, 1924-2002  
Wyman, William, 1922-1980

Occupations:

Ceramicists -- Massachusetts -- Interview

Functions:

Artists' studios