



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Gene Crain

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Gene Crain
Date:	1999 March 7-May 22
Identifier:	AAA.crain99
Creator:	Crain, E. Gene, 1934- (Interviewee) Anderson, Susan (Interviewer)
Extent:	107 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Gene Crain, 1999 March 7-May 22, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Gene Crain, 1999 March 7-May 22, 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 on line.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

E. Gene Crain (1934-) is a lawyer and art collector from Newport Beach, California. Full name Ernst Gene Crain. Crain's art collection includes extensive holdings of prominent artists of the California School, a West Coast watercolor movement that arose during the Depression era.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Gene Crain, conducted 1999 March 7-May 22, by Susan Anderson, for the Archives of American Art, in the law offices of Gene Crain, Newport Beach, California.

Scope and Contents

Crain describes the focus of his collection of some 1000 works of art, and how it grew out of his longstanding relationships with artists Millard Sheets, Phil Dike, Rex Brandt, and others. He recalls his relationships with Sheets, Dike, and Brandt at some length, including their feelings for the land as well as their personalities and work. He discusses urban growth, disappearance of the locale and nostalgia in the context of art collecting, and his collection as an important record of a certain time and place. He discusses convenience, climate, and topography as contributing factors to the emergence of the watercolor school as well as other important influences: Pacific rim culture and Far Eastern Art and philosophy; Mexican art and culture; the film industry, especially the Disney Studios; and the federal art projects as a catalyst and support system. Crain discusses the impact of social and economic factors in Southern California during the Depression, contrasting them with harsher conditions in other parts of the country; the development of his eye an aesthetic taste and his patronage of the artists beginning in the early 1960s; the artists' critical standing in the post-World War II period and the "crowding out" of the school by other movements such as Abstract Expressionism and Pop; and the viability of the school in the post-war period, its legacy, and comments on the present market value of the art.

General

Originally recorded on 8 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 13 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 38 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Abstract expressionism
- Art -- Collectors and collecting
- Art -- Economic aspects
- Depressions -- 1929 -- California
- Pop art

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Brandt, Rex, 1914-2000
- Dike, Phil, 1906-1990
- Sheets, Millard, 1907-1989
- Walt Disney Productions