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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Val Cushing

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>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Val Cushing
Identifier:	AAA.cushin01
Date:	2001 April 16
Creator:	Cushing, Val M. (Interviewee) Carney, Margaret, 1949- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	46 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Val Cushing, 2001 April 16, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Val Cushing, 2001 April 16, 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.

Biographical / Historical

Val Cushing (1931-) is a ceramic artist and potter from Alfred Station, New York. Margaret Carney (1949-) is the director of the Schein Joseph International Museum of Ceramic Art in Alfred, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Val Cushing conducted 2001 April 16, by Margaret Carney, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Cushing's studio, Alfred Station, New York.

Scope and Contents

Cushing speaks of his early interest in drawing; applying to Alfred University without a portfolio and being accepted on an athletic scholarship to play football; his teachers at Alfred including Katherine Nelson, Charles Harder, Marion Fosdick, Kurt Ekdahl, and Dan Rhodes; his classmates at Alfred including Herb

Cohen, Marty Moskof, Marty Chodos, Luis Mendez, Ed Pettengill, and Richard Homer; the influence of Marguerite Wildenhain, who came to Alfred to teach for two weeks in 1952 (Cushing's senior year); his first job making pots at Santa's Workshop in Adirondack Mountains in New York in 1951, and the value of throwing every day; learning that "technique is not enough"; his travels; serving in the military police in Fort Dix, New Jersey, during the Korean War; visiting the Metropolitan Museum to sketch pots; meeting his wife Elsie Brown, who was private-duty nurse in New York; Charles Harder as an administrator and teacher; attending graduate school at Alfred on the G.I. Bill from 1954 to 1956; his decision to become teacher rather than full-time potter at the suggestion of Charles Harder; teaching at University of Illinois in 1956 and then Alfred University in 1957; the "famous" dialogues between Charles Harder and Bernard Leach; the importance of designing functional handmade objects; the evolution of the American craft market; his work for Andover China; exhibitions; his close-knit ceramics community in the 1950s and 1960s; his relationships with galleries including American Hand and The Farrell Collection in Washington, D.C., Helen Drutt Gallery and the Works Gallery in Philadelphia, The Signature Shop & Gallery in Atlanta, Martha Schneider Gallery in Chicago, and Cedar Creek Gallery in Creedmoor, North Carolina; teaching at Penland, Haystack, Arrowmont, Archie Bray, and Anderson Ranch; "the Alfred connection at Archie Bray" and his grant to study at Archie Bray in 1968; the importance of Alfred's summer school to the history of contemporary clay in America; the value of university training; Bob Turner's and Ted Randal's influence on his work through their "philosophic stance" and "presence as artists"; his working space and his 1983 NEA grant to adapt an existing barn for use as a studio; the influence of nature on his work; working with kick wheel, Soldner wheel, Venco Pug Mill, natural gas and electric kilns; his glaze expertise; opportunities for experimentation; his love of jazz music and its influence on his working methods; pricing his pots; commissions; ceramic workshops as theatrical "performances" and an American phenomenon; the role of specialized periodicals in the craft field; the difference between craft critics and painting and sculpture critics; and the place of ceramics in museum collections in the United States and abroad.

Scope and Contents

Cushing also talks about his involvement with NCECA [The National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts], the American Craft Council, and the American Ceramics Society; the lack of political and social commentary in his work; his teaching experiences in Europe and Asia; his participation in the opening of The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park in Japan; and the importance of ceramic history for the contemporary ceramist. He also recalls Susan Peterson, Bill Pitney, Marv Rickel, Don Frith, Winslow Anderson, Ken Deavers, Joan Mondale, Joan Farrell, Don Reitz, Gerry Williams, Bill Parry, Ken Ferguson, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 3 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- Economic aspects
- Ceramics -- Equipment and supplies
- Ceramics -- Study and teaching
- Ceramics -- Technique
- Decorative arts
- Glazing (Ceramics)

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Alfred University -- Faculty
Alfred University -- Students
Archie Bray Foundation
Archie Bray Foundation -- Faculty
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Wildenhain, Marguerite

Occupations:

Ceramicists -- New York (State)