



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with John Dugdale

Funded by the Keith Haring Foundation.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with John Dugdale
Date:	2017 January 17-18
Identifier:	AAA.dugdal17
Creator:	Dugdale, John, 1960- (Interviewee) Kerr, Theodore (Interviewer)
Extent:	2 Items (sound files (6 hrs., 1 min.); digital, wav) 122 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with John Dugdale, 2017 January 17-18, Transcript

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

The transcript and audio recording are open for research. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

John Dugdale (1960-) is a photographer in New York, New York. Theodore Kerr (1979-) is a writer and organizer in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with John Dugdale conducted 2017 January 17-18, by Theodore Kerr, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Dugdale's studio in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Dugdale speaks of finding great joy in his elementary school art teacher's classes; taking photographs of his siblings as a child; growing up in Stamford, Connecticut and remembering every detail of Little Italy; being bullied as a kid for being different; being a voracious reader; the impact of his parents' divorce at age 8; his interest in photography in high school taking him to the School of Visual Arts in New York City; being diagnosed HIV-positive; his first job photographing flowers for Madderlake florists; the launch of his commercial photography career and the success that followed; caring for his friends who were sick and dying, thinking that would be his role in this epidemic; the stroke that left him almost completely blind and his extremely low T-cell count at the time of his hospitalization; spending a year in the hospital and ultimately checking himself out and recovering at home; the tremendous support of his family and community; having six weeks to prepare for a show at Wessel + O'Connor Fine Art upon returning home from the hospital; resurrecting the cyanotype process for the show; his surprise at the success of the show, and slow realization that people were moved by viewing their own experiences through his photographs; appreciation of the male body; being his own activist; creating art with the intention to draw people in and not scare them away; understanding and appreciating the power of the human body after experiencing multiple strokes and sight loss, and how these events brought more depth to his work; interacting with his models; a struggle with loneliness and desire for intimacy; the feeling of being awake and paying closer attention to the world around him; existing on borrowed time; experiencing a massive stroke as a result of long-term medication use; being HIV-positive for 10 years without showing symptoms; refusing to take AZT; his religious and spiritual beliefs; just as repaired Ming vases, feeling himself more powerful now in his "broken" state; his reaction to being represented in the Metropolitan Museum of Art; his love of being a gay man and feeling strongly that he would change nothing about his life; finding difficulty in being identified as an HIV-related artist; and the house fire that helped him realize that we own nothing in this life, not even our own bodies. Dugdale also recalls his partner Rey Clarke, Maurice Sendak, Louise Nevelson, Keith Haring, Karen Waltuck, Tom Pritchard, Billy Jarecki, Carla Grande, Cynthia O'Neal, and Karen Murphy.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- AIDS (Disease)
- AIDS (Disease) and the arts
- Photographers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
- Photographers with visual disabilities

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Sendak, Maurice
- Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project