



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Fred Fenster

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Fred Fenster
Identifier:	AAA.fenste04
Date:	2004 August 9-10
Creator:	Fenster, Fred, 1934- (Interviewee) Yager, Jan, 1951- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	119 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Fred Fenster, 2004 August 9-10, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Fred Fenster, 2004 August 9-10, 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

Fred Fenster (1934-) is a metalsmith of Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Jan Yager is a jeweler and metalsmith from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Fred Fenster conducted 2004 August 9-10, by Jan Yager, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin.

Scope and Contents

Fenster speaks of his parents and growing up in the Bronx; getting his degree in industrial arts from City College of New York; becoming interested in working with metals; setting up his first studio and making silver jewelry; getting married; teaching industrial arts for two years at a junior high school in the Bronx; studying metal work at the Cranbrook Academy of Art; working in a metal shop; writing his thesis on pewter work; doing commissioned projects while at Cranbrook; showing his work in the graduate exhibition; working as an Army crafts instructor; teaching metal work at the University of Wisconsin; his teaching philosophy; having a studio at home; teaching workshops at many places including Penland School of Crafts; the influence of other artists and periodicals on his work; teaching a workshop in Taiwan; the process of making a piece in his studio.

Scope and Contents

Fenster also speaks of his favorite piece that he has made; choosing tools; designing and making Kiddush cups; pricing his work; the importance of function in his work; choosing designs, surfaces, and types of metal; being influenced by ironwork; learning problem solving skills from his father; participating in exhibitions; visiting museums; the influence of aboriginal artifacts and tools; visiting Australia, New Zealand, and Japan; his relationship with collectors; preparing for his retrospective; working on commission; how the craft market has changed; what some of his students are doing now; applying for grants; the influence of Scandinavian design on his work; being a member of many metal and craft organizations; and retiring and plans for the future. Fenster also recalls Al Pine, Bernard Bernstein, Richard Thomas, Michael Jerry, Don Haskins, Zoltan Sepeshy, Stanley Lechtzin, L. Brent Kington, Harvey Littleton, Arthur Vierthaler, Eleanor Moty, Mary Ann Scherr, Jack Prip, Art Smith, Bill Brown, Chunghi Choo, Phillip Morton, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 6 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 17 digital wav files. Duration is 7 hr., 11 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Metal-work -- Economic aspects
- Metal-work -- Equipment and supplies
- Metal-work -- Study and teaching
- Metal-work -- Technique
- Metal-workers -- Wisconsin -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America