



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Viola Frey

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## Collection Overview

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|-------------------------|---|
| <b>Repository:</b>      | Archives of American Art  |
| <b>Title:</b>           | Oral history interview with Viola Frey  |
| <b>Identifier:</b>      | AAA.frey95  |
| <b>Date:</b>            | 1995 Feb. 27-June 19  |
| <b>Creator:</b>         | Frey, Viola, 1933-2004 (Interviewee)<br>Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)<br>Women in the Arts in Southern California Oral History Project   |
| <b>Extent:</b>          | 5 Sound cassettes (Sound recording (5 hrs.); analog)<br>126 Pages (Transcript)  |
| <b>Language:</b>        | English .   |
| <b>Digital Content:</b> | <a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Viola Frey, 1995 Feb. 27-June 19, Transcript</a><br><a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Viola Frey, 1995 Feb. 27-June 19, 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, 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. Funding for this interview was provided by the Margery and Harry Kahn Philanthropic Fund of the Jewish Communal Fund of New York.

### Available Formats

Transcript available online.

### Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

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## Biographical / Historical

Viola Frey (1933-2004) was a ceramist and sculptor of Oakland, Calif.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Viola Frey conducted 1995 Feb. 27-1995 June 19, by Paul Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art, Women in the Arts in Southern California Oral History Project, at the artist's studio, in Oakland, Calif.

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## Scope and Contents

FEB. 27, 1995 SESSION: Family background in the Midwest; Huguenot ancestry; importance of grandmother in her life; living in Central Valley, Calif.; father's collecting junk; early plans to become a writer; declining her acceptance to UC Berkeley and attending community college to study art; attending California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, majoring in ceramics; winning a first prize at City of Paris contest; attending Tulane University; moving to New York; working at the Museum of Modern Art; returning to San Francisco in 1960 and community there. She recalls Richard Diebenkorn, Mark Rothko, Peter Voulkos, and Robert Arneson.

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## Scope and Contents

MAY 15, 1995 SESSION: Influence of Robert Arneson; comparison of her work to Voulkos, Arneson and Manuel Neri; effect of gender on art subjects; Frey's theme of man in suit as power to do good or bad; interest in archeology; influence of National Geographic magazine on her work, especially as a source for images of grandmothers; production of her large-scale ceramic sculpture; her preference for electric kiln; modular production; studio spaces in Oakland and San Francisco and effect of varying light; working on a piece over a long period of time, which is unusual for sculpture; and the importance of space in the creation of work.

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## Scope and Contents

JUNE 19, 1995 SESSION: Influence of television and radio; attitude toward Japanese-influenced ceramics; use of color; overglaze painting; china painting in France; relationships between her figure drawing and sculpture; New York period; funk; plate art; autobiographical and personal qualities in her work; move from house to studio; personal relationship with Charles Fiske; her private art library; interest in artist's monographs; social life; image of man in suit; influence of AIDS in her work; art-brute; and response to critics Donald Kuspit and Susan Larsen.

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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:

- Decorative arts
- Women artists
- Women ceramicists
- Women sculptors

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Women in the Arts in Southern California Oral History Project

Occupations:

- Ceramicists -- California -- Oakland

Sculptors -- California -- Oakland