



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Edith Gregor Halpert

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Edith Gregor Halpert
Identifier:	AAA.halper62
Date:	1962-1963
Extent:	436 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Halpert, Edith Gregor, 1900-1970 Phillips, Harlan B. (Harlan Buddington), 1920-
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This interview is part of the Archives of American Art 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 others. The transcript was microfilmed in 1996.

Available Formats

35mm microfilm reel 5130 available at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

Biographical / Historical

Edith Halpert (1900-1970) was an art dealer from New York, N.Y.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Edith Halpert conducted 1962-1963, by Harlan Phillips, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Halpert speaks of her childhood in Russia and growing up in New York City; working at Bloomindale's, Macy's, Stern Brothers, and Cohen Goldman; her marriage to artist Sam Halpert, his health, and living in Paris in 1925; becoming an art student at the Academy of Design and feeling that Leon Kroll was an excellent art teacher until he began to correct her drawings; when George Bridgman thought she was ruining his class; the Lincoln Square Arcade, when she and Ernest Fiener and Robert Brackman would

rent Conan's studio evenings and bring in instructors; how Newman Montross influenced her more than anybody about showing her art that she loved; burning all of her work because Kroll said she had no talent; receiving a painting from John Marin; her friendship and working relationship with Abby Rockefeller and other family members.

Scope and Contents

She recalls opening the Downtown Gallery, in Greenwich Village, in 1926; a brief history of modern art; many artists helping decorate the new Daylight Gallery in 1930 and the first show being called "Practical Manifestations of Art"; meeting Robert and Sonia Delaunay in France; when she refused to allow Ezra Pound to speak at one of the gallery lectures because of his anti-Semite remarks and William Carlos Williams and Ford Madox Ford argued with her over it; experiencing jealousy and professional attacks from other dealers; the successful "Pop" Hart show and book in 1929; the "Thirty-three Moderns" show in 1930 at the Grand Central Galleries; the Jules Pascin show in 1930; in America, most of the art buyers supporters of culture were women, until the WPA and World War II, when it became fashionable for men to be involved; Ambroise Vollard's advice on selling art; handling the frustrations of working in the art field; friendships with Stuart Davis, Charles Sheeler, and Ben Shahn; how artists work through dry periods in their creativity and the "Recurrent Image" show; a discussion on modern art galleries of New York City, such as Daniel, Knodler, Ferargil, the New Gallery, 291, the Grand Central, Kraushaar, and Montross; her travels through Pennsylvania and Maine for good examples of folk art for the gallery; the "The Artist Looks at Music" show; the non-competitive spirit of the early modern American artists; of being saved financially in 1940 by selling a William Harnett painting to the Boston Museum and then renting new space for the gallery.

Scope and Contents

Also, Mitchell Siporin bringing Halpert and Edmund Gurry to Mitchell Field during World War II for a camouflage show and consequently Downtown Gallery artists and others were enlisted in the camouflage corps for the U.S. Air Force; Charles Sheeler and his wife find Halpert a house in Newtown, Conn.; her decision in 1933 to push folk art for acquisition by the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery in Kansas City, Missouri; her great concern about what to do with her folk art literature collection; dismay and that no one writes about the history of folk art and those responsible for its creation and popularity; Louis Stern hiring her to organize a municipal exhibit in Atlantic City, N.J., with Donald Deskey designing the furniture and Holger Cahill managing the publicity; Joe Lillie helping her meet Fiorello La Guardia and Joe McGoldrick in 1934 about a municipal show in New York City, but it is moved to Radio City Music Hall through Nelson Rockefeller; the "Salons of America" show; wanting articles written about art for love rather than art for investment; working with Aline Saarinen on her book, "Proud Possessors;" letters from Stuart Davis, William Zorach and others that hurt her feelings; enjoying giving educational lectures and considering retirement because of ill health; the desire to write a book on the history of trade signs in folk art; feeling that the young artists are being ruined by too much support without working for it; planning to write a book entitled, "Unsung Heroes," about artists brave enough to experiment; organizing a show in Russia at her own expense; later representing the U.S. in art at the "American National Exposition"; the agitators and success of the exposition; Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe.

Scope and Contents

Halpert also recalls Juliana Force, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Buckminster Fuller, George Luks, Edsel Ford, Max Weber, Danny Diefenbacher, Hamilton Easter Field, Frank Stella, Glenn Coleman, Margaret Zorach, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Henry Mercer, Romany Marie, Edward G. Robinson, Paul Mellon, Charles Pollet, Alex Brook, Lunca Curass, Dorothy Lambert, Duncan Candler, Frank Rhen, Louis Rittman, Bea Goldsmith, Arthur Craven, Robert Frost, Philip Wittenberg, Caesar de Hoke, Richard deWolfe Brixey, Seymour Knox, Walt Kuhn, Elisabeth Luther Cary, Charles Locke, Duncan Fergusson, Mrs. Solomon Guggenheim, Bob Tannahill, David Thompson, Marsden Hartley, Erwin Barrie, Robert Laurent, Conger Goodyear, Henry McBride, Edward Hopper, Charles Daniel, William Merritt Chase, Charles Hopkinson, Thomas Hart Benton, Frank Crowninshield, Alfred Barr, Lord Duveen, Jacob Lawrence, John Marin Jr., Karl Zerbe, Franz Kline, Arthur Dove, Julian Levy, Jack Levine, Valentine Dudensing, Peggy Bacon, Stefan Hirsch, Gertrude Stein, Isamu Noguchi, Jasper Johns, Chaim Soutine, B. K. Saklatwalla; Fernand Leger, Pablo Picasso, Ben Shahn, Charles Demuth, Alexander Calder, Jackson Pollock, Edward Steichen, Carl Sandburg, Clement Greenberg, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 7 tape reels. Reformatted in 2010 as 27 digital wav files. Duration is 32 hrs., 27 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Economic aspects
Art dealers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Camouflage
Folk art -- Collectors and collecting

Names:

Bacon, Peggy, 1895-1987
Barr, Alfred H., Jr., 1902-1981
Barrie, Erwin S., 1886-1983
Benton, Thomas Hart, 1889-1975
Brackman, Robert, 1898-
Bridgman, George Brant, 1864-1943
Brixey, Richard de Wolfe
C.W. Kraushaar Art Galleries
Cahill, Holger, 1887-1960
Calder, Alexander, 1898-1976
Cary, Elisabeth Luther, 1867-1936
Chase, William Merritt, 1849-1916
Coleman, Glenn O., 1887-1932
Crowninshield, Frank, 1872-1947
Daniel Gallery
Daniel, Charles, 1878-1971

Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964
Demuth, Charles, 1883-1935
Deskey, Donald, 1894-
Dove, Arthur Garfield, 1880-1946
Downtown Gallery (New York, N.Y.)
Dudensing, F. Valentine, 1892-1967
Ferargil Galleries
Fergusson, John Duncan, 1874-1961
Field, Hamilton Easter
Force, Juliana, 1876-1948
Ford, Ford Madox,, 1873-1939
Frost, Robert, 1874-1963
Fuller, R. Buckminster (Richard Buckminster), 1895-1983
Goodyear, A. Conger (Anson Conger), 1877-1964
Grand Central Art Galleries
Greenberg, Clement, 1909-1994
Halpert, Samuel, 1884-1930
Hartley, Marsden, 1877-1943
Hirsch, Stefan, 1899-1964
Hopkinson, Charles, 1869-1962
Hopper, Edward, 1882-1967
Johns, Jasper, 1930-
Kline, Franz, 1910-1962
Knox, Seymour H., 1898-1990
Kroll, Leon, 1884-1974
Kuhn, Walt, 1877-1949
Kuniyoshi, Yasuo, 1889-1953
Laurent, Robert, 1890-1970
Lawrence, Jacob, 1917-2000
Levine, Jack, 1915-2010
Levy, Julien
Locke, Charles, 1899-
Luks, George Benjamin, 1867-1933
Léger, Fernand, 1881-1955
M. Knoedler & Co.
Marin, John, Jr., 1915?-1988
McBride, Henry, 1867-1962
Mellon, Paul
Mercer, Henry Chapman
Montross Gallery
Montross, N. E. (Newman E), 1849-1932
New Gallery (New York, N.Y.)
Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988
O'Keeffe, Georgia , 1887-1986
Pascin, Jules, 1885-1930
Picasso, Pablo, 1881-1973
Pollock, Jackson, 1912-1956
Pound, Ezra, 1885-1972
Rivera, Diego, 1886-1957
Robinson, Edward G., 1893-1973
Rockefeller, Abby Aldrich
Saarinen, Aline B. (Aline Bernstein), 1914-1972
Saklatwalla, Beram K.
Sandburg, Carl, 1878-1967

Shahn, Ben, 1898-1969
Sheeler, Charles, 1883-1965
Siporin, Mitchell, 1910-1976
Soutine, Chaim, 1893-1943
Steichen, Edward, 1879-1973
Stein, Gertrude, 1874-1946
Stella, Frank
Stern, Louis E., 1886-1962
Stieglitz, Alfred, 1864-1946
Tannahill, Robert Hudson
Vollard, Ambroise, 1867-1939
Weber, Max, 1881-1961
Whitney, Gertrude Vanderbilt, 1875-1942
Williams, William Carlos, 1883-1963
Wittenberg, Philip, 1895-1987
Zerbe, Karl, 1903-1972
Zorach, Marguerite, 1887-1968
Zorach, William, 1887-1966

Functions:

Art galleries, Commercial -- New York (State) -- New York