



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Frank Holliday

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Frank Holliday
Identifier:	AAA.hollid17
Date:	2017 January 24-26
Creator:	Holliday, Frank (Interviewee) Kerr, Theodore (Interviewer)
Extent:	5 Items (Sound recording: 5 sound files (5 hr., 18 min.); digital, wav) 136 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Frank Holliday, 2017 January 24-26, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Frank Holliday, 2017 January 24-26, 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 is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Biographical / Historical

Frank Holliday (1957-) is a painter in New York, New York. Theodore Kerr (1979-) is a writer and organizer in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Frank Holliday conducted 2017 January 24 and 26, by Theodore Kerr, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Holliday Studios in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Holliday speaks of a beautiful relationship with his Grandmother Holliday; growing up in suburbia with a glamorous mother and industrialist father; being encouraged to draw and paint constantly to keep busy and out of trouble; realizing at a young age that art can bring happiness and cheer to others; feeling free and open until society told him he was different and the resulting need to protect himself by trying to be super-masculine; attending junior high in Greensboro, North Carolina during integration and becoming a young politician bringing people and groups together; studying ballet at the North Carolina School of the Arts during high school; continuing his study in New York City until visiting the Museum of Modern Art and deciding he was destined to be a painter; moving to San Francisco at age 18 to live among gay people; the utopian counter-culture that existed before AIDS; making art constantly through photography, film, painting; the theft of much of his early work over the years; realizing he needed to return to New York to escape his street-oriented lifestyle in San Francisco; attending School of Visual Arts; studying gay men semiotically through signs and social cues with Keith Haring and Bill Beckley; working at Warhol's Factory on Union Square and Interview magazine; the genesis of Club 57; imagining his sets at Club 57 as installations with live people; the appeal of his projects being anti-everything; learning about a "gay cancer" and his then-boyfriend becoming sick and dying from an unknown brain issue; living under the assumption that he was HIV-positive for eight years before falling extremely ill with pneumonia; learning of his HIV/AIDS diagnosis two weeks before "the cocktail" came out in 1996; his breakthrough show "Trippin' in America" in 2001; the process of getting sober six years before his diagnosis; learning to make art without the feeling the need to rely on drugs for creativity; meeting his partner of nineteen years and learning to feel worthy of love; self-hatred and homophobia after getting sober; gaining a tremendous respect and appreciation for the gay community living bravely just as they were; witnessing the World Trade Center towers collapse on 9/11; answering a Craigslist ad and being cast in a movie; acting in several films including "American Gangster;" trading three years of acting lessons with Bill Esper for one painting; how acting helped with his painting; comparing his body being tuned to painting as a dancer's is to music; how living with AIDS has made him very aware of the physical-ness of his body and what it means to be alive; the importance of leaving his mark on his art; academia taking over the art world; feeling looked over in retrospectives of AIDS artists, but identifying more as a human with a disease than as an "AIDS artist;" and purposefully leaving room in his paintings to allow the viewer to enter and experience. Holliday also recalls Harvey Milk, Michael Lowe, Mike Bidlo, Philip Taaffe, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Art Garibay, Henry Post, Bill Collum, and Elizabeth Murray.

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
- Artists (LGBTQ)
- Gay artists
- Painters -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
- Photography

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Andy Warhol's Factory (New York, N.Y.)

Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 1960-1988
Beckley, Bill, 1946-
Bidlo, Mike
Club 57 (New York, N.Y.)
Collum, Bill
Esper, William
Garibay, Art
Haring, Keith
Lowe, Michael
Milk, Harvey
Murray, Elizabeth, 1940-
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)
North Carolina School of the Arts -- Students
Post, Henry
School of Visual Arts (New York, N.Y.) -- Students
Taafe, Philip
Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project

Occupations:

Actors -- New York (State) -- New York