



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Mary Lee Hu

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Mary Lee Hu
Date:	2009 March 18-19
Identifier:	AAA.hu09
Creator:	Hu, Mary Lee, 1943- (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	8 Items (Sound recording: 8 wav files (5 hr., 42 min.); digital) 163 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Mary Lee Hu, 2009 March 18-19, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Mary Lee Hu, 2009 March 18-19, 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.

Biographical / Historical

Mary Lee Hu (1943-) is a metalsmith in Seattle, Washington. Smith was educated at Cranbrook Academy of Art and Southern Illinois University. She teaches at the University of Washington.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Mary Lee Hu conducted 2009 March 18-19, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Hu's home and studio, in Seattle, Washington.

Scope and Contents

Hu speaks of growing up outside Cleveland, Ohio; her early interest in making objects; attending the Lawrence Art Center camp in Kansas at the age of 16 where she first experimented with metals; her like

of working with tools in order to create something; taking metal smith classes at the Cleveland Institute of Art during high school; attending Miami University in Ohio for two years followed by two years at Cranbrook Academy of Art; working as a TA with L. Brent Kington at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale; her collaborative work in both textiles and metals while at Carbondale which led to her first experimentation in weaving silver wire; creating a body of work for her Master's thesis in which all the pieces were woven wire; various works, their origins, when, where and why they were created, including her Neckpiece, Choker, Bracelet, Brooch and Ring series; her aesthetic interest in patterns, line and positive/negative space; a limited interest in and use of color in her work; the transition from silver to gold wire; a progressively larger interest in the history of jewelry and body adornment which eventually became a lecture at the University of Washington, where she taught for 26 years; numerous trips around the world to countries such as China, Tibet, Nepal, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia; a strong interest in ethnic and native jewelry/body adornment practices; the various purposes which jewelry can serve in society; her involvement with the Society of North American Goldsmiths and the American Craft Council; her technique based teaching practices; the role that modern technology plays in teaching, learning, and making jewelry; the lack of support and funds for metals programs in universities around the country; her library, which includes over 2,000 books about the history of jewelry and body adornment; her collection of jewelry from around the world; her want to create beautiful and functional jewelry; the public and private aspects to jewelry and its role in museums; current projects and the importance to maintain interest of metals in younger generations. Hu also recalls Gary Turner, Hans Christensen, Otto Dingeldein, Heikki Seppä, Hero Kielman, Phil Fike, Patti Warashina, Gary Noffke, Elliott Pujol, Chonghi Choo, Daphne Farafo, Vicki Halper, Ron Ho, Miye Matsukata, Alma Eikermann, Mark Baldrige, Kurt Matzdorf, Eleanor Moty, Fred Fenster, John Marshall, James McMurray, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 8 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 43 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Body adornment
- Jewelry
- Jewelry making -- Equipment and supplies
- Jewelry making -- Study and teaching
- Jewelry making -- Technique
- Metal-workers -- Washington (State) -- Interviews
- Women artists

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- American Craft Council
- Baldrige, Mark S., 1946-
- Choo, Chonghi
- Christensen, Hans, 1924-1983
- Cleveland Institute of Art -- Students

Cranbrook Academy of Art -- Students
Dingeldein, Otto
Eikerman, Alma
Farafol, Daphne
Fenster, Fred, 1934-
Fike, Phillip G., 1927-1997
Halper, Vicki
Ho, Ron
Kidman, Hero
Kington, L. Brent (Louis Brent), 1934-2013
Lawrence Arts Center
Marshall, John, 1936-
Matsukata, Miye, 1922-1981
Matzdorf, Kurt
McMurray, James
Miami University (Oxford, Ohio) -- Students
Moty, Eleanor
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Noffke, Gary
Pujol, Eleanor
Seppä, Heikki
Society of North American Goldsmiths
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale -- Students
Turner, Gary
University of Washington -- Faculty
Warashina, Patti, 1940-

Places:

Afghanistan -- Description and Travel
Australia -- Description and Travel
China -- Description and Travel
Indonesia -- Description and Travel
Iran -- Description and Travel
Nepal -- Description and Travel
Ohio -- Description and Travel
Papua New Guinea -- Description and Travel
Tibet (China) -- Description and Travel
Turkey -- description and travel