



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Bill Jacobson

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Bill Jacobson
Date:	2017 March 25 and 26
Identifier:	AAA.jacobs17
Creator:	Jacobson, Bill, 1955- (Interviewee) Fialho, Alex, 1989- (Interviewer)
Extent:	4 Items (sound files (4 hrs., 47 min.); digital, wav) 84 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Bill Jacobson, 2017 March 25 and 26, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Bill Jacobson, 2017 March 25 and 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

Bill Jacobson (1955-) is a photographer in New York, New York. Alex Fialho (1989-) is a curator and arts writer and works as Programs Director for Visual AIDS in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Bill Jacobson conducted 2017 March 25 and 26, by Alex Fialho, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Jacobson's home and studio in Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Contents

Jacobson speaks of his childhood in Norwich, Connecticut; becoming serious about photography as an adolescent; early understandings of his own queerness; attending Brown University and taking photography classes at RISD; spending junior year of college at the San Francisco Art Institute; working for the "Seattle Gay News" after graduating; the influence of transcendental meditation on his early photographs; moving to New York in 1982; early discussions and experiences of HIV/AIDS in San Francisco and New York; financially supporting himself by taking commercial photographs for art galleries; collecting vernacular photographs from flea markets; deciding to focus on his own photography in 1989; the development of his out-of-focus aesthetic; shooting and printing his series Interim Landscapes, Interim Portraits, Interim Figures, and Interim Couples; the general misunderstanding of his work's relationship to the AIDS crisis; the art world's great loss of life to HIV/AIDS; participating in AIDS activism; living in the East Village in the 1980s; his relationship with Julie Saul Gallery; exposure to Minimalism through his commercial photography work; his shift to darker prints in series Song of Sentient Beings and the Thought Series; contemporary photographers whose work he admires; his shift to color photography; the technical aspects of his photographic and printing practice; his shift to an in-focus aesthetic; moving to Brooklyn in the mid-2000s; his interest in photographing the built and constructed world for A Series of Human Decisions; developing his series Place Series, 945 Madison Avenue, Lines in My Eyes, and figure, ground. The importance of travel to his artistic practice; the shift in his audience in response to the shift in his aesthetic; teaching at the International Center of Photography; showing two works in the "Art AIDS America" exhibition; the need for greater historical consciousness among younger artists; and his hope for a more nuanced understanding of his artistic legacy. Jacobson also recalls Bert Beaver, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Ray Metzker, Kermit Champa, Charles LeDray, John Collier, Larry Sultan, Jeffrey Lunger, Jeffrey Siegal, Bill T. Jones, Arnie Zane, Keith Haring, Marian Goodman, Ellsworth Kelly, Jack Shear, Julian Schnabel, Lucas Samaras, Christian Siekmeier, Richard Anderson, Donna De Salvo, Hugh Steers, Anselm Kiefers, Julie Saul, Richmond Burton, Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, Kate Shepherd, A.L. Steiner, Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Hujar, Rock Hushka, Tom Sokolowski, Robert Klein, Nayland Blake, David Deitcher, Marlon Riggs, Joe Fawbush, and others.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Photographers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project