



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Michael James

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Michael James
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.james03
<b>Date:</b>	2003 January 4-5
<b>Creator:</b>	James, Michael, 1949- Harris, Patricia, 1949- (Interviewer) Lyon, David, 1949- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
<b>Extent:</b>	91 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Michael James, 2003 January 4-5, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Michael James, 2003 January 4-5, 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 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 available on line.

### Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

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## Biographical / Historical

Michael James (1949- ) is a fiber artist from Lincoln, Nebraska. Patricia Harris and David Lyon are art critics from Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Michael James conducted 2003 January 4-5, by Patricia Harris and David Lyon, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Lincoln, Nebraska.

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## Scope and Contents

James speaks of his childhood in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in a large Catholic French-Canadian family; his parochial school experience; the early influence of French language and textiles; his undergraduate studies at Southeastern Massachusetts University and graduate studies at Rochester Institute of Technology in painting and printmaking; his first exposure to the craft world; transitioning from painting to quilts while starting a family; his first teaching jobs and shift to self employment; he discusses his books *Quiltmaker's Handbook I and II*; being male in the women's world of quiltmaking; he comments on the importance of fiber as a means of expression; his artistic influences; his 1990 residency in Switzerland; creating fabrics by hand-painting and digital printing; representational imagery in his work and themes; commissions; the impact of religion, spirituality, mortality, politics and social issues on his quilts; his working environment in Somerset, Massachusetts, and Lincoln, Nebraska; teaching at the University of Nebraska, and the International Quilt Study Center there; his wife Judy and her art; quiltmakers inside and outside academia; the value of quilts as "art"; crafts schools; his involvement in national and regional craft organizations; his early exhibitions; his relationships with dealers; the state of the art market; the lack of critical reception in the quiltmaking field; his own writings; how American fiber arts rank on an international scale; and new uses of technology in his work. He also recalls Jon Gnagy, Donald Krueger, Susan Russo, Faith Ringgold, Mickey Lawler, Ulysses Dietz, Robert and Ardis James, Florence Dionne, Lois Martin, Diane Itter, Hilda Raz, and others.

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## General

Originally recorded on 6 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 9 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hr., 35 min.

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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:

- Art -- Economic aspects
- Decorative arts
- Fiber artists -- Nebraska -- Interviews
- Textile crafts -- United States

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America

### Occupations:

- Quiltmakers -- United States