



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Jacob Kainen

Funding provided by the Mark Rothko Foundation. Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Archives of American Art  
750 9th Street, NW  
Victor Building, Suite 2200  
Washington, D.C. 20001  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>  
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

# Table of Contents

Collection Overview .....	1
Administrative Information .....	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects .....	2

## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Jacob Kainen
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.kainen82
<b>Date:</b>	1982 Aug. 10-Sept. 22
<b>Extent:</b>	6 Cassettes (Sound recording; analog.) 108 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Creator:</b>	Kainen, Jacob Berman, Avis Mark Rothko and His Times Oral History Project
<b>Language:</b>	English .

---

## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

This interview was conducted as part of the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and his Times oral history project, with funding provided by the Mark Rothko Foundation.

### Acquisition Information

Others interviewed on the project (by various interviewers) include: Sonia Allen, Sally Avery, Ben-Zion, Bernard Braddon, Ernest Briggs, Rhys Caparn, Elaine de Kooning, Herbert Ferber, Esther Gottlieb, Juliette Hays, Sidney Janis, Buffie Johnson, Louis Kaufman, Jack Kufeld, Katharine Kuh, Stanley Kunitz, Joseph Liss, Dorothy Miller, Betty Parsons, Wallace Putnam, Rebecca Reis, Maurice Roth, Sidney Schectman, Aaron Siskind, Joseph Solman, Hedda Sterne, Jack Tworokov, Esteban Vicente and Ed Weinstein. Each has been cataloged separately.

### Available Formats

Transcript available on line.

### Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

---

## Biographical / Historical

Jacob Kainen (1909-2001) was a painter, printmaker, and curator from Washington, D.C. Studied at the Art Students League and Pratt Institute; died at age 91.

---

## Scope and Contents

An interview of Jacob Kainen conducted 1982 Aug. 10-1982 Sept. 22, by Avis Berman, for the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project.

---

## Scope and Contents

Kainen speaks about his family and educational background; early interest in art; his studies at the Art Students League and Pratt Institute; showing at the ACA Gallery; the community of artists in New York in the late 1930s; writing for ART FRONT; his employment by the graphic arts division of the WPA-FAP in New York; his move to Washington, D.C., in 1942, to work for the Smithsonian Institution; his first marriage to Bertha Friedman and their children; his career in Washington, D.C. as a curator, painter, printmaker, writer, and teacher; the FBI investigation of his background; and the art scene in Washington, D.C. Kainen also recalls artists he has known including Stuart Davis, Joseph Solman, John Graham, Mark Rothko, Pietro Lazzari, Willem de Kooning, Max Schnitzler, Arshile Gorky, Gene Davis, Alma Thomas, George McNeil, Kenneth Noland, Boris Margo, Stanley Hayter, and Ad Reinhardt. He discusses Mark Rothko's influences, how he "hated the art industry" and was secretive about his art materials. Kainen also recalls encountering Rothko in Provincetown in 1968 and comments on his art and his suicide. Jacob Kainen's wife, Ruth, was also present and contributed her recollections.

---

## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Abstract expressionism
- Federal aid to the arts
- Printmakers -- Washington (D.C.) -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- ACA Galleries
- Art Students League (New York, N.Y.)
- Davis, Gene, 1920-1985
- Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964
- De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997
- Gorky, Arshile, 1904-1948
- Graham, John, 1887-1961
- Hayter, Stanley William, 1901-1988
- Lazzari, Pietro, 1898-1979
- Margo, Boris, 1902-1995
- Mark Rothko and His Times Oral History Project
- McNeil, George, 1908-1995
- Noland, Kenneth, 1924-2010

Pratt Institute  
Reinhardt, Ad, 1913-1967  
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970  
Schnitzler, Max, 1903-  
Solman, Joseph, 1909-2008  
Thomas, Alma

Occupations:

Painters -- Washington (D.C.) -- Interviews

Preferred Titles:

*Art front*