



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Reed Kay

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Reed Kay
Identifier:	AAA.kay95
Date:	1995 December 22-1996 October 4
Extent:	54 Slides 232 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Kay, Reed Brown, Robert F.
Language:	English .

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

Reed Kay (1925-) is a painter and teacher from Brookline, Massachusetts.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Reed Kay conducted 1995 December 22-1996 October 4, by Robert F. Brown, for the Archives of American Art over seven sessions, in Kay's home, in Brookline, Massachusetts.

Scope and Contents

The cassettes are accompanied by 54 color slides of Kay's artwork executed between 1941 and 1993, including sketches, watercolors, and paintings.

Scope and Contents

Kay talks about his childhood in an immigrant Jewish community in Boston and the great encouragement he received from teachers and librarians; his entry into the difficult Boston Latin School at age 11; and his early entry into the art classes at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Scope and Contents

Kay continues discussion about the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston School; life-long friendships there with Jason Berger, Jack Kramer, and David Aronson; and instructors, including Karl Zerbe, head of painting.

Scope and Contents

Kay talks about his service in World War II; completion of education at MFA School; his marriage in 1946; his first teaching position at the MFA School's summer sessions under Mitchell Siporin and Leonard Baskin in 1948 and Oskar Kokoschka in 1949. He discusses Kokoschka and Zerbe as teachers and colleagues; and his travelling fellowship to Paris, Italy, and Spain, 1949-1950.

Scope and Contents

Kay continues his discussion of Karl Zerbe as a teacher; talks about the difficulty of beginning a painting career and teaching, especially in a university as Kay did from 1956 until 1989; and about various teaching colleagues at the MFA School.

Scope and Contents

Kay talks about the superb teaching of anatomy by Ture Bengtz and of perspective by Peter Dubaniewicz at MFA School in the early 1940s; on the precocious abilities of upperclassmen such as Conger Metcalf and John Wilson, and the stimulation their accomplishment gave Kay; on his work, from student drawings to his cityscape paintings of the late 1950s, which he continues to make, abandoning figural, narrative, and studio subjects.

Scope and Contents

Teaching materials and methods of painting at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (summers of 1952 and 1954-1960) and the high quality of instruction and students and his decision to leave; the pluses and minuses of teaching and the toll it took on his own work; his long tenure at the School of Visual Arts, Boston University (1956-1989).

Scope and Contents

On his writings, principally, "The Painter's Companion: a Basic Guide to Studio Methods and Material," (1961) [revised editions, titled, "Painter's Guide," (1972, 1983)], which was an outgrowth of the emphasis put on craftsmanship, permanence, and mastery of media at MFA School under Karl Zerbe; on his growing concern, expressed in writings and lectures, with the toxicity of some modern artists' materials; and his relationship with art conservators. He discusses his work, from 1959 into the early 1990s while viewing slides.

General

Originally recorded on 9 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 17 digital wav files. Duration is 12 hrs., 56 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Kokoschka, Oskar, 1886-
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. School -- Faculty
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. School -- Students
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture -- Faculty
Zerbe, Karl, 1903-1972

Occupations:

Painters -- Massachusetts -- Boston -- Interviews