



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Katharine Kuh

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Katharine Kuh
<b>Date:</b>	1982 Mar. 18-1983 Mar. 24
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.kuh82
<b>Creator:</b>	Kuh, Katharine (Interviewee) Berman, Avis (Interviewer) Mark Rothko and His Times Oral History Project
<b>Extent:</b>	313 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Katharine Kuh, 1982 Mar. 18-1983 Mar. 24, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a>

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## 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, Jacob Kainen, Louis Kaufman, Jack Kufeld, Stanley Kunitz, Joseph Liss, Dorothy Miller, Betty Parsons, Wallace Putnam, Rebecca Reis, Maurice Roth, Sidney Schectman, Aaron Siskind, Joseph Solman, Hedda Sterne, Jack Tworok, Esteban Vicente and Ed Weinstein. Each has been cataloged separately.

### Available Formats

35mm microfilm reel 4937 available at Archives of American Art offices and through interlibrary loan.

### Restrictions

Transcript: Patrons must use microfilm copy.

### Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Katharine Kuh (1904-1994) was an art consultant, curator, and critic from Chicago and New York City.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Katharine Kuh conducted 1982 Mar. 18-1983 Mar. 24, by Avis Berman, for the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh speaks of her childhood in Chicago, the development of her interest in art, classes in art history at Vassar College, and her career as curator of modern art at the Art Institute of Chicago. She recalls in particular the "Sanity in Art" movement against modern art in Chicago. Kuh describes her relationship with Mark Rothko and Rothko's relationships with Mark Tobey, Clyfford Still, Kate Rothko, Theodoros Stamos, Milton Avery, Stanley Kunitz, and Hans Hofmann.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh discusses her parents, the family silk business, travelling in Europe as a child, life in Chicago, the effects of polio and other illnesses on her interests, and her student years at Vassar College. She remembers visiting Bernard Berenson in Italy with her family and again with Daniel Catton Rich, with whom she worked very closely at the Art Institute of Chicago. She speaks of the Katharine Kuh Gallery, which she started in the mid-1930s and its place in the vanguard of the Chicago art scene.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh remembers the effects of the stock market crash on her personal situation, her marriage to businessman George Kuh, distaste for life in the suburbs, and her divorce. She discusses the Katharine Kuh Gallery and the actions taken against her business by members of the reactionary "Sanity in Art" movement (including a very funny anecdote concerning Carlos Merida). She speaks of the classes in modern art that she taught at her gallery and of some of the artists she exhibited there, including the photographers Ansel Adams, Alfred Stieglitz, and Edward Weston.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh remembers the McCarthy era and the political conservatism in Chicago, including her testimony on behalf of Bill Zimmerman, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs. She criticizes blockbuster exhibitions and the changes in the role of a museum curator. She reminisces about building the collection at the Art Institute of Chicago and the art education program she ran there, and recalls Stuart Davis, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Gyorgy Kepes, and Ivan Albright.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh remembers Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Marcel Duchamp, as well as the collectors Walter Paepcke and Walter and Louise Arensberg (whose collection she surveyed in their home for an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago).

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh focuses on her memories of Mark Rothko, recalling when they met, their friendship, his manner of working, his feelings about his work, and his worries towards the end of his life. She talks about Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, and Mark Tobey. Some parts of this tape repeat what she said earlier.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh continues discussing Rothko, particularly his Houston chapel murals and the retrospective exhibition at MOMA in 1961. She remembers visiting Rothko's studio and describes his working methods. She relates Rothko's views on other artists, including Milton Avery, Clyfford Still, Turner, Robert Motherwell, and Adolf Gottlieb; parts repeat things said before. Kuh also discusses Rothko's wife and daughter.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh recounts building the collection at the Art Institute of Chicago and speaks of the museum staff, trustees, and donors. She remembers Alfred Barr at MOMA.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh continues speaking about the Art Institute of Chicago, describing the circumstances of her resignation and subsequent move to New York. She talks of knowing Peggy Guggenheim, Max Ernst, and Fernand Leger.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh describes her work as a consultant to college museums and her writings. She discusses the field of art criticism and her career as art editor at Saturday Review. She recalls Clyfford Still's retrospective exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and his death.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh describes her work as a collector for the First National Bank of Chicago.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh recounts more about her work at Saturday Review and her resignation. She goes into great detail about her travels in Alaska and British Columbia surveying Northwest Indian art for a government report. She speaks again about the McCarthy era.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh speaks again about the Katharine Kuh Gallery and the artists she exhibited there, including Josef Albers (and his Black Mountain College), Alexander Archipenko, Stuart Davis, Paul Klee, Alexander Calder, and Man Ray.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh continues her discussion of artists she exhibited at the Katharine Kuh Gallery, including Mark Tobey, Paul Klee, and Isamu Noguchi.

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## Scope and Contents

Kuh continues talking about artists she exhibited at the Katharine Kuh Gallery, including David Smith, Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Eliot Porter, Rufino Tamayo, and Jack Tworkov.

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## General

Originally recorded on 16 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 31 digital wav files. Duration is 21 hrs., 52 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:

Abstract expressionism

Types of Materials:

Interviews

Sound recordings

Names:

Adams, Ansel, 1902-1984

Albers, Josef

Albright, Ivan, 1897-1983

Archipenko, Alexander, 1887-1964

Arensberg, Louise S. (Louise Stevenson), 1879-1953

Arensberg, Walter, 1878-1954

Art Institute of Chicago

Avery, Milton, 1885-1965

Barr, Alfred H., Jr., 1902-1981

Berenson, Bernard, 1865-1959

Black Mountain College (Black Mountain, N.C.)

Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964

De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997

Duchamp, Marcel, 1887-1968  
Ernst, Max, 1891-1976  
First National Bank of Chicago -- Art collections  
Hofmann, Hans, 1880-1966  
Katharine Kuh Gallery (Chicago, Ill.)  
Kepes, Gyorgy, 1906-2001  
Klee, Paul, 1879-1940  
Léger, Fernand, 1881-1955  
Mark Rothko and His Times Oral History Project  
Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig, 1886-1969  
Moholy-Nagy, László, 1895-1946  
Mérida, Carlos, 1891-1984  
Newman, Barnett, 1905-1970  
Noguchi, Isamu, 1904-1988  
Paepcke, Walter Paul, 1896-1960  
Porter, Eliot, 1901-1990  
Ray, Man, 1890-1976  
Rich, Daniel Catton, 1904-1976  
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970  
Smith, David, 1906-1965  
Stamos, Theodoros, 1922-1997  
Stieglitz, Alfred, 1864-1946  
Still, Clyfford, 1904-1980  
Tamayo, Rufino, 1899-  
Tobey, Mark  
Tworkov, Jack  
Vassar College  
Weston, Edward, 1886-1958

Occupations:

Art critics -- Illinois -- Chicago  
Art critics -- New York (State) -- New York  
Art museum curators -- Illinois -- Chicago  
Art museum curators -- New York (State) -- New York

Preferred Titles:

*Saturday review*