



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Thomas Lawson

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Thomas Lawson
Identifier:	AAA.lawson18
Date:	2018 August 9-10
Extent:	7 Items (sound files (6 hr., 58 min.) Audio; digital, wav) 113 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Lawson, Thomas, 1951- Ferguson, Russell, 1956-
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.

Restrictions

The transcript and audio recording are open for research. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Thomas Lawson (1951-) is a painter, writer, the dean of the School of Art at California Institute of the Arts, and the Editor-in-Chief at East of Borneo, in Los Angeles, California. Russell Ferguson (1956-) is a professor in the Department of Art at University of California, Los Angeles, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Thomas Lawson conducted 2018 August 9-10, by Russell Ferguson, for the Archives of American Art, at Lawson's home in Los Angeles, California.

Scope and Contents

Lawson speaks of his family history, childhood, and schooling in Glasgow, Scotland; studying literature at St. Andrews University; early art-making, magazine-making, and curatorial experiences in university; developing an interest in contemporary art while studying for a postgraduate diploma in art history at Edinburgh University; visiting New York and interviewing Jasper Johns in 1974 for his postgraduate thesis; pursuing doctoral studies in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center, in the same class as Douglas Crimp and Craig Owens; beginning to write for various art publications; executing curatorial projects during his doctoral period; becoming a part of the late '70s New York art scene; the first exhibition of his artwork, at Artists Space; the influence of avant-garde theater on his art-making; co-founding and operating REALLIFE Magazine; writing the essay "Last Exit: Painting" and others for Artforum; his work and relationship with Metro Pictures; his thoughts on recent analysis of the Pictures Generation; teaching at SVA and later at CalArts; changes in the New York art scene during the '80s; his first public art projects; his international body of exhibitions; his work as dean of CalArts; the effect of his move to California on his art-making practice; CalArts' response to the 1994 Northridge earthquake; working as a co-selector for the British Art Show; his work on the biography of Thomas Muir; helping start the publication Afterall; his sense of an inadequate critical response to the entirety of his body of work; his return to painting in the last decade; and the development of his ideas about teaching. Lawson also recalls Susan Morgan, Eduardo Paolozzi, Pat Douthwaite, Douglas Hall, Hugh MacDiarmid, John Steer, Ivor Davies, John Cage, Mark Lancaster, Milton Brown, Robert Pincus-Witten, John Rewald, Franics Naumann, Rosalind Krauss, Betsy Baker, Ray Ring, Norman Lewis, Kellie Jones, Sherrie Levine, David Salle, Julia Heyward, Eric Fischl, Richard Serra, Robert Longo, Ingrid Sischy, Rene Ricard, Helene Winer, Jack Goldstein, Nigel Greenwood, Sherrie Levine, Benjamin Buchloh, Tim Rollins, Jenne Siegel, Mark Dion, Gregg Bordowitz, Andrea Fraser, Julie Ault, Andres Serrano, Anthony Reynolds, Mike Kelley, Declan McGonagle, Ross Sinclair, Alanna Heiss, Millie Wilson, Steven Lavine, Richard Kuhlenschmidt, Mark Bradford, Lucy Byatt, Lauri Firstenberg, David Kordansky, Danielle Colomine, Michel Aphenboro, and others.

System Details

Recorded on Tascam DR-100MKII 0222721.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Authors -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews
Painters -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Occupations:

Arts administrators -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews