



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael Mazur

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Michael Mazur
Date:	1993 Jan. 12-1995 Feb. 3
Identifier:	AAA.mazur93
Creator:	Mazur, Michael, 1935-2009 (Interviewee) Brown, Robert F. (Interviewer)
Extent:	49 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Michael Mazur, 1993 Jan. 12-1995 Feb. 3, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Michael Mazur, 1993 Jan. 12-1995 Feb. 3, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

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.

Biographical / Historical

Michael Mazur (1935-2009) was a painter, graphic artist, and art instructor of Cambridge, Mass.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Michael Mazur conducted 1993 Jan. 12-1995 Feb. 3, by Robert Brown, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Mazur remembers growing up as the only child in a well-to-do Jewish family in Manhattan; his demanding education at the Horace Mann School where he worked on a literary magazine with Edward Koren, the cartoonist; studying with an artist in Greenwich Village; and his early determination to be an artist. Academic challenges and social conservatism at Amherst College (B.A. 1958), where he studied printmaking and drawing with Leonard Baskin, an arrogant and limited artist, and working to his advantage with the gifted young printer, George Lockwood, in Baskin's studio. The year of self-directed study in Florence, Italy, and the lasting effect on him of the great European art tradition; his marriage to the poet, Gail Mazur; being a student at the Yale School of Art (BFA 1959, MFA 1961) and the contrast of the teaching methods of the autocratic Josef Albers and the congenial Gabor Peterdi; and his valuable experience as a volunteer assistant to Naum Gabo, who introduced him to monoprints. Teaching at the Rhode Island School of Design (1961-64) and the faculty there; and the development of his first well-known work, the "Locked Ward" series of prints, based on observation at mental hospitals. Teaching at Brandeis University (1965-75) and his involvement in Vietnam War era politics; and the various genres of his paintings and prints in the 1970s and 1980s and what he feels to be the essence of his work. The speed with which the "Branching" series of paintings and drawings was done and which was perhaps based on his observations of his vascular system as he underwent angioplasty in January 1993; the ambiguity of their space; being titled only post-facto; the equal importance of every part of a composition and the use of a very limited palette; and his affinity to artists Brice Marden and Richard Diebenkorn. Recent paintings which are a continuation of his "Branching" series, but influenced by a 13th century Chinese painting at Princeton University and which has led him to cease making preliminary studies and into greater abstraction; his illustrations in monotype for Robert Pinsky's translation of Dante's INFERNO, 1992-3 and his long interest in the INFERNO; development of the New Provincetown Print Project beginning in 1988 (a two-week workshop for artists who work on monoprints with master printer Robert Townsend and Mazur at the Fine Arts Work Center, Provincetown, Mass.); and his improvisational method of teaching at Harvard University.

General

Originally recorded on 6 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 12 digital wav files. Duration is 9 hrs., 14 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Graphic artists -- Massachusetts -- Interviews
- Painters -- Massachusetts -- Interviews
- Painting, American
- Printmakers -- Massachusetts -- Interviews
- Prints -- 20th century
- Prints -- Technique -- Study and teaching
- Prints, American

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

Harvard University -- Faculty

Occupations:

Art teachers -- Massachusetts -- Interviews