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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael C. McMillen

Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance. 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.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Michael C. McMillen
Date:	1997 Apr. 15-Dec. 8
Identifier:	AAA.mcmill97
Creator:	McMillen, Michael C. (Interviewee) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)
Extent:	5 Sound cassettes (Sound recording, master (5 hrs.); analog) 73 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Michael C. McMillen, 1997 Apr. 15-Dec. 8, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Michael C. McMillen, 1997 Apr. 15-Dec. 8, 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.

Biographical / Historical

Michael C. McMillen (1946-) is a painter and installation artist from Los Angeles, Calif. McMillen studied at Santa Monica City College and San Fernando Valley State College (now California State University at Northridge), with Hans Burkhardt. He spent his early career as a model builder for the movies which included making props for "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Blade Runner".

Scope and Contents

An interview of Michael C. McMillen conducted on 1997 Apr. 15-Dec. 8, by Paul Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Interview with McMillen begins with a discussion about growing up in post-war California, visiting television sets where his father was a scenic artist, and the beginning of an interest in illusion and other realities. He discusses how he became fascinated with ancient civilizations after a visit in 1957 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; from this experience he became interested in decay, change, and disintegration. He discusses the elements of open narrative, allowing the viewer to fill in the blanks. He acknowledges the influence of California assemblage movement, aerospace, and Hollywood as sources for his material and art practice.

Scope and Contents

McMillen explains his goal is to surround the viewer with a total experience, including smell, sound, moisture, and temperature. He feels that art reflects time and place, a response to history, and a metaphor for events. He next recalls "Journey to the Surface," a submarine, incorporating stand-alone pieces in a large installation that uses historical objects as time markers. He feels that his work is an accumulation of "stuff" that is used as a source for personal identity and the viewer brings his own history pieces and markers of progress through life. He concludes with a discussion of the function of art, as a personal expression and self-validation rather than the political/social aspect of much contemporary art.

General

Originally recorded on 5 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 10 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hrs., 5 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Philosophy
Painters -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings