



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with George McNeil

Archives of American Art  
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## Collection Overview

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| <b>Repository:</b>      | Archives of American Art   |
| <b>Title:</b>           | Oral history interview with George McNeil  |
| <b>Date:</b>            | 1968 Jan. 9-May 21   |
| <b>Identifier:</b>      | AAA.mcneil68   |
| <b>Creator:</b>         | McNeil, George, 1908-1995 (Interviewee)<br>Sandler, Irving, 1925- (Interviewer)                            |
| <b>Extent:</b>          | 82 Pages (Transcript)  |
| <b>Language:</b>        | English .  |
| <b>Digital Content:</b> | <a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with George McNeil, 1968 Jan. 9-May 21, Transcript</a> |

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

These interviews are part of the Archives' 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 others.

### Restrictions

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

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## Biographical / Historical

George McNeil (1908-1995) was a painter and printmaker from New York, N.Y.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of George McNeil conducted 1968 Jan. 9-May 21, by Irving Sandler, for the Archives of American Art. McNeil speaks of why he became interested in art; his early influences; becoming interested in modern art after attending lectures by Vaclav Vytlacil; meeting Arshile Gorky; the leading figures in modern art during the 1930s; his interest in Cézanne; studying with Jan Matulka and Hans Hofmann; his experiences with the WPA; the modern artists within the WPA; the American Abstract Artists (A.A.A.); a group of painters oriented to Paris called The Ten; how there was an anti-surrealism attitude, and a surrealist would not have been permitted in A.A.A.; what the A.A.A. constituted as abstract art; a grouping within the A.A.A. called the Concretionists; his memories of Léger; how he assesses the period of the 1930s; the importance of Cubism; what he thinks caused the decline of A.A.A.; how he assesses the period of the 1940s; his stance on form and the plastic values in art; his thoughts on various artists; the importance of The Club; the antipathy to the School of Paris after the war; how Impressionism was considered in the 40s and 50s; slides of his paintings from 1937 to 1962, and shows how he developed as an artist; the problems of abstract expressionism;

organic and geometric form; the schisms in different art groups due to politics; his teaching techniques; why he feels modern painting declined after 1912; the quality of A.A.A. works; stretching his canvases, and the sizes he uses; his recent works, and his approaches to painting. He recalls Vaclav Vytlačil, Hans Hofmann; Arshile Gorky, John Graham, Jan Matulka, John Marin, Wassily Kandinsky, Mercedes Carles Matter, Albert Swinden, Fernand Léger, Stuart Davis, Burgoyne Diller, David Smith, Edgar Levy, Leo Manso, Irene Rice Pereira, Willem de Kooning, Ilya Bolotowsky, Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, Joan Miró, Robert Motherwell, George L.K. Morris, Albert Gallatin, Charles Shaw, John Ferrin, Ralph Rosenborg, Hananiah Harari, Agnes Lyall, Jean Helion, and many others.

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## General

Originally recorded on 3 sound tape reels. Reformatted in 2010 as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hrs., 14 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
- Art -- Philosophy
- Art, American
- Cubism
- Impressionism (Art)
- Painters -- New York (State) -- Interviews
- Painting
- Printmakers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
- Surrealism

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- American Abstract Artists
- Bolotowsky, Ilya, 1907-1981
- Davis, Stuart, 1892-1964
- De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997
- Diller, Burgoyne, 1906-1965
- Dlugoszewski, Lucia, 1931-2000
- Gallatin, A. E. (Albert Eugene), 1881-1952
- Gorky, Arshile, 1904-1948
- Gottlieb, Adolph, 1903-1974
- Graham, John, 1887-1961
- Harari, Hananiah, 1912-2000
- Hofmann, Hans, 1880-1966
- Héliion, Jean, 1904-1987
- Kandinsky, Wassily, 1866-1944
- Levy, Edgar
- Léger, Fernand, 1881-1955

Manso, Leo  
Marin, John, 1870-1953  
Matter, Mercedes  
Matulka, Jan, 1890-1972  
Miró, Joan, 1893-  
Morris, George L. K., 1905-1975  
Motherwell, Robert  
Pereira, I. Rice (Irene Rice), 1902-1971  
Rosenborg, Ralph M., 1913-1992  
Rothko, Mark, 1903-1970  
Shaw, Charles Green, 1892-1974  
Smith, David, 1906-1965  
United States. Work Projects Administration  
Vytlačil, Vaclav, 1892-1984