



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Mary Merkel-Hess

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman
Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Mary Merkel-Hess
Date:	2010 August 24-25
Identifier:	AAA.merkel10
Creator:	Merkel-Hess, Mary (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	5 Items (Sound recording: 5 sound files (4 hr., 11 min.); digital, wav) 86 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Mary Merkel-Hess, 2010 August 24-25, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Mary Merkel-Hess, 2010 August 24-25, 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 online.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

Mary Merkel-Hess (1949-) is fiber artist in Iowa City, Iowa. Mija Riedel (1958-) is an independent scholar and writer in San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Mary Merkel-Hess conducted 2010 August 24 and 25, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Merkel-Hess' home, in Iowa City, Iowa.

Scope and Contents

Mary Merkel-Hess speaks of growing up in the rural Midwest; deciding pursue an artistic career; studying philosophy at Marquette University and earning an MFA the University of Wisconsin-Madison; becoming part of the art community in Iowa City; beginning her artistic career in metalsmithing and later transitioning into fiber mediums; using basketry and papermaking methods along with a variety of materials to devise original techniques; the role of light, balance, juxtaposition in her fiber sculptures; working from both natural and human impacted landscapes; traveling extensively through Europe and Japan; attending the Armory Show and SOFA Santa Fe; interacting with galleries such as Browngrotta Art Gallery and Olson-Larsen Galleries; completing public and residential commissions; supporting herself through the sale of her work. Mary Merkel-Hess also recalls Chungi Choo, Heikki Seppä, Tim Barrett, Alma Eikerman, Shereen LaPlantz, Jack Lenor Larsen, Tom Grotta, Marlene Olson, Wendy Haas, Katie Gingrass and others.

General

Originally recorded on 3 memory cards. Reformatted in 2010 as 5 digital wav files. Duration is 4 hr., 11 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Basket making
- Metalsmithing
- Papermaking
- Philosophy
- Women artists
- Women sculptors

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Barrett, Tim, (Papermaker)
- Browngrotta Arts (Gallery)
- Choo, Chungi
- Eikerman, Alma
- Grotta, Thomas
- Larsen, Jack Lenor, 1927-2020
- Marquette University -- Faculty
- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
- SOFA West Santa Fe
- Santa Fe Armory Show (1977 : Santa Fe, N.M.)
- Seppä, Heikki
- University of Wisconsin--Madison -- Students

Occupations:

- Fiber artists -- Iowa City -- Iowa

Sculptors -- Iowa City -- Iowa

Places:

Europe -- description and travel

Japan -- Description and Travel