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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Bruce Metcalf

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

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Table of Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Collection Overview | 1 |
| Administrative Information | 1 |
| General..... | 2 |
| Scope and Contents..... | 1 |
| Scope and Contents..... | 2 |
| Biographical / Historical..... | 1 |
| Names and Subjects | 2 |
| Container Listing | |

Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Oral history interview with Bruce Metcalf |
| Date: | 2009 June 10 |
| Identifier: | AAA.metcal09 |
| Creator: | Metcalf, Bruce, 1949- (Interviewee) Cooke, Edward S., 1954- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America |
| Extent: | 96 Pages (Transcript) 5 Items (Sound recording: 5 sound files (4 hr., 10 min.); digital, wav) |
| Language: | English . |
| Digital Content: | Digital Content: Oral history interview with Bruce Metcalf, 2009 June 10, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Bruce Metcalf, 2009 June 10, 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 is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Restrictions

This transcript is open for research. Access to the entire recording is restricted. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Bruce Metcalf (1949-) is a jeweler and writer in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Bruce Metcalf conducted 2009 June 10, by Edward S. Cooke, Jr., for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Metcalf's home, in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Mr. Metcalf discusses his early years in Amherst, Massachusetts; beginnings

as a maker with modeling clay and plastic airplane models; undergraduate years at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York in the late 1960s; early interest in architecture; early disenchantment with modernist discourse and theory; introduction to Marxist theory and idealism of the 1960s; summer trip to California in 1970; return to the East Coast upon the death of his father; return to college, transferring into jewelry in his senior year; influence of his teacher Michael Jerry; seeing the work in "Objects: USA" exhibition (1969) and influence of the work of J. Fred Woell, Richard Mawdsley, L. Brent Kington; rejection of current trends in art, including conceptual art and formalism; his affinity for the medium of metal, and hammersmithing; influence of funk ceramics, including work by Fred Bauer and Richard Shaw; brief stint at Montana State University, Bozeman; working in cardboard and wood; graduate school at the State University of New York, New Paltz; working with Robert Ebendorf and Kurt Matzdorf at New Paltz; work as a production artist/craftsperson; attending Rhinebeck, New York, craft fair in the mid-1970s; the influence of writings by William Morris and John Ruskin and the notion of "dignified labor"; graduate school at Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; formulating his aesthetic of narrative symbolism; publication of his first article in 1977 as a response to review of the exhibition "Forms in Metal: 275 Years of Metalsmithing in America" (1975); yearlong teaching position at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado; taking a teaching position at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio (1986-1991); publication of his article "Crafts: Second-Class Citizens?" in the first issue of *Metalsmith*, 1980; growing involvement with the Society of North American Goldsmiths; development of his notion of "social utility" and the role and function of crafts and making; expansion of his writing on craft; rejection of the deconstructivist school of thought in the 1980s; abandonment of sculptural objects for jewelry in the early 1990s; return to Philadelphia in 1991; early teaching of history of craft, first at Kent, then on a Fulbright scholarship in Seoul, South Korea (1990), later at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, in the early 1990s; influence of Martin Eidelberg; development of his vision for a history of craft course; collaboration with Janet Koplos on "Makers: A History of American Studio Craft"; use of his medium and craft to explore issues of nurturing and anxiety; the psychological/social effect and aesthetic importance of wearing jewelry (for the wearer and the artist); the pros and cons of craft collectors; the problematics of installation work by craft artists; recent trends in craft, including Anne Wilson's notion of "sloppy craft" and an "anti-craft" attitude; recent artists, including Arthur Hash and Gabriel Craig; lack of exhibition opportunities for younger/emerging artists; influential recent texts, including "Shards," by Garth Clark. He also recalls Robert Arneson, Randy Long, Carol Kumata, Jamie Bennett, Steve and Harriet Rogers, Wayne Hammer, Stanley Lechtzin, Gene Koss, Henry Halem, Mark Burns, Rose Slivka, Nilda Getty, Jill Slosberg, Sharon Church, John Gill, David La Plantz, Lois Moran; Gary Griffin; William Daley, Marian Pritchard, Glenn Adamson, Pat Flynn, Susan Cummins, and Judith Schaechter.

Scope and Contents

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Bruce Metcalf on June 10, 2009. The interview took place in Bala Cynwyd, Penn., and was conducted by Edward S. Cooke, Jr. for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. Bruce Metcalf has reviewed the transcript. His corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

General

Originally recorded as 5 sound files. Duration is 4 hr., 10 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Ceramics
Communism
Conceptual art
Deconstructivism (Architecture)
Formalism (Art)
Jewelers -- Pennsylvania -- Interviews
Jewelry making -- Study and teaching
Metal-work

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Adamson, Glenn
Arneson, Robert, 1930-1992
Bauer, Fred
Bennett, Jamie, 1948-
Burns, Mark, 1950-
Church, Sharon, 1948-
Clark, Garth, 1947-
Colorado State University -- Faculty
Craig, Gabriel
Cummins, Susan
Daley, William, 1925-
Ebendorf, Robert, 1938-
Eidelberg, Martin P.
Flynn, Pat, 1954-
Getty, Nilda
Gill, John, 1949-
Griffin, Gary, 1945-
Halem, Henry
Hammer, Wayne
Hash, Arthur, 1976-
Jerry, Michael John, 1937-
Kent State University -- Faculty
Kington, L. Brent (Louis Brent), 1934-2013
Koplos, Janet
Koss, Gene
Kumata, Carol
La Plantz, David
Lechtzin, Stanley, 1936-
Long, Randy
Matzdorf, Kurt
Mawdsley, Richard, 1945-
Montana State University (Bozeman, Mont.)
Moran, Lois
Morris, William, 1834-1896
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Pritchard, Marian
Rogers, Harriet
Rogers, Steve

Ruskin, John, 1819-1900
Schaechter, Judith, 1961-
Shaw, Richard, 1941 Sept. 12-
Slivka, Rose
Slosberg, Jill
Society of North American Goldsmiths
State University of New York at New Paltz -- Students
Syracuse University -- Students
Tyler School of Art -- Students
University of the Arts (Philadelphia, Pa.) -- Faculty
Wilson, Anne, 1949-
Woell, J. Fred, 1934-

Places:

California -- description and travel
Seoul (Korea) -- Description and Travel