Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William Morris

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. 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 William Morris
Date:	2009 July 13-14
Identifier:	AAA.morris09
Creator:	Morris, William, 1957- (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	7 Items (Sound recording: 7 wav files (5 hr., 5min.); digital) 105 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with William Morris, 2009 July 13-14, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with William Morris, 2009 July 13-14, 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

William Morris (1957-) is a glass artist in Stanwood, Washington.

Scope and Contents

An interview of William Morris conducted 2009 July 13-14, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Morris' home, in Stanwood, Washington.

Scope and Contents

William Morris speaks of his decision to stop working in glass in 2005; his deep connection to the natural world; working now with stone; the longstanding theme of man and nature in his work; his influence on the studio glass movement; use of installations; relationship to the greater art world; Cache [1993]; the importance of working in a team, particularly with Jon Ormbrek; studio practice and philosophy of working in the studio; series Man Adorned and first use of the human form; how his work evolves artistically; the influence of his travels on his work and his particular affinity for Mesoamerican culture; the process of choosing his subjects; growing up in Carmel, California, and frequenting the museum at the Carmel Mission Basilica; his early fascination with Native American artifacts and history in the museum; childhood spent hiking in the hills around Carmel and youth spent camping and rock-climbing; art instruction during childhood; ceramics work in high school; introduction to ideas of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell by his high school teacher, Lloyd Baskerville; undergraduate work at California State University, Chico, working with Vernon Patrick; first experience with glass in high school, through the Fort Ord military base crafts department; brief studies at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington; arriving at Pilchuck Glass School, Stanwood, Washington, in 1977 as a shop assistant/maintenance person; his first encounter with Dale Chihuly; 10 years as Chihuly's main assistant and de facto apprenticeship; his greater overall technical education at Pilchuck; the development of his own team as he continued to work with Chihuly; working with Chihuly and Italo Scanga; the synergy of working in a group and artistic cross-pollination at Pilchuck; the influence and mentorship of Judy Pfaff; working with Italian glass masters at Pilchuck; the influence of Pino Signoretto; his trip with Chihuly to the British Isles, which inspired his series Stone Vessels and series Standing Stones in the mid-1980s; his practice of working in series; series Petroglyph Vessels, and the beginning of narrative in his work; the importance of naiveté, experimentation, and a "confidence in innocence"; series Artifacts; the influence of Donald Lipski on Morris' installations; series Burial Urns and series Burial Rafts; series Canopic Jars; commissions for George Stroemple; the genesis of the series Rhyton; the transcendental/mythic qualities in his work; series Crow and Raven; more discussion of series Man Adorned; series Rattles; collaboration with fashion designer Donna Karan; the importance of glass as a material, and the importance of "play"; the value of an apprentice-type program; his work in bronze and with Nancy Graves; series Cinerary Urns and coming to terms with the deaths of close friends; series Mazorca; series Idolo and Idolito; series Native Species (2006); series Fish Traps; more discussion of his decision to leave glassworking; documentary film Creative Nature, 2008; "Myth, Object, and the Animal" exhibition; the adventurous spirit of the American studio glass movement, particularly in the early years; his preference for short workshops rather than longer teaching sessions; the aesthetic continuity of his work throughout his career; his appreciation of the community of collectors of glass art. He also recalls Ken Wiese, Robert and Terrie Kvenild, Bertil and Ulrica Vallien, Gary Galbraith, Stan Price, Dennis Oppenheim, Kiki Smith, Dante Marioni, Livio Seguso, Marvin Lipofsky, Benjamin Moore, Jamie Carpenter, Checco Ongaro, Lino Tagliapietra, Ricky DeMarco, Flora Mace, Joey Kirkpatrick, Trumaine Mason, Karen Willenbrink, Ross Richmond, Randy Walker, John Hauberg, Stanislav Libenský, Graham Graham, Charlie Cowles, George and Dorothy Saxe, and Jack and Rebecca Benaroya.

General

Originally recorded on 3 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 7 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 5 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Study and teaching
Ceramics -- Study and teaching
Glass artists -- Washington (State) -- Interviews
Sculptors -- Washington (State) -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Benaroya, Jack, 1921-2012
Benaroya, Rebecca
California State University, Chico -- Students
Campbell, Joseph, 1904-1987
Carpenter, James, 1949-
Central Washington University -- Students
Chihuly, Dale, 1941-
Demarco, Ricky
Graves, Nancy Stevenson, 1940-1995
Hauberg, John H. (John Henry), 1916-
Hydman-Vallien, Ulrica, 1938-2018
Jung, C. G. (Carl Gustav), 1875-1961
Karan, Donna, 1948-
Kirkpatrick, Joey
Libenský, Stanislav, 1921-2002
Lipofsky, Marvin, 1938-2016
Lipski, Donald, 1947-
Mace, Flora, 1949-
Marioni, Dante, 1964-
Moore, Benjamin P.
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Oppenheim, Dennis, 1938-2011
Pfaff, Judy, 1946-
Pilchuck Glass Center (Stanwood, Wash.)
San Carlos Borromeo Basilica (Carmel, Calif.)
Saxe, Dorothy
Saxe, George
Scanga, Italo, 1932-2001
Seguso, Livio, 1930-
Signoretto, Pino, 1944-
Smith, Kiki, 1954-
Stroemple, George R.
Tagliapietra, Lino
Vallien, Bertil, 1938-

Places:

British Isles -- Description and Travel