



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Dennis Oppenheim

Funding for this interview was provided by the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation.
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.

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	1
Scope and Contents	1
Names and Subjects	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Dennis Oppenheim
Date:	1995 July-Aug
Identifier:	AAA.oppenh95
Creator:	Oppenheim, Dennis, 1938-2011 (Interviewee) Boettger, Suzaan (Interviewer)
Extent:	130 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Dennis Oppenheim, 1995 July-Aug, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Dennis Oppenheim, 1995 July-Aug, 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. Funding for this interview was provided by the Horace N. Goldsmith Foundation.

Available Formats

Transcript available online.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

Dennis Oppenheim (1938-2011) was a sculptor from New York, N.Y.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Dennis Oppenheim conducted 1995 July- Aug., by Suzaan Boettger, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Oppenheim speaks of growing up in Washington and California, his father's Russian ancestry and education in China, his father's career in engineering, his mother's background and education in English, living in Richmond El Cerrito, his mother's love of the arts, his father's feelings toward Russia, standing out in the community, his relationship with his older sister, attending Richmond High School, demographics of El Cerrito, his interest in athletics during high school, fitting in with the minority class in Richmond, prejudice and cultural dynamics of the 1950s, a lack of art education and philosophy classes during high school, "Rebel Without a Cause," Richmond Trojans, hotrod clubs, the persona of a good student, playing by the rules of the art world, friendship with Jimmy DeMaria and his relationship to Walter DeMaria, early skills as an artist, art and teachers in high school, attending California College of Arts and Crafts, homosexuality in the 1950s and 1960s, working and attending art school, professors at art school, attending Stanford, early sculptural work, depression, quitting school, getting married, and moving to Hawaii, becoming an entrepreneur, attending the University of Hawaii, going back to art school, radical art, painting, drawing, sculpture, the beats and the 1960s, motivations, studio work, theory and exposure to art, self-doubts, education in art history, Oakland Wedge, earth works, context and possession, Ground Systems, Directed Seeding, Cancelled Crop, studio art, documentation, use of science and disciplines in art, conceptual art, theoretical positions, sentiments and useful rage, Robert Smithson and earth works, Gerry Shum, Peter Hutchinson, ocean work and red dye, breaking patterns and attempting growth, body works, drug use and hippies, focusing on theory, turmoil, Max Kozloff's "Pygmalion Reversed," artist as shaman and Jack Burnham, sync and acceptance of the art world, machine works, interrogating art and one's self, Vito Acconci, public art, artisans and architects, Fireworks, dysfunction in art, periods of fragmentation, bad art and autobiographical self-exposure, discovery, being judgmental of one's own work, critical dissent, impact of the 1950s and modernism, concern about placement in the art world, Gypsum Gypsies, mutations of objects, reading and writing, form and content, and phases of development. Oppenheim also recalls "American Graffiti," Richard Serra, Nathan Olivera, Keith Boyle, Artforum, Michael Fried, John Gibson, Robert Morris, Rene di Rosa, Allan Kaprow, Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Alanna Heiss, Lawrence Weiner, Joseph Kosuth, Chris Burden, Mario Salvio, and Bruce Nauman.

General

Originally recorded on 5 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 9 digital wav files. Duration is 6 hrs., 11 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Sculptors -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings