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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Tom Patti

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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 Tom Patti
Identifier:	AAA.patti10
Date:	2010 January 18-19
Creator:	Patti, Tom (Interviewee) Warmus, William, 1953- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	77 Pages (Transcript) 6 Items (Sound recording: 6 sound files (4 hr., 47 min.); digital, wav)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Tom Patti, 2010 January 18-19, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Tom Patti, 2010 January 18-19, 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.

Biographical / Historical

Tom Patti (1943-) is a glass artist, sculptor, and designer in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and Miami Beach, Florida.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Tom Patti conducted 2010 January 18 and 19, by William Warmus, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Patti's residence, in Miami Beach, Florida.

Scope and Contents

Patti talks about growing up in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in a working-class neighborhood, and playing in and around the General Electric Corp. landfill, the major employer in the area; losing vision in one eye after

a childhood accident; he recalls running with a tough crowd during high school and making homemade tattoos for his friends; his probation officer during high school, who encouraged his interest in art; meeting Norman Rockwell, who encouraged him to attend Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York; majoring in industrial design at Pratt, where he worked with Rowena Reed Kostellow; the idealism and social consciousness of the 1960s; exposure to the ideas of visionary architects such as Moshe Safdie and Buckminster Fuller; the New York art/social scene in the 1960s, including Max's Kansas City; meeting Marilyn Holtz, whom he later married; a trip to Colombia to discuss shelter development, and exposure to severe poverty; a resulting focus on people-centered shelter ideas; graduate work at Pratt, and the value of his studies in an academic environment; working with inflatable shelters, experimenting with different materials, including using glass; returning to the Berkshires in Massachusetts, working odd jobs, running a small glass school for children; becoming aware of the studio glass movement and attending a glassblowing workshop at Penland School of Crafts in Penland, North Carolina, in 1971; continued work with glass, including Vitrolite and other scavenged materials; growing public recognition in the 1970s; an internship at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, where he met Steve Feren, with whom he worked for several years; acquisition of work by the Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, New York, in 1976; first one-man gallery show in 1977; purchase of work by the Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; series Solar Riser and the importance of a meditative/spiritual component of his work; setting up a studio in Plainfield, Massachusetts; first museum exhibition at the George Walter Vincent Smith Art Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts; speaking at the World Crafts Council conference in Vienna in the late 1970s; continued travel and recognition in Europe in the 1980s; "Genic Doran Divider-Sentinel," (1982-84), commissioned sculpture for General Electric in Pittsfield, which led to his focus on laminated materials; early 1990s studio expansion to work on a larger scale; commission work with Cesar Pelli for Owens Corning Fiberglas in 1993; one-person show at Serge Lechazynski's gallery in Biot, France; travels in Europe and Israel; serving on the board of the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts; consulting work with the glass and materials industry; "Spectral-Luma Ellipse" (2000); "Spatial Boundary" (2001), commissioned by Ann and Graham Gund; continued smaller-scale work; designing the window for Sienna Gallery in Lenox, Massachusetts, owned by his daughter; recent commissions including "Morton Square" in 2004, the Roosevelt Avenue Intermodal Station (2004), both in New York City, and "Miami Rain" (2009), Miami, Florida; and the importance of transparency, opacity, and translucency in his work. He also recalls Joseph Parriott, Sybil Moholy-Nagy, Rudolf Arnheim, Art Wood, Thomas Buechner, Doug Heller, Penelope Hunter-Stiebel, Laurie Wagman and Irvin Borowsky, and Malcolm Rogers.

General

Originally recorded on 6 memory cards. Duration is 4 hr., 47 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Design, Industrial -- Study and teaching
- Designers -- Massachusetts -- Interviews
- Glass art -- Study and teaching
- Glass artists -- Massachusetts -- Interviews
- Glass blowing and working -- Study and teaching
- Sculptors -- Massachusetts -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews

Sound recordings

Names:

Arnheim, Rudolf
Borowsky, Irvin J.
Buechner, Thomas S.
Corning Museum of Glass.
Fuller, R. Buckminster (Richard Buckminster), 1895-1983
General Electric Company
George Walter Vincent Smith Museum
Gund, Ann
Gund, Graham
Haystack Mountain School of Crafts -- Students
Heller, Doug, 1946-
Hunter-Stiebel, Penelope, 1946-
Kostellow, Rowena Reed
Moholy-Nagy, Sibyl, 1905-
Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Norman Rockwell Museum at Stockbridge
Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation
Parriott, Joseph
Pelli, Cesar
Penland School of Crafts -- Students
Pratt Institute -- Students
Rockwell, Norman, 1894-1978
Rogers, Malcolm Jennings
Safdie, Moshe, 1938-
Sienna Gallery
Wagman, Laurie
Wood, Art

Places:

Colombia -- Description and Travel
Europe -- description and travel
Israel -- Description and Travel