



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Jack Pierson

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Table of Contents

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

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Jack Pierson
Date:	2017 January 16-17
Identifier:	AAA.pierso17
Creator:	Pierson, Jack, 1960- (Interviewee) Fialho, Alex, 1989- (Interviewer)
Extent:	5 Items (sound files (6 hrs., 10 min.); digital, wav) 84 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Jack Pierson, 2017 January 16-17, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Jack Pierson, 2017 January 16-17, 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

The transcript and recording are open for research. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Jack Pierson (1960-) is a multi-disciplinary artist in New York, New York. Alex Fialho (1989-) is a curator and arts writer who is the Programs Director for Visual AIDS in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Jack Pierson, conducted 2017 January 16-17, by Alex Fialho, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Pierson's home in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Pierson speaks of growing up in Plymouth, Massachusetts; being surrounded by "old stuff" amassed by his parents and relatives; working summers in his teen years in order to save enough money to live in New York City for several weeks with a family friend and visit museums; being particularly taken with the glamor of Nancy Sinatra and other singers from the age of six; being bullied as a young gay boy and relating more to children who didn't judge; the impact of seeing a Mark di Suvero show at the Whitney Museum of American Art in his teens; his early music obsessions with Nancy Sinatra, then Diana Ross and the Supremes, followed by Alice Cooper and David Bowie; writing poetry in high school and attending one year at Hofstra University with the intention to study graphic design; spending a month in Europe before taking a year to work in a factory and save money; attending Massachusetts College of Art and Design and being drawn to the performance program; his involvement in the punk scene; the influence of the B-52s in his '50s completist work; recalling the impact the Diane Arbus monograph had on him while at Hofstra; moving into photography; spending a summer in Provincetown with friends; the realization that he could become a successful photographer; working at Boston restaurant 29 Newbury among artists, writers, and musicians; his relationship with Mark Morrisroe; feeling the desire for fame; first learning of gay-related immunodeficiency (GRID); transferring to Cooper Union and moving to New York City; working at Patrick Fox Gallery; how a Christmas trip to Miami Beach turned into a six-month stay; being away from New England and embracing a new self-confidence and freedom; his first shows at Simon Watson and Pat Hearn; working odd jobs for several years while studio painting; befriending Robert Miller and eventually styling his home in Miami Beach; finding validation in his personal creativity when Bruce Weber hired him to style a Vogue shoot; printing 50 of his own photographs in poster size for a show; finding commercial success from works created after heartbreak in Los Angeles; testing positive for HIV; feeling more emboldened to live as fully as he could; attending the March on Washington and his response to the AIDS quilt; mourning the loss of a generation of gay mentors to youth today, and feeling strongly about giving back through teaching; perseverance and making work to perhaps make someone else's life better; working in Provincetown after being awarded a fellowship at the Fine Arts Work Center; the prayer-centered work in the Luhring Augustine show created as a direct result of being HIV-positive; his pink show as a celebratory show, of still being alive; his work in three Whitney biennials; the death of long-time friend Pat Hearn and honoring her at a Cheim & Read show; the genesis of his show at Regan Projects. Pierson recalls Azariah Eshkenazi, Rob Weiner, Donald Burgy, Stephen Tashjian [Tabboo!], Kathe Izzo, Mark Morrisroe, Pat Hearn, David Armstrong, Roberta Juarez, Colin de Land, Shaun Regan, and Pete Moran.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Artists -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Photographers -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Hearn, Pat, 1955-2000
Izzo, Kathe
Morrisroe, Mark, 1959-1989
Tabboo!, 1959-

Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project