



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Perry Townsend Rathbone

Funding for the digital reformatting of this interview in 2007 was provided by the Rathbone Family. 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.

Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>

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

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Oral history interview with Perry Townsend Rathbone |
| Date: | 1975 Aug. 8-1976 Sept. 24 |
| Identifier: | AAA.rathbo75 |
| Creator: | Rathbone, Perry Townsend, 1911-2000 (Interviewee) Cummings, Paul (Interviewer) |
| Extent: | 11 Items (sound tape reels; 3 3/4 ips.) 277 Pages (Transcript) |
| Language: | English . |
| Digital Content: | Digital Content: Oral history interview with Perry Townsend Rathbone, 1975 Aug. 8-1976 Sept. 24, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Perry Townsend Rathbone, 1975 Aug. 8-1976 Sept. 24, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt) |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

These interviews are 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 others.

Available Formats

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Biographical / Historical

Perry Townsend Rathbone (1911-2000) was a museum director from New York, N.Y. He was a curator at the Detroit Institute of Art, 1936-1940, director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis, 1940-1955, and director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1955-1972. At the time of the interview, Rathbone was director of the auction house, Christie's USA (1973-1977). He went on to become senior vice-president from 1977-1987, and a consultant beginning in 1987.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Perry Townsend Rathbone conducted 1975 Aug. 8-1976 Sept. 24, by Paul Cummings, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Perry speaks of his childhood in New York City and upstate New York; his parents; his education at Harvard University; his experience taking a museum course with Paul Sachs at Harvard; working in the education department and under William Valentiner at the Detroit Institute of the Arts during the Depression; assisting Valentiner in organizing the 1939 World's Fair art exhibitions; directing the St. Louis Museum of Art; funding strategies and practices for art museums; working for the Combat Artists' Program in the military during World War II; leaving St. Louis to direct the Boston Museum of Fine Arts; initiating museum membership programs and women's committees in St. Louis and Boston; leading the American Association of Museum Directors; traveling to Washington, DC to advocate for art museums during the 1969 income tax reform committee sessions; retiring early from the Boston Museum; assuming the directorship of Christie's in New York; notable acquisitions throughout his career; relationships with museum donors and boards of trustees; and exhibitions including *Westward the Way*, *Mississippi Panorama*, *Sport in Art*, *European Masters of the 20th century*, *Art of Ancient Peru*, *Gold of Ancient Americas*, and *Masterpieces of Primitive Art*. Perry also recalls Donald Oenslager, Bud Reed, John Mason Brown, Arthur Pope, Paul Sachs, Edward Forbes, William Valentiner, John Newberry, Louis LaBeaume, Lionberger Davis, Meyric Rogers, Curt Valentin, Max Beckmann, Henry McIlhenny, Joseph Pulitzer, Charles Norgle, Lansing Thoms, Etta Steinberg, Richard Weil, Gertrude Townsend, John W. Coolidge, Harold Edgell, W.G. Constable, Henry Rossiter, Gertrude Townsend, Carl Zahn, Hanns Swarzenski, Dows Dunham, Richard McLanathan, Walter Whitehill, Tenley Albright, Maxim Karolik, Nathaniel Saltonstall, Walter Chrysler, George Seybolt, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 11 sound tape reels. Reformatted in 2010 as 20 digital wav files. Duration is 16 hr., 43 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art, American
Museum directors -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings