



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Eric Rhein

Funded by the Keith Haring Foundation.

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
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Eric Rhein
Date:	2017 February 26-April 16
Identifier:	AAA.rhein17
Creator:	Rhein, Eric, 1961- (Interviewee) Kerr, Theodore (Interviewer)
Extent:	202 Pages (Transcript) 8 Items (sound files (9 hrs., 29 min.); digital, wav)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Audio: Oral history interview with Eric Rhein, 2017 February 26-April 16, 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.

Restrictions

This interview is access restricted; written permission is required. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Interviewee Eric Rhein (1961-) is a mixed-media artist living and working in New York, New York. Interviewer Theodore Kerr (1979-) is a writer and organizer in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Eric Rhein conducted 2017 February 26-April 16, by Theodore Kerr, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Mana Contemporary in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Scope and Contents

Rhein speaks of his youth in Kentucky, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and New York State's Hudson Valley; as a child, creating within the immersive educational community experience of his father's university art

teaching, including a focus on ceramics; the personal influence of his uncle Lige Clarke, a gay rights pioneer; early sexual experiences; formative experiences in art making and theatrical endeavors in high school; attending the School of Visual Arts in New York City, while simultaneously being immersed in New York's East Village art scene; early work in puppetry, including work for George Balanchine; significant romantic relationships; the shifts of his studio from the East Village, to Long Island City, and most recently to Jersey City; his devoted carrying of memories of friends who died of complications from AIDS; artwork made in response to the AIDS crisis; receiving his HIV diagnosis in 1987, and its implications for his life and artwork; finding support through groups like The Healing Circle and Friends In Deed; the relationship between creativity, nature, and spirituality; initial and ongoing work with Visual AIDS; HIV stigmatization in relation to body image and appearance; his extreme bodily fragility, near-death experience, and subsequent return to physical vitality; resiliency; medical care he received for HIV-related illnesses and the lifesaving effect of protease inhibitors; the genesis, forms, and evolution of his AIDS memorial, "Leaves;" art-making as a form of AIDS activism, as well as emotional evolution; his body of work as a memoir to his life's experience; the use & significance of salvaged and recycled materials; the genesis and significance of his "Lazarus" photographic self-portrait; the realities of long-term HIV survivorship, psychological vulnerability, and his commitment to continue healing; art-making as a way of isolating from the world; the sense of community among artists touched by HIV/AIDS; returning to the School of Visual Arts from 1998 to 2000, and receiving a Master's Degree; immersing himself in spirituality, including Native American and Eastern belief systems and healing arts; transformative experiences on Fire Island; the global reach of his art; different understandings of HIV/AIDS among younger generations; the showing of his work, and achieving recognition, in a context outside of HIV; the art world's market-driven mechanisms; his recent exhibitions, including internationally; torsos as a motif in his work; and the genesis and significance of his 2015 work, "The Order." Rhein also recalls: Philip Mullen, Jack Nichols, Steve Yates, Randy Wicker, Peter Cusack, Rika Burnham, Peter Lewton-Brain, Kermit Love, Abby Krey, Greer Lankton, Richard Hunt, Lincoln Kirstein, Steven Lonsdale, Billy Wonder, Bill Stelling, Ann Craig, Douglas Ferguson, David Salle, Jackie Winsor, Petah Coyne, Mats Gustafson, Ted Muehling, Huck Snyder, Antonio Lopez, Ross Bleckner, Annie Sprinkle, John Dugdale, Dr. Paul Bellman, David Hirsch, Frank Moore, Connie Butler, Robert Mapplethorpe, Edward Albee, Hugh Steers, Roland Waden, Russell Sharon, Luis Frangella, Wilfredo Vela, Arnie Zane, Carlos Rodriguez, John Sex, Joe Piazza, Ken Davis, William Weichert, Ramsey McPhillips, Hannah Wilke, David Nelson, Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Hunter Reynolds, Stephen Vider, Gail Thacker, Rafael Sanchez, Mark Isaacson, Ralph Cutler, Michael Von Uchtrup, Chrys Skleros, Bruce Bergman, Jim Pepper, Bill Olander, Barbara Hunt McLanahan, Andrew Zabler, Pavel Zoubok, Richard Anderson, Kris Nuzzi, Seth Joseph Weine, Walt Cessna, Spencer Cox, and others.

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
Mixed media (Art)

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project