



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Kenny Scharf

Funding for this interview was provided 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
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Kenny Scharf
Identifier:	AAA.scharf17
Date:	2017 February 22-23
Creator:	Scharf, Kenny (Interviewee) Kerr, Theodore (Interviewer)
Extent:	3 Items (sound files (5 hr., 3 min.); digital, wav)
Language:	English .

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

Interview ACCESS RESTRICTED; Use requires written permission.

Biographical / Historical

Kenny Scharf (1958-) is a painter, muralist, sculptor, installation artist in Los Angeles, California. Theodore Kerr (1979-) is a writer and organizer in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Kenny Scharf conducted 2017 February 22-23, by Theodore Kerr, for the Archives of American Art's Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project, at Scharf's studio in Los Angeles, California.

Scope and Contents

Scharf speaks of his childhood and adolescence in Los Angeles; choosing to attend the School of Visual Arts in New York; his first exhibition with Fiorucci upon arriving in New York; lasting relationships from his SVA years; the development of his interest in an outer space aesthetic; dancing at various downtown nightclubs in New York before and during the AIDS crisis; his early film work and its environmentalist impulse; his disillusionment with the art market; his intense motivation to become a recognized artist after not being included in the 1983 Whitney Biennial with Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat; feeling forgotten by the art world again in the 1990s; feeling overlooked as an influence on Takashi Murakami's artwork; seeing

many friends die of AIDS in the 1980s; getting married, having children, and living a heteronormative lifestyle in response to the AIDS crisis; sensing a widespread fear of having sex during the AIDS epidemic; his personal struggle to remain joyful and productive during this time; moving to Miami in 1992; his experience of survivor's guilt; Haring's relationship with Scharf's children as their godfather; the difference in reactions to the initial AIDS crisis from the queer and straight art worlds; the difficulties of watching those with HIV physically and mentally deteriorate; rising homophobia during the early AIDS crisis; contracting hepatitis, and then HIV, while in Miami, and receiving successful treatment from a local herbalist; dealing with depression while in Miami; moving from Miami to Los Angeles in 1999, in part to pursue animation; the genesis of the Closets series; moving back to New York in 2007; the genesis of the Cosmic Cavern parties; the pervasive stigma attached to being HIV-positive; his current regimen for remaining HIV-undetectable ; his drive to show the worth and advantages of being an older artist; his desire to be remembered as a contemporary of Haring and Basquiat; the greater appreciation for life that he has after living through the AIDS crisis; his process of becoming more patient in his drive for recognition; the dilemma of wanting to be open about his HIV status without getting pigeonholed or becoming a spokesman; his recent work in painting murals; his disillusionment with Donald Trump's election; and the happy memories he experiences when walking around St. Mark's Place in New York. Scharf also recalls Eileen Guggenheim, Klaus Nomi, Joey Arias, Diane Von Furstenburg, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Basquiat, John Sex, Wendy Wild, Drew Straub, Jane Panetta, Andy Warhol, Nicholas Moufarrege, Martin Burgoyne, Kwong Chi, Susanne Bartch, Rene Ricard, Johnny Rudo, Jimmy De Sana, Paul Kasmin, Scott Ewalt, and others.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- AIDS (Disease) and the arts
- Installations (Art)
- Painters -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews
- Sculptors -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Visual Arts and the AIDS Epidemic: An Oral History Project

Occupations:

- Muralists -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews