



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ruth Adler Schnee

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Ruth Adler Schnee
Identifier:	AAA.schnee02
Date:	2002 November 24-30
Extent:	159 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Schnee, Ruth Adler, 1923- Schnee, Anita Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
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.

Available Formats

Transcript available online.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

Ruth Adler Schnee (1923-) is a textile artist from Southfield, Michigan.

Biographical / Historical

The interviewer, Anita Schnee, is her daughter and is from Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Ruth Adler Schnee conducted 2002 November 24-30, by Anita Schnee, at the artist's home in Southfield, Michigan, for the Archives of American Art as part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Scope and Contents

Schnee talks about her early childhood in Germany, living in Nazi Germany and her family's emigration to the U.S. in 1939; her family's beginnings in the U.S. and her education; working in the display department at Winkleman's Department store; her scholarship to Rhode Island School of Design; experiencing New York City at the close of WWII; attending Cranbrook Academy of Art; her friendship with Eliel and Loja Saarinen; meeting and marrying Edward Charles Schnee; their first silk screening studio in Detroit; early designs; a fire that destroyed the first Adler Schnee shop in 1955; the new Adler Schnee store on Livernois; buying trips to Norway, Sweden, and Finland; difficulties and strategies for selling fabric designs; teaching herself the silk-screening process; designing for the airline industry; her love of color; and the labor intensive process of making the perfect design.

Scope and Contents

Schnee also discusses her sources of inspiration and how they have changed over the years; good design as "problem solving"; participating in tradeshows and finding clients; the shop paper, "The Bugle;" the Detroit Artists Market; significant commissions including Braniff Airlines, Ford Rotunda Auditorium, the Feld-Weisberg Clinic, and the Jewish Home for the Aged; and a research trip to Williamsburg, Virginia, to learn early American design techniques. Schnee comments on her travels to Mexico, Germany, South America, Israel, and in the U.S. She concludes the sessions by reviewing the recording and providing additional information. Schnee recalls Paul Klee, Albert Kahn, Minoru Yamasaki, Maija Grotell, Richard Savage, Al Taubman, Louis Redstone, Hans Knoll, Victor Gruen, Edward Wormley, Edgar Kaufman, Susanne Dotson, Harley Melzian, Selma Fraiberg, Hedie and Helmut Goedeckemeyer, Roberto Lago, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 9 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 70 digital wav files. Duration is 11 hr., 9 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Economic aspects
Decorative arts
Design -- Study and teaching

Nazis -- Germany
Textile crafts -- Michigan -- Detroit
Textile designers -- Michigan -- Detroit -- Interviews
Voyages and travels
Women artists

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America