



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Jon Shirley

Funding for this interview was provided by Barbara Fleischman.

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.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects	2

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Jon Shirley
Identifier:	AAA.shirle18
Date:	2018 August 7-8
Extent:	6 Items (sound files (4 hr., 35 min.) Audio; digital, wav) 75 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Shirley, Jon, 1938- Riedel, Mija, 1958-
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 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

Jon Shirley (1938-) is a retired president, chief operating officer, and director of the Microsoft corporation, and a collector of Modern art, in Medina, Washington. Mija Riedel (1958-) is a writer and editor in San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Jon Shirley conducted 2018 August 7-8, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art and the Center for the History of Collecting in America at the Frick Art Reference Library of The Frick Collection, at Shirley's home in Medina, Washington.

Scope and Contents

Mr. Shirley recalls hiring architect George Suyama to design a 23,000-square-foot home to house the art collection Shirley was assembling with his wife, Mary; growing up in Honolulu, Philadelphia, and Puerto Rico as his father was in the military; an influential humanities class at the Hill School; discovering Alexander Calder while still in high school; studying at MIT; his 25-year tenure with Radio Shack and Tandy International Electronics stores; a five-year period in Brussels that expanded his knowledge of art; his and Mary's move to Seattle and subsequent engagement with art glass and Pilchuck; becoming president of Microsoft and taking the company public; the evolution of his Alexander Calder collection to 40+ works (what has been called the best privately held Calder collection in the U.S.); his 30+ year friendship with Chuck Close, collecting more than 30 of his works, and financing "The Portrait Speaks;" his long-term engagement with the Seattle Art Museum and in particular the founding and endowing of the Olympic Sculpture Park; Mary's death in 2013 and Shirley's subsequent remarriage to Kim Richter; and endeavoring to restore Calder's only posthumously made work, "Mountain and Clouds," in the Hart Senate Office Building. Shirley also recalls working with Robert Mnuchin, Anthony Grant, Sandy Rower, Tobias Meyer, Robert Storr, Patterson Sims, Arne Glimcher, Jinny Wright, Barney Ebsworth and the Pace Gallery; acquiring works by Magdalena Abakanowicz, Jesús Moroles, Marino Marini, Mark Rothko, Gerhard Richter, Mark di Suvero, Claes Oldenburg, David Smith, Joan Mitchell, Korean Dansaekhwa artists, Constantin Brancusi ("Bird in Space") and Alberto Giacometti ("Dog"); and building a collection of 350+ works of sculpture and post-WWI paintings.

System Details

Recorded on Tascam DR-100MKII R000329.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Collectors and collecting
Art, Modern

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Art Collectors: A Project in Partnership with the Center for the History of Collecting in America at
The Frick Collection
Calder, Alexander, 1898-1976
Close, Chuck, 1940-
Microsoft Corporation
Pilchuck Glass Center (Stanwood, Wash.)
Seattle Art Museum