



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Tommy Simpson

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. 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.

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Tommy Simpson
<b>Date:</b>	2004 May 6-July 2
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.simpso04
<b>Creator:</b>	Simpson, Tommy (Interviewee) Cooke, Edward S., 1954- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
<b>Extent:</b>	6 Items (Sound recording: 6 sound files (3 hr., 54 min.); digital, wav) 89 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Tommy Simpson, 2004 May 6-July 2, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Tommy Simpson, 2004 May 6-July 2, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)</a>

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## 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.

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## Biographical / Historical

Tommy Simpson (1939- ) is a furniture maker and sculptor from Washington Depot, Connecticut. Edward S. Cooke, Jr. is a professor from Newtonville, Massachusetts.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Tommy Simpson conducted 2004 May 6-July 2, by Edward S. Cooke, Jr., for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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## Scope and Contents

Simpson speaks of growing up in rural Illinois; making things as a child; discovering his interest in art at Northern Illinois University; getting an MFA in painting at Cranbrook Academy of Art; using the wood shop at Cranbrook; exhibiting at various galleries in New York City and moving to Connecticut; showing work in the

"Fantasy Furniture" exhibit at the Museum of Arts & Design; visiting Europe; the New York studio furniture market in the 1960s; writing the book, "Fantasy Furniture"; exhibiting in "Objects USA;" working as artist in residence at the Fairtree Gallery; teaching at the University of Hartford; his work ethic and productivity; living and working in Greenwich, Connecticut; the constraints of being classified as a furniture maker; teaching briefly at the Program In Artisanry and other schools; the increased public interest in fine woodworking in the 1980s; changes in the craft market; writing the book, "Two Looks to Home"; the influence of events on his work; his current interest in making whole interiors; working on commission; the current public interest in craft; expressing themes in his work; his working process in his studio; the future of fine woodworking; the difficulties of working with galleries; designing rugs; and visiting China. Simpson also recalls Zoltan Sepeshy, Wendell Castle, Paul Smith, Sam Maloof, Edward Zucca, Wendy Maruyama, Richard Newman, Judy McKie, and others.

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## General

Originally recorded on 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 54 min.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

### Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Furniture making -- Study and teaching
- Painting -- Study and teaching

### Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

### Names:

- Boston University. Program in Artisanry -- Faculty
- Castle, Wendell, 1932-2018
- Cranbrook Academy of Art -- Students
- Maloof, Sam
- Maruyama, Wendy, 1952-
- McKie, Judy Kensley, 1944-
- Museum of Arts and Design (New York, N.Y.)
- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
- Newman, Richard, (Artist)
- Northern Illinois University -- Students
- Sepeshy, Zoltan, 1898-1974
- Smith, Paul J., 1931-
- University of Hartford -- Faculty
- Zucca, Edward

### Occupations:

- Cabinetmakers
- Sculptors -- Connecticut

Places:

China -- Description and Travel  
Europe -- description and travel