



# Smithsonian

*Archives of American Art*

## Oral history interview with Lowery Stokes Sims

This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G 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/>

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Oral history interview with Lowery Stokes Sims
<b>Date:</b>	2010 July 15-22
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.sims10
<b>Creator:</b>	Sims, Lowery Stokes (Interviewee) Richards, Judith Olch (Interviewer) Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project
<b>Extent:</b>	110 Pages (Transcript)
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Digital Content:</b>	<a href="#">Digital Content: Oral history interview with Lowery Stokes Sims, 2010 July 15-22, Transcript</a> <a href="#">Audio: Oral history interview with Lowery Stokes Sims, 2010 July 15-22, 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.

### Available Formats

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

### Restrictions

This transcript is open for research. Access to the entire recording is restricted. Contact Reference Services for more information.

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## Biographical / Historical

Lowery Stokes Sims (1949- ) is a curator, art historian and art administrator in New York, N.Y. Judith Olch Richards (1947- ) is former director of iCI in New York, N.Y.

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## Scope and Contents

An interview of Lowery Stokes Sims conducted 2010 July 15 and 22, by Judith Olch Richards, for the Archives of American Art's Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts project, at Sims' home, in New York, N.Y.

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## Scope and Contents

Sims speaks of her family background; traveling to the south as a child; growing up in the Bronx and Queens, New York and being raised Catholic; the careers of her family members; her favorite subjects in elementary school; attending Queens College where she discovered art history; getting a sense of race and gender politics while earning her B.A. at Queens College; her participation in the "SEEK Program" which opened her up to African art and Black literature; her work at the Brooklyn Museum with Joy Sales teaching children about African art; the importance of her legacy and mentoring and working with other female African American art historians like Thelma Golden, Kellie Jones, and Leslie King-Hammond; her two-month trip to Europe following undergraduate school where she visited London, Greece, Turkey, Rome, and Amsterdam; her studies in Baltimore at Johns Hopkins University where she met David Boxer; completing her thesis on Africa architecture and her decision to leave the program upon receiving her Master's degree; the beginning of her career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as an assistant museum educator and her work with Irvine MacManus and William Miller; her decision to become a curator at the Met; her interactions with Henry Geldzahler, Philippe de Montebello, and the Menil family; the racism and sexism she encountered in her experiences at the Met; her work on an American realist exhibition; conflicts between department heads at the Met; her work on the "Ellsworth Kelly: Recent Paintings and Sculptures" exhibition in 1979; Her work on a Robert Beverly Hale show; her difficulties in working on the 1979 Clyfford Still exhibition; attending Columbia University and teaching at Queens College; her decision to get her Ph.D. at the City University of New York, beginning in 1981 where she studied under Robert Pincus-Witten; her interest in Wifredo Lam beginning in 1982 and her introduction to his widow, Lou Laurin-Lam; her dissertation on Lam and her stay with Lou Laurin-Lam in the Bastille area of Paris in the spring of 1993; the completion of her Ph.D. in 1995; and the submission of her dissertation to the University of Texas Press and its publication in 2002. Sims also recalls her promotion to the position of associate curator at the Met in 1980 and her work to include more women and artists of color within the museum's collection; her work on a John Marin exhibition and "The '80s: A New Generation" exhibition of 1988; her collaboration with the American Federation of the Arts on a series of exhibitions in the 1980s; her work on Kaylynn Sullivan and Hannah Wilke for the "Art & Ideology," show in 1984; co-curating the show "Art as a Verb: The Evolving Continuum: Installations, Performances, and Videos by 13 African-American Artists" with Leslie King-Hammond at the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1988-89; her first major exhibition, "Stuart Davis: American Painter," in 1991 and her collaboration with William Agee and William Lieberman; her work on the "Richard Pousette-Dart, 1916-1992" show in 1997-98; and the "On the Roof" exhibitions at the Met and "Abakanowicz on the Roof" in 1999. Sims also discusses her decision to leave the Met and take a position as the executive director of the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2000; hiring Thelma Golden; the technological and financial progress made during her tenure; The Studio Museum's Artist-in Residence program; her work with the New York City Cultural Institutions Group; her work on the exhibitions "The Challenge of the Modern: African-American Artists 1925-1945" in 2003 and "Frederick J. Brown: Portraits in Jazz, Blues, and Other Icons" in 2002; her position as president of the Studio Museum; her part-time teaching work; the exhibitions "Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary" in 2008-09, "Bigger, Better, More: The Art of Viola Frey" in 2010; "Dead or Alive" in 2010, and the "The Global Africa Project" from 2010-11; her work for the ArtTable organization; the changes she's seen in the art world since the beginning of her career; and her plans for future projects including a monograph on Robert Colescott.

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## General

Originally recorded on 3 memory cards as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 5 hr., 40 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:

African American art museum curators

Types of Materials:

Interviews  
Sound recordings

Names:

Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project

Occupations:

Art historians -- New York (State) -- New York  
Art museum curators -- New York (State) -- New York