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Oral history interview with Kiff Slemmons

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Kiff Slemmons
Identifier:	AAA.slemmo07
Date:	2007 November 1-2
Extent:	92 Pages (Transcript)
Creator:	Slemmons, Kiff Riedel, Mija, 1958- 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.

Biographical / Historical

Kiff Slemmons (1944-) is a metal artist from Chicago, Illinois. Interviewer Mija Riedel is a curator and writer from San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Kiff Slemmons conducted 2007 November 1-2, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Slemmons' home and studio in Chicago, Illinois.

Scope and Contents

Slemmons speaks of her childhood growing up in a small town in Iowa; helping her mother in the town pharmacy; working the printing press with her dad, who published the town newspaper; taking art lessons in grade school; learning to play the piano; attending one year at Scripps College before living for a year in Paris; attending the University of Iowa majoring in French; taking basic art classes her senior year; a spring trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, with her future husband Rod; financing the trip by selling 150 pairs of

earrings at the student art fair; visiting Monte Alban and being inspired by the ancient jewelry in Tomb 7; moving to Washington state; meeting Ella Steffins and doing jewelry repair work; a strong feeling of the maker's presence in work she repairs; the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi; imperfection as an attractive quality; the conscious decision made from jewelry making to art making, based more in ideas and concepts as opposed to simple decoration; series Hands of Heros, Figures of Speech; the importance of exhibiting her work as it would be seen worn as opposed to in cases under glass; the development of her breastplate pieces; the Top 10 Ethnic Hits; the layering of many meanings as well as materials in her work; her respect for the brevity of poetry and love of Emily Dickinson's work; the restraint of poetry in leaving things unsaid and her struggle to capture that essence; series Re:Pair and Imperfection coming out of her move to Chicago and the developing Iraq War; her workbench as an ever-changing sketchbook full of chaos, tension, and conversation; working with Francisco Toledo and the city of Oaxaca in developing paper jewelry; her travels to India, Africa, Mexico, and Japan; her piece Insectopedia and the great interest shown in it by entomologists; and her desire to send her work out in the world where it is seen and enjoyed. Slemmons also recalls Ramona Solberg, David LaPlantz, Leo Adams, Esther Knobel, Lloyd Herman, Dominic DiMare, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Hoch, Annette Messenger, Virginia Holshuh, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 13 digital wav files. Duration is 7 hr., 19 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Decorative arts
Jewelry makers -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews
Metal-workers -- Illinois -- Chicago -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Adams, Leo
Benjamin, Walter
Di Mare, Dominic, 1932-
Herman, Lloyd E.
Holshuh, Virginia
Höch, Hannah, 1889-1978
Knobel, Esther, 1949-
La Plantz, David
Messenger, Annette, 1943-
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Scripps College -- Students
Solberg, Ramona
Steffins, Ella
Toledo, Francisco, 1940-

University of Iowa -- Students