



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Barbara Lee Smith

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Barbara Lee Smith
Date:	2009 March 16-17
Identifier:	AAA.smith09
Creator:	Smith, Barbara Lee (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	6 Items (Sound recording: 6 sound files (5 hr., 21 min.)) 122 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Barbara Lee Smith, 2009 March 16-17, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Barbara Lee Smith, 2009 March 16-17, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

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

Barbara Lee Smith (1938-) is a mixed media artist known for sculptural drawings constructed from fabric and lives and works in Gig Harbor, Washington.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Barbara Lee Smith conducted 2009 March 16-17, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Smith's home, in Gig Harbor, Washington. Smith speaks of moving around a lot with her family as a child; most of her childhood memories in Cape May, New Jersey where she recalls an early love of the ocean; playing piano from early childhood through young adulthood and its continued influence in her visual art; attending Douglass College at Rutgers University where she graduated with a home economics major; the first time she saw an Abstract Expressionist exhibition in college and the memory of those paintings; her love of color through sunsets and music; learning machine embroidery as a

young mother from a Better Homes & Gardens article in the 1960s; falling in love with embroidery and learning as much as she could about the art form; being influenced by artists such as Mariska Karasz and Constance Howard; taking initiative after the Human Potential Movement and started pursuing embroidery art full time; participating in local, national and international embroidery and craft guilds; her love of historic embroideries; receiving her MFA Northern Illinois University; various techniques from her early years of making that still find their way into her work today; teaching workshops and seminars as an adult education teacher for almost 40 years; the influence of traveling to places such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom has had on her work; early abstract works in comparison to her recent, more representational work; the role maps have played in a good portion of her work; her work process and rather painterly approach to creating; the love of making and creating; the challenge and problem-solving qualities of taking commissions; writing the book, "Celebrating the Stitch" and the subsequent exhibitions that traveled around the world; the use of layering in her work to create clear layers of color; a collaborative book project with fellow artist, Jane Dunnewold; various exhibitions she has participated in and curated; her studio in Gig Harbor, Washington; relocating to Washington after 30 years in Chicago, Illinois and the influence the move had on her work. Smith also recalls Jill Nordforsclark, Randall Lanou, John Pemberton III, Jane Buckley, Jean Ray Laury, Jens Jensen, Bucky King, Henry Stahmer, Mary Lee Hu, Barbara Krug, Diane and Bill Itter, Renie Breskin Adams, Dimitri and Avra Liakos, Michael James, Chris Timmons, Studs Terkel, Bertil Vallien, Deidre Scherer, Jan Beaney, Tadao Andu, Jacqueline Govin, Jean Littlejohn, and Billie Ruth Sudduth among others.

General

Originally recorded as 6 sound files. Duration is 5 hr., 21 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Abstract expressionism
- African American women artists
- Decorative arts
- Fiber artists -- Washington -- Interviews.
- Human potential movement

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Adams, Renie Breskin
- Andu, Tadao
- Beany, Jan
- Buckley, Jane
- Dunnewold, Jane, 1954-
- Govin, Jacqueline
- Howard, Constance
- Hu, Mary Lee, 1943-
- Itter, Diane, 1946-1989
- Itter, William

James, Michael, 1949-
Jensen, Jens, 1860-1951
Karasz, Mariska, 1898-1960
King, Bucky
Krug, Barbara
Lanou, Randall
Lawry, Jean Ray
Liakos, Avra
Liakos, Dimitri
Littlejohn, Jean
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Nordsforsclark, Jill
Northern Illinois University -- Students
Pemberton, John
Rutgers University -- Students
Scherer, Deidre, 1944-
Stahmer, Henry
Sudduth, Billie Ruth
Terkel, Studs, 1912-2008
Timmons, Chris
Vallien, Bertil, 1938-

Functions:

Artists' studios

Places:

Australia -- Description and Travel
Great Britain -- Description and Travel
Japan -- Description and Travel
New Zealand -- Description and Travel