



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael Smith

Funding for this interview was provided by the Lichtenberg Family 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/>

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	1
Administrative Information	1
Scope and Contents.....	1
Scope and Contents.....	2
Biographical / Historical.....	1
Names and Subjects	2
Container Listing	

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Michael Smith
Identifier:	AAA.smith18
Date:	2018 July 30-August 1
Creator:	Smith, Michael, 1951 March 8- (Interviewee) Zapol, Liza, 1978- (Interviewer)
Extent:	9 Items (sound files (6 hr., 27 min.) Audio; digital, wav) 97 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Michael Smith, 2018 July 30-August 1, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Michael Smith, 2018 July 30-August 1, 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.

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

Michael Smith (1951-) is a performance artist, video, and installation artist, and a professor at University of Texas at Austin. Liza Zapol (1978-) is an oral historian at the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

An interview with Michael Smith conducted 2018 July 30 and August 1, by Liza Zapol, for the Archives of American Art at Smith's studio, in Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Contents

Smith discusses memories of his home, growing up on the South Side of Chicago; his father's work in real estate in Chicago; his understanding of the contract buyers lawsuit; his recollections of the changing demographics of his neighborhood from Jewish to African American; his relationship to his mother, father, and brother; his relationship to his Jewish identity growing up; his involvement in singing, sports, and girlfriends as a teenager; the influence of television, movies, and comedy records on his childhood; his early experiences of art and watching his brother paint; his departure from Chicago and attending the University of Colorado in 1968, where his brother went, and following in his footsteps as an artist; protesting the Vietnam War and avoiding the draft; his first experience in New York City at the Whitney Independent Study Program [ISP]; his training in dance with Hanya Holm at Colorado College, his first choreographies; his studio in Boulder, and then in Chicago; his transition from painting into performance; seeing improvisation, performance, and dance in Chicago; Seeing William Wegman's work; creating his first comedy performances; influence of Jackie Vernon; developing the ideas for "Mike" and "Baby Ikki"; his early scripts and performance notes; influence of Alfred Jarry and Richard Foreman; his script, costume, and movement for "Baby Ikki"; the creation of Comedy Hour in Chicago, and other early "skits"; the inspiration for Minimal Message Movement; Coming to New York and meeting Marcia Tucker; his inclusion in Performances: Four Evenings, Four Days, at the Whitney Museum; performing at the Collective, Artists Space, Franklin Furnace, and other downtown locations; living in SoHo and the East Village in New York; developing a sense of timing and pacing in his early work; the sets and props of Let's See What's in the Refrigerator; the social commentary or politics of "Mike"; creating the composition and set of Notes for a Rec Room; his notebooks, nation and brainstorm for work. In session two, Michael Smith describes his sense of humor; Jackie Vernon and his sense of delivery; the humor of Jacques Tati and Buster Keaton; creating his first work composed for video, Secret Horror; his relationship to music, punk, New Wave, Muzak, rap, and his band the Social Climbers; his involvement with the Times Square Show and Colab; creating more video work that placed Mike in a cultural context with Government Approved Home Fallout Shelter, Go For it, Mike, Death of a Salesman, and others; collaboration with William Wegman on World of Photography; working with Steve Paul on live variety shows such as Mike's Talent Show, and Mike's TV Show; creating work for Saturday Night Live and Cinemax; creating Mike's Kiddie Show and working with Doug Skinner; the changes in arts funding in the 1990s; Working with Joshua White and creating Musco; starting to work in education and teaching in Los Angeles, at Yale, and at the University of Texas at Austin, Teaching performance art and specific assignments; a photographic series of class photographs; Creating Open House at the New Museum, and Interstitial for the installation; Returning to Baby Ikki and working with Mike Kelley on A Voyage of Growth and Discovery; his friendship with Mike Kelley; his thoughts about infantalist themes with "Baby Ikki", The theme of aging in his work and current work,; the creation of Excuse Me?!...I'm Looking For the "Fountain of Youth," and Not Quite Under_Ground, commenting on social practice art; planning for his next project in Mexico City; his relationship to performance art; his dealers; curators, his response to critiques; his archive and thinking about his legacy. Smith also recalls Ron Clark, Malcolm Morley, Brice Marden, Carl Andre, Lawrence Weiner, Hanya Holm, Vito Acconci, Jim Self, Barbara Dilley, Mike Kelley, John Baldessari, Dike Blair, Mark Fischer, Carole Ann Klonarides, Eric Bogosian, Charlie Ahearn, Dick Connetto, Mark Bingham, Alan Herman, Tim Maul, Amy Sillman, Andrea Blum, Sharon Hayes, Chuck Nanney, Annette Carozzi, Toiny Castelli, Patty Brundrage, Christine Burgin, Emi Fontana, Chris Dercon, and Jay Sanders.

System Details

Recorded on Sound Devices 722.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Installations (Art)
Performance artists -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Occupations:

Video artists -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews