



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Billie Ruth Sudduth

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Billie Ruth Sudduth
Date:	2007 July 26-27
Identifier:	AAA.suddut07
Creator:	Sudduth, Billie Ruth (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer)
Extent:	3 Sound discs (Sound recording (4 hr., 42 min.); digital; 2 5/8 in.) 81 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Billie Ruth Sudduth, 2007 July 26-27, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Billie Ruth Sudduth, 2007 July 26-27, 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

Billie Ruth Sudduth is a basketmaker from Bakersville, North Carolina. Mija Riedel (1958-) is a curator and writer from San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Billie Ruth Sudduth conducted 2007 July 26-27, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist's home and studio, in Bakersville, North Carolina.

Scope and Contents

Sudduth speaks of her childhood in Alabama; her adoptive family; growing up in a creative and musical environment; an early exposure to women working with their hands; buying a Cherokee basket at age 12; childhood piano lessons and later exploring rhythm in her baskets; attending Huntingdon College; a strained relationship with her mother; meeting her biological family; attending the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa

and earning a Master's degree in social work; working as a social worker and psychologist for over 20 years; balancing a career with family; taking a basket-making class in an effort to relax and do something for herself; making baskets in spare time and teaching herself new techniques; her family's move to Las Vegas, Nevada; teaching basket-making classes to adults; developing Math in a Basket curriculum; an interest in Fibonacci and the inclusion of its ratio in her baskets; an interest in color and natural dyes; returning to North Carolina and focusing full time on basket making; receiving a North Carolina Arts Council Emerging Artists grant to photo-document her body of work; becoming interested in chaos theory and its application to her basketry; the popularity and success of Math in a Basket; teaching experiences at Penland School of Crafts, Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and John Campbell Folk School; receiving a North Carolina Arts Council Visual Artist grant to study Cherokee, Choctaw, and other Native American tribes' basketry; her extensive basket collection; the honor of being named a North Carolina Living Treasure; participating in juried shows, including exhibiting at the Smithsonian Craft Show for 12 years and the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show for seven years; the evolution of her workspace and studio; making the Carolina snowflake, which was exhibited at the White House; her exhibition history; an increasing respect for and recognition of baskets as art objects; the advantages university-trained artists have over self-taught artists; learning the business side of art making through trial and error; living and working in an incredible community of artists and collectors in North Carolina; a growing interest and participation in donating her baskets for fundraisers; and looking forward to spending more time with her grandchildren. Sudduth also recalls Cynthia Bringle, Carol Sedestrom Ross, Kenneth Trapp, Howard Risatti, Katie Gingrass, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 3 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 15 digital wav files. Duration is 4 hr., 42 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Basket makers -- North Carolina -- Interviews
- Basket making
- Decorative arts
- Women artists

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts -- Faculty
- Bringle, Cynthia, 1939-
- Gingrass, Katie
- Huntingdon College (Montgomery, Ala.) -- Students
- John Campbell Folk School -- Faculty
- Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
- Penland School of Crafts -- Faculty
- Risatti, Howard, 1943-
- Ross, Caroline Sedestrom
- Smithsonian Craft Show
- Trapp, Kenneth R.

University of Alabama -- Students

Occupations:

Psychologists -- North Carolina
Social workers -- North Carolina