



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Thomas Tibbs

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Thomas Tibbs
Identifier:	AAA.tibbs96
Date:	1996 March 19-May 9
Creator:	Tibbs, Thomas S., 1917-2002 (Interviewee) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)
Extent:	2 Sound cassettes (Sound recording (120 min.); analog) 49 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Thomas Tibbs, 1996 March 19-May 9, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Thomas Tibbs, 1996 March 19-May 9, 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. Funding for the transcription of this interview provided by Pasadena Art Alliance.

Biographical / Historical

Thomas Tibbs (1917-2002) was a museum director and educator from San Diego, California. Tibbs was founding director (1956-1960) of the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York and the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art (1968), now Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, where he promoted an interest in crafts, their collection and exhibition as art. He was director of the new museum in Huntington, W.V., where he initiated a crafts competition as a means to "fill the museum." His long-time interest in modern and contemporary art led him to hire I.M. Pei to design the new museum wing in Des Moines when he was director. Tibbs is professor emeritus of San Diego State University where he taught contemporary art.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Thomas Tibbs conducted 1996 March 19-May 9, by Paul Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art, at the artist's home, in Fallbrook, California.

Scope and Contents

Tibbs discusses his family background and early interest in the arts that led him to the University of Rochester (N.Y.), where he had his first museum experience and studied music and literature before doing post-graduate work as curator of prints and of education; the museum field in the late 1940s and the professionals he knew, among them his mentor Phillip Adams of the Cincinnati Art Museum and Grace McCann Morley; the changing ideas of contemporary art, regionalism, and New York's emergence as the center in the 1950s; his experiences with the New York school artists in the 1950s and his observations of their interests and individuality, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany exhibition at the Crafts Museum in 1958, an event which he credits the Tiffany fashion "rage" of the 1960s. Tibbs recalls artists Adolph Gottlieb, Mark Rothko, Franz Kline, Betty Parsons, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock, and Peggy Guggenheim, David Campbell, Earl Parten, Wharten Escherick, Margret Craver Withers, and Arlene Fisch.

General

Originally recorded on 2 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 4 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hr., 5 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Decorative arts
- Educators -- California -- San Diego -- Interviews
- Handicraft
- Museum directors -- California -- San Diego -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- American Crafts Council. Museum of Contemporary Crafts