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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert Trotman

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Robert Trotman
Identifier:	AAA.trotma05
Date:	2005 September 14
Creator:	Trotman, Bob, 1947- (Interviewee) Hanzal, Carla, 1965- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	51 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Robert Trotman, 2005 September 14, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Robert Trotman, 2005 September 14, 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

Robert Trotman (1947-) is a wood artist from Casar, N.C. Carla Hanzal is a curator from Charlotte, N.C.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Robert Trotman conducted 2005 September 14, by Carla Hanzal, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at the artist's studio, in Casar, N.C.

Scope and Contents

Trotman discusses how he first became involved and attracted to woodworking while living in northern Virginia in the 1970s; his early involvement with the Penland School of Crafts, Penland, N.C., and its influence on his work; his first visits to galleries in New York, including the Paula Cooper Gallery, the Heller Gallery, and the Holly Solomon Gallery, in the early 1980s; the difference between art and craft, and where his work

fits in that continuum; why he stopped making furniture in 1997, and what he hopes to accomplish as a sculptor; his major artistic influences, including Martin Puryear, Judith Shea, and James Surls; his academic background in philosophy, which was his major in college, and his attraction to existentialism, especially the writings of Franz Kafka; his upper-middle class childhood in Winston-Salem, N.C., where his father was a banker and his mother a homemaker, who was interested in early American furniture and antiques; his view of America as puritanical and of the American upper classes as "wooden," lacking feeling and soul; his uncle, Frank Trotman, a gallery/frame shop owner who lived a Bohemian lifestyle in Winston-Salem in the 1940s, and exposed him to the artist's lifestyle; his fascination with his grandmother's collection of wooden figures, which consisted of four- and five-inch-tall European peasant characters; his interest in human psychology, and his attraction to writers such as Slavoj Zizek and Jacques Lacan in particular; the pleasure he gets from working with wood and the strengths of its unique qualities; his commissions and how he feels they fit into his oeuvre overall; his teaching experiences; and the influence and support of his wife, Jane Trotman, on whom he relies for advice and feedback. Trotman also recalls John Brooks, Sam Maloof, Tom Spleth, Stuart Kestenbaum, Ron Mueck, Evan Penny, John Currin, Robert Lazzarini, Julie Heffernan, Stephan Balkenhol, George Adams, Robert Morris, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 4 sound discs. Reformatted in 2010 as 4 digital wav files. Duration is 3 hr., 25 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Decorative arts
Wood-carving -- Equipment and supplies

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Penland School of Handicrafts -- Students

Occupations:

Sculptors -- North Carolina
Wood-carvers -- North Carolina