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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with William Underhill

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with William Underhill
Identifier:	AAA.underh02
Date:	2002 June 8
Creator:	Underhill, William, 1933- (Interviewee) Carney, Margaret, 1949- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Extent:	41 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with William Underhill, 2002 June 8, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with William Underhill, 2002 June 8, 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 available on line.

Restrictions

Transcript available on the Archives of American Art website.

Biographical / Historical

William Underhill (1933-) is a metalsmith from Wellsville, N.Y. Margaret Carney is an art historian from New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview of William Underhill conducted 2002 June 8, by Margaret Carney, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, in Wellsville, N.Y.

Scope and Contents

Underhill speaks of being born in Berkeley, California, to parents who were art teachers; the differences between the West Coast Bay Area arts and crafts movement and that of the east coast; attending California College of Arts & Crafts for two years and then transferring to the University of California at Berkeley, in 1953, to enter the architecture program; building a dome out of aluminum for the city of Oakland's parks department with other students during the summer of 1956; being drafted into the Army in 1957; working for the U.S. Army headquarters in Germany as a draftsman; prominent and influential craft artists that he knew; marrying Linn Baldwin [Underhill], a fellow classmate, in 1957, and starting a family; re-entering UC Berkeley, finishing his B.A. degree in 1960 and completing his M.A. in 1961; his studies with Peter Voulkos; making bronze bowls, which led to his idea of casting wax, modeling wax fabrication, using sheet wax, and making textured sculpture and geometric shapes; having one of his bowl pieces in the Museum of Contemporary Crafts; the Oakland Museum buying a piece of his work; his teaching position at Highlands University in Las Vegas, N.M.; being in the "Young Americans" exhibit and receiving the "Best of Show" award in 1962; most teachers trying to "emulate" the style of Peter Voulkos; moving to New York; showing at the Blumenfeld Gallery; sharing a studio next to the Clay Arts Center in Port Chester, N.Y.; building a foundry and a melting facility; teaching part-time at a community adult art center in White Plains, N.Y.; his financial difficulties; teaching part-time at Pratt Institute in 1965; J. Gordon Lippincott, of the industrial firm Lippincott and Margolies, commissioning him to do large scale steel sculptures for major corporations; working as a draftsman in an architect's office in New York City to pay for rent and groceries in 1966; teaching a summer session at Columbia's Teacher's College; teaching full-time as an instructor at New York University in 1967; teaching a workshop at Alfred University, in 1963; interviewing for a teaching position at Alfred at the College Art Association meeting, in Boston, in 1968; moving in the summer of 1969 to Alfred to teach; his counter-culture lifestyle and consequent decrease in his artistic production; showing at the Lee Nordness Gallery in the 1960s; exhibiting at the Perimeter Gallery, Helen Drutt Gallery, Twining Gallery, and Garth Clark Gallery in the 1980s; creating the bronzed statue of King Alfred for Alfred University and selling his copyright to them; his signature stamp; having pieces in the American Craft Museum and in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's collection; teaching at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, the Anderson Ranch, and the Mendocino Art Center; various craft magazines including Craft Horizons and Metalsmith; being a member of the American Craft Council [ACC]; his retirement in 1997; and working at the Berkeley Art Foundry in the summer of 2002. Underhill also recalls Robert Arneson, Josephine Blumenfeld, Diane Cox, Val Cushing, Peter Dodge, Jack Earl, Andrew Jevremovic, Manuel Neri, Bill Parry, Ted Randall, Dan Rhodes, Glenn Zweygardt, and others.

General

Originally recorded on 2 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 4 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hr., 7 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Art -- Economic aspects
- Art metal-work -- Study and teaching
- Art metal-work -- Technique
- Bronze founding -- Technique
- Decorative arts

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Names:

Alfred University -- Faculty
Lee Nordness Galleries
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Voulkos, Peter, 1924-2002

Occupations:

Sculptors -- New York (State)