



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with John Wilmerding

Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with John Wilmerding
Date:	2018 March 19-20
Identifier:	AAA.wilmer18
Creator:	Wilmerding, John (Interviewee) Lyon, Christopher (Interviewer)
Extent:	7 Items (sound files (6 hr., 12 min.) Audio; digital, wav) 82 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with John Wilmerding, 2018 March 19-20, Transcript

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.

Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds Wilmerding's thesis (B.A.) "Fitz Hugh Lane: American marine painter, 1804-1865," Harvard University, 1960.

Available Formats

Transcript is available on the Archives of American Art's website.

Restrictions

This transcript is open for research. Access to the entire audio recording is restricted. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

John Wilmerding (1938-) is an art historian and curator in New York, New York. Christopher Lyon (1949-) is a writer in Brooklyn, New York.

Scope and Contents

An interview with John Wilmerding conducted 2018 March 19-20, by Christopher Lyon, for the Archives of American Art, at Wilmerding's home in New York, New York.

Scope and Contents

Wilmerding speaks of the indirect influence of his grandmother Electra Webb; his initial exposure to art history as a freshman at Harvard; the stigma against specializing in American art history that he encountered at Harvard; his undergraduate thesis work on the marine paintings of Fitz Henry Lane; starting his art collection in the early 1960s; the generation of American art historians with whom he attended graduate school at Harvard; early teaching experiences at Dartmouth; composing the "Pelican History of American Art;" his decision to become a senior curator at the National Gallery; the beginning of his interdisciplinary scholarship in an American Studies context; early curatorial experiences; his work as deputy director of the National Gallery; his decision to take a professorship at Princeton; organizing the Andrew Wyeth "Helga" exhibition and catalogue for the National Gallery; developing relationships with collectors and lenders while at the National Gallery; composing "Compass and Clock" and "Signs of the Artist: Signatures and Self-Expression in American Painting" after affiliating with Princeton's American Studies program; organizing an exhibition and promised gift of his personal 19th-century collection for the National Gallery; beginning to collect Pop art; the beginnings of his writings on 20th-century American artists; organizing "The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art" with Acquavella Gallery and Rizzoli; working with Alice Walton to create the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; and the personal meaning he has derived from teaching. Wilmerding also recalls Vincent Scully, John Coolidge, Seymour Slive, Benjamin Rowland, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, Maxim Karolik, Alfred Mansfield Brooks, Theodore Stebbins, Barbara Novak, Charlie Childs, Stuart Feld, David Huntington, Jules Prown, Carter Brown, James Cox, Robert Rosenblum, Wanda Corn, Paul Gottlieb, Leonard Andrews, Paul and Bunny Mellon, Richard Estes, Allan Stone, Robert Indiana, Tom Wesselmann, Ralph Lerner, Moshe Safdie, Neil Rudenstine, Philippe de Montebello, Leon Black, Max Anderson, Kathy Foster, Rebecca Zurier, Franklin Kelly, Carter Cleveland

System Details

Recorded on Tascam DR-100MKII R00030.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Art -- Collectors and collecting -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews
Curators -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings

Occupations:

Art historians -- New York (State) -- New York -- Interviews