



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Robert Winokur

Funding for this interview was provided by the Nanette L. Laitman
Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

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Collection Overview

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| Repository: | Archives of American Art |
| Title: | Oral history interview with Robert Winokur |
| Identifier: | AAA.winokr11 |
| Date: | 2011 July 23-24 |
| Creator: | Winokur, Robert, 1933- (Interviewee) Riedel, Mija, 1958- (Interviewer) Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America |
| Extent: | 7 Items (Sound recording: 7 sound files (5 hr., 35 min.)) 159 Pages (Transcript) |
| Language: | English . |
| Digital Content: | Digital Content: Oral history interview with Robert Winokur, 2011 July 23-24, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Robert Winokur, 2011 July 23-24, 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 Winokur (1933-) is a ceramist in Horsham, Pennsylvania. Mija Riedel (1958-) is an independent scholar in San Francisco, California.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Robert Winokur conducted 2011 July 23 and 24, by Mija Riedel, for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America, at Winokur's home and studio, in Horsham, Pennsylvania.

Scope and Contents

Robert speaks of his mother earning an award for her artwork; his father and other family members being Communists and having to distance himself in being identified with them; his mother making ceramic jewelry

while his father was working as a welder at Cramps Shipyard in Philadelphia during World War II; feeling like he had an attention deficit disorder of some kind, which prevented him from doing well in school, so he took ceramics classes in high school to bring his grades up; starting in painting at the Tyler School of Art, finishing in sculpture, clay, and ceramics; appreciating the Abstract Expressionist work of Franz Kline; of the opinion that one learns art by doing and that the teachers are there to direct you only; feeling that he did not have the freedom to experiment with clay as he wished at Alfred University, School of Art and Design for fear of being compared to Peter Voulkos; his first job teaching at North Texas State University in Denton, Texas; teaching in Peoria, Illinois for a year; beginning Cape Street Pottery in Ashfield, Massachusetts; when he began salt firing and working more in sculptural forms; his work influenced by Abstract Expressionism, Paul Klee, Willem de Kooning, Ignazio Giacometti, Zen master calligraphers, Peter Voulkos, and others; feeling that the computer cannot, as of yet, produce the quality of art that humans can through repetition; that the process of creating is more important than the subject; starting his 30-year teaching career at Tyler School of Art in 1966; that students today are approaching ceramics conceptually and academically rather than through a relationship with the material; the beginning of NCECA [National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts]; and how he enjoys making what he wants to, now that he is retired. Robert also recalls Rudolf Staffel, John Wood, Ted Randall, Daniel Rhodes, Shoji Hamada, Marguerite Wildenhain, Ken Ferguson, Norm Schulman, Victor Babu, Myrna Minter, Don Reitz, Helen Drutt English, Richard Notkin, Dick Hay, Marge Levy, and Ken Vavrek.

General

Originally recorded as 7 sound files. Duration is 5 hr., 35 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Abstract expressionism
- Ceramic jewelry
- Ceramicists -- Pennsylvania -- Interviews
- Ceramics -- Study and teaching
- Communism
- Painting -- Study and teaching
- Sculpture -- Study and teaching
- World War, 1939-1945

Types of Materials:

- Interviews
- Sound recordings

Names:

- Alfred University -- Students
- Babu, Victor, 1936-
- De Kooning, Willem, 1904-1997
- Ferguson, Ken, 1928-
- Giacometti, Ignazio
- Hamada, Shōji, 1894-1978
- Hay, Dick
- Helen Drutt Gallery

Klee, Paul, 1879-1940
Kline, Franz, 1910-1962
Levy, Marge
Minter, Myrna
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (U.S.)
North Texas State University -- Faculty
Notkin, Richard
Randall, Theodore, 1914-1985
Reitz, Don, 1929-2014
Rhodes, Daniel, 1911-1989
Schulman, Norman, 1924-
Staffel, Rudolf, 1911-2002
Tyler School of Art -- Faculty
Tyler School of Art -- Students
Vavrek, Ken
Voukos, Peter, 1924-2002
Wildenhain, Marguerite
Wood, John, 1922-2012