



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Joel-Peter Witkin

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.

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Joel-Peter Witkin
Date:	1999 October 18 and 2001 August 14
Identifier:	AAA.witkin99
Creator:	Witkin, Joel-Peter, 1939- (Interviewee) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)
Extent:	3 Items (sound cassettes (165 min.); analog.)
Language:	English .

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 is provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance.

Acquisition Information

Funding source: Pasadena Art Alliance

Available Formats

Transcript available at Archives of American Art offices with an appointment and through interlibrary loan.

Conditions Governing Use

Authorization to quote or reproduce for the purposes of publication requires written permission from Joel-Peter Witkin. Contact Reference Services for more information.

Biographical / Historical

Joel-Peter Witkin (1939-) is a photographer from Albuquerque, N.M.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Joel Peter Witkin conducted 1999 October 18 and 2001 August 14, by Paul Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art, in Witkin's home, in Albuquerque, N.M.

Scope and Contents

Witkin discusses his childhood in Brooklyn; his Italian and Russian Jewish heritage; his parent's religious differences and their interest in art and music; his father's desertion when he and his twin brother were three; his early use of a Kodak camera in hopes to "see God," and finding an image and accepting it as an epiphany; a 1966 trip to Europe, especially time spent in Paris; his attraction to risk taking and pushing limits which he attributes to his father's gambling and his belief that such risks are necessary to discover life and self; photographing sideshow freaks, in which he discovered a sense of family; seeking the supernatural in photography; and spiritual redemption through his chosen medium.

General

Originally recorded on 3 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 6 digital wav files. Duration is 2 hr., 44 min.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Photographers -- New Mexico -- Albuquerque -- Interviews

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Sound recordings