



Artists Documentation Program (ADP) Interview Video Index

Artist: George Herms

Date: February 10, 2017

Location: The Menil Collection

Interviewer: Brad Epley and Kari Dodson

Video / Edit: Laurie McDonald

Total Run Time: 01:34:26

Abstract:

Artist George Herms discusses his work with The Menil Collection's Chief Conservator, Brad Epley and Assistant Objects Conservator, Kari Dodson on the occasion of the exhibition "Holy Barbarians: Beat Culture on the West Coast" at The Menil Collection, November 18, 2016-March 12, 2017. The discussion focuses primarily on materials used in his found object assemblage sculptures, and his feelings towards their deterioration and conservation. Throughout the interview, Herms relates history and anecdotes about his relationships with fellow Beatnik era artists.

Controlled Access Headings (Library of Congress):

Corporate Name(s)

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Artists Documentation Program
Menil Collection (Houston, Tex.)
Whitney Museum of American Art

Genre(s)

Interviews
Oral histories

Personal Name(s)

Dodson, Kari
Epley, Bradford
Herms, George, 1935-
McDonald, Laurie

Subject(s)

Art--Conservation and restoration
Art--Technique
Artists--Interviews
Artists' materials
Assemblage (Art)

ADP Interview Video Index

Indexed by: Megan Peck, June 2018

Video: adp2017a_herms_edmast_a.mp4 / Interview #: VI2000-020.2017a

Interview date: 02/10/2017

Exhibitions/Works:

Names of exhibitions and works referenced during this interview appear below in gray cells.

Controlled Vocabulary:

Except where indicated, all keywords employ Getty vocabularies (AAT/ULAN/TGN). Those marked with (*) employ Library of Congress Authorities. Those marked with (**) employ local terms.

| Time | Contents | Subject Keywords |
|----------|---|--|
| 00:00:05 | Opening Credits | |
| 00:00:40 | Introduction – Brad Epley, George Herms, Kari Dodson Herms discusses being open about his works and his creation processes and techniques. | found objects Teske, Edmund Ungaro, Carol Mancusi-* |
| 00:00:48 | (Exhibition Reference) “Holy Barbarians: Beat Culture on the West Coast” The Menil Collection, Houston, TX November 18, 2016-March 12, 2017 | |
| 00:01:59 | (Image) George Herms <i>Shrine for Painters</i>, 1960 Private Collection | |
| 00:02:00 | Process of Creation/Nature of Work – Herms examines <i>Shrine for Painters</i> , 1960. He notes the provenance of specific elements, and recalls its exhibition in a group show at Batman Gallery in 1961. Herms also discusses some of the influences for his found object shrines. | Altoon, John assemblage (sculpture technique) Batman Gallery* Berman, Wallace collages (visual works) Corte Madera Creek (creek) found objects found object sculpture Larkspur (inhabited place) Mexico City (inhabited place) pseudonyms Richer, Arthur San Francisco Bay (bay) San Quentin (inhabited place) Seitz, William Chapin shrines (structures) |
| 00:02:11 | (Exhibition Reference) “George Herms” Batman Gallery, San Francisco, CA May 1961 | |

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| 00:02:27 | <p>(Artwork Reference) George Herms <i>Baudelaire</i>, 1960 Private Collection</p> <p><i>Cowboy</i>, 1960 (no longer extant)</p> | |
| 00:06:59 | <p>(Bibliographic Reference) Berman, Wallace, <i>Semina</i>. (periodical of nine issues) 1955-1964</p> | |
| 00:07:44 | <p>Nature of Work/Process of Creation - Herms discusses the ethos that led him to assemblage, working with found objects, and creating shrines.</p> | <p>assemblage (sculpture technique) beachcombing** Duchamp, Marcel found objects shrines (structures)</p> |
| 00:10:00 | <p>Nature of Work and Conservation Issues - Herms addresses Kari Dodson's question about replicating or replacing damaged objects on his sculptures. He ponders the natural aging of art, and time and weathering being elements of his sculptures. He also discusses some of his own experiments and attempts to preserve objects.</p> | <p>found objects Marmor, Judd* Marquette, William Clayton** resin (organic material) rust time varnish weathering</p> |
| 00:12:09 | <p>(Image) George Herms <i>Shrine for Painters</i>, 1960 Private Collection</p> | |
| 00:14:03 | <p>(Artwork Reference) <i>Secret Archives</i>, 1974 Private Collection, Topanga, CA Courtesy of L.A. Louver, Venice, CA</p> | |
| 00:14:10 | <p>(Exhibition) "The Prometheus Archives: A Retrospective Exhibition of the Works of George Herms" Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA June 2-July 22, 1979</p> | |
| 00:17:17 | <p>(Bibliographic Reference) Herms, George, <i>The River Book</i>. Venice, CA: Hamilton Press, 2014</p> | |

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| 00:18:48 | Exhibition and Historical Anecdote - Herms discusses <i>Wrench's</i> inclusion in the Object Makers exhibition in 1961. He talks about the impact of curators Bill Seitz, Walter Hopps, and Alfred Barr on his work and career, and relates several anecdotes about them. Herms also touches on his use of pseudonyms and the origins of Paul Mistrie. | Barr, Alfred Hamilton Duchamp, Marcel found objects Hopps, Walter Johns, Jasper pseudonyms Seitz, William Chapin |
| 00:19:03 | (Exhibition Reference) "Object Makers" Pomona College, Claremont, CA 1961 | |
| 00:19:49 | (Exhibition Reference) "Pseudonymphia" TJB Gallery, Newport Beach, CA 1975 | |
| 00:21:06 | (Bibliographic Reference) William Seitz, William C., <i>The Art of Assemblage</i> . New York: Plantin Press, 1961 | |
| 00:23:28 | (Exhibition Reference) "The Art of Assemblage" Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY October 4-November 12, 1961 | |
| 00:24:58 | Concept/Nature of Work and Exhibition – Herms examines and comments on <i>Wrench</i> . He ponders the significance of a label on one side and offers his suggestion to display <i>Wrench</i> with both faces visible. | Braque, Georges Guggenheim, Peggy Hopps, Walter Huber, Caroline* Picasso, Pablo rust weathering |
| 00:27:54 | Concept/Nature of Work - Herms discusses the importance of glue to his work and contemplates its impact on permanence. He also discusses the evolution of installation art from assemblage. | assemblage (sculpture technique) glue Hopps, Walter installations (visual works) |
| 00:29:22 | Process of Creation and Historical Anecdote - Herms and Dodson discuss <i>Paul's Piece</i> , 1961, created under the pseudonym Paul Mistrie. He touches on the use of pseudonyms among his contemporaries. Herms describes the objects used in the work, and explains the provenance of the exhibition announcement card on its reverse side. Throughout the discussion, Herms reflects on his relationship with other artists in the "Holy Barbarians: Beat Culture on the West Coast" exhibition, especially Ed Kienholz. He also offers some of his feelings towards the deterioration of art. | Alexander, Robert assemblages (sculpture) Batman Gallery* Beat Generation Berman, Wallace Dwan, Virginia* Hopps, Walter Kienholz, Edward labels (identifying artifacts) |

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| | | mail art pseudonyms Seitz, William Chapin Ungaro, Carol Mancusi-* |
| 00:31:50 | (Image) George Herms <i>Paul's Piece, 1961</i> Private Collection | |
| 00:36:05 | (Image) Announcement designed by Wallace Berman for Batman Gallery exhibition, 1961 | |
| 00:39:48 | Exhibition and Conservation Issues - Herms answers Kari Dodson's questions regarding the display of <i>Paul's Piece</i> and some of its elements. He relates a number of anecdotes regarding his reputation for creating sculptures that fall over. Herms also touches on fears of the atomic bomb deeply influencing Cold War Era artists' concepts of permanence. | Abstract Expressionist Altoon, John Bancroft, Sarah C. Cold War* Di Suvero, Mark Henger, Sue* Kaprow, Allan rust Serra, Richard |
| 00:39:52 | (Image) George Herms <i>Paul's Piece, 1961</i> Private Collection | |
| 00:41:38 | (Exhibition Reference) "Two Schools of Cool" Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA October 9, 2011-January 22, 2012 | |
| 00:42:28 | (Artwork Reference) George Herms <i>Greet the Circus with a Smile, 1961</i> The Menil Collection, Houston, TX Gift of Edwin Gregson | |
| 00:44:55 | Exhibition – Herms responds to Brad Epley's question regarding a Pasadena Art Museum label on the reverse side of <i>Paul's Piece</i> . He describes the arrangement of his works in the California Collage show at The Pasadena Art Museum and discusses the significance to him of viewing artists' works there. | Blum, Shirley Neilsen* collage (technique) collagists Cornell, Joseph Driscoll, Bobby, 1937-1968* Hopps, Walter labels (identifying artifacts) Pasadena Museum of California Art wind (weather) |

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| 00:45:56 | <p>(Image) George Herms <i>Paul's Piece</i> (reverse side)</p> <p>(Exhibition Reference) "Collage: Artists in California (Directions in Collage)" Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA June 19-July 20, 1962</p> | |
| 00:47:09 | <p>(Image) George Herms <i>The Librarian</i>, 1960 Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA Gift of Molly Barnes Image courtesy of Norton Simon Museum</p> | |
| 00:47:18 | <p>(Image) <i>Macks</i>, 1961 (no longer extant) Image source: <i>The River Book</i> courtesy of Wilder Herms</p> | |
| 00:48:27 | <p>(Exhibition Reference) "Marcel Duchamp Retrospective" Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA October 8-November 3, 1963</p> | |
| 00:48:39 | <p>(Exhibition Reference) "Joseph Cornell" Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA January 9-February 11, 1967</p> | |
| 00:49:12 | <p>Exhibition and Historical Anecdote – Herms relates the story of an opening at the Aura Gallery in Pasadena, California. He discusses his use of life raft dye for the exhibition's art labels and in another installation work.</p> | <p>Aura Gallery** Bogart, Humphrey, 1899-1957* Pasadena (inhabited place) dye Sea Dye Marker** Stockwell, Dean wall labels</p> |
| 00:49:14 | <p>(Image/Artwork Reference?) George Herms <i>Day of Bessie Smith</i>, 1962 The Menil Collection, Houston, TX Gift of Caroline Huber and estate of Walter Hopps</p> | |

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| 00:49:40 | (Exhibition Reference) “George Herms” Aura Gallery, Pasadena, CA 1962 | |
| 00:52:06 | Process of Creation and Concept/Nature of Work – Herms describes the techniques and materials used to create various elements of <i>The Day of Bessie Smith</i> . | book of days** butterfly hinges nails (fasteners) seashell Smith, Bessie, 1894-1937 |
| 00:52:33 | (Image) Detail George Herms <i>Day of Bessie Smith, 1962</i> The Menil Collection, Houston, TX Gift of Caroline Huber and estate of Walter Hopps | |
| 00:54:43 | Historic Anecdote - Herms discusses the connection between his exhibition and the love of jazz he shared with Jim Newman and Walter Hopps. | Aura Gallery** Hopps, Walter Chicago (inhabited place) jazz Newman, J.K. |
| 00:56:18 | (Image) Opening party for “George Herms” exhibition Aura Gallery, Pasadena, CA 1962 Photographs courtesy of Marvin Silver | |
| 00:56:36 | Exhibition, Conservation Issues, and Historical Anecdote – Herms expresses his concerns over the condition of <i>The Day of Bessie Smith</i> , and describes the provenance of materials used in the work. In response to Epley’s question regarding protective bonnets, Herms discusses his evolving opinion about Plexiglas. | beachcombing** collages (visual works) conservation (process) covers (overlying objects) Kienholz, Edward Los Angeles County Museum of Art Plexiglas™ plywood preservation (function) Richer, Arthur wood (plant material) |
| 00:56:46 | (Image/Artwork Reference) George Herms <i>The Librarian</i> Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA Gift of Molly Barnes | |
| 00:59:30 | (Artwork Reference) George Herms | |

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| | Zodiac Behind Glass Series, 1965-1966 | |
|----------|---|--|
| 01:01:48 | Exhibition – Herms and Dodson discuss the label from <i>Day of Bessie Smith</i> . Herms offers his opinion for displaying the label with the work. | wall labels |
| 01:03:10 | Conservation Issues and Process of Creation – Herms and Dodson discuss his concerns and preferences for the treatment of <i>Day of Bessie Smith</i> . Herms also discusses his sculptures that break planes. | beads (pierced objects) butterfly hinges collages (visual works) conservation (process) glue mussels preservation (function) seashell shell (animal material) wire |
| 01:07:58 | Conservation Issues and Process of Creation – Herms and Epley discuss the condition of <i>Greet the Circus with a Smile</i> . While inspecting the work, Herms describes his intent and creation of some of its component parts. Specifically, he addresses the element created under his pseudonym Tarzan Feathers, and the placement of “L-O-V-E” on all of his sculptures. Herms also relates a few anecdotes about his relationship with Wallace Berman. | Belasco, David, 1853-1931* Belasco Theatre (New York, N.Y.)* Berman, Wallace Brittin, Charles Cocteau, Jean Cornell, Joseph feathers (animal components) Pollock, Jackson San Francisco (inhabited place) staples tar (material) Ungaro, Carol Mancusi- |
| 01:08:14 | (Image) George Herms <i>Greet the Circus with a Smile, 1961</i> The Menil Collection, Houston, TX Gift of Edwin Gregson | |
| 01:11:02 | (Image) George Herms, 1972 Courtesy of the Frank J. Thomas Archives | |
| 01:11:24 | (Image/Video) Alberta Mayo and George Herms <i>Unbeknownst, 1977</i> Courtesy of Alberta May | |
| 01:14:51 | (Bibliographic Reference) Cocteau, Jean, <i>Vocabulaire</i> . 1922. | |
| 01:15:25 | (Artwork Reference) | |

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| | George Herms Saturn Collage, 1960 | |
| 01:19:32 | (Artwork Reference) George Herms All I Wanna Do is Swing 'N' Nail, 1961 University of California, Berkley Art Museum and Pacific Rim Film Archive Gift of Alfred Childs | |
| 01:21:01 | Process of Creation - Herms discusses his creative process. He describes his tendency to produce series, and the sources of inspiration for his waves of work. He also touches on his storage problem for the inventory of works in his possession. | Herms, Wilder** Hopps, Walter Love Press Publications** Menil, Dominique de printing ink Richer, Arthur |
| 01:25:10 | Historical Anecdote – Herms relates the story of the loss of <i>Hugo the Aquarian</i> . | Beattie, Paul Corte Madera Creek (creek) tides |
| 01:25:10 | (Artwork Reference and Image) George Herms Hugo the Aquarian No longer extant | |
| 01:27:27 | Process of Creation – Herms expresses his appreciation for the care of his works by the Menil Collection. He touches on the museum’s care of its collection at large, and specifically discusses taking inspiration from Yves Tanguy’s paintings. | conservation (process) found objects Menil Collection Tanguy, Yves |
| 01:29:46 | Historical Anecdote - Herms discusses his relationship with fashion designer Adam Kimmel. | Art Institute of Chicago Beat generation Brooklyn (borough) fashion design Florence (inhabited place) Hopper, Dennis Kimmel, Adam, 1960-* Shafrazi, Tony Sobieski, Leelee, 1983-* Wakefield, Neville, 1963* |
| 01:33:17 | Closing Credits | |