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Overview

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Oral history interview with Alexis Smith, 2014

— those are the people that I remember the most, but those are mostly really did, you know — we really did — it was a really interesting group

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And also, people sometimes change their know — because I feel like I'm saying —

MS. SMITH: Oh, so it doesn't matter, is what you're saying. I just want to this, they are not going to read it as though they've already read

ffi

ffi

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: As an old editor , you know that it has to — it

MS. SMITH: It must have been when I was — came here.

U-C-H-I-T-A, Hurtado. I'm not — I'm sure — I think it's H-U-R-T-A-D-O. She

ij

ij

studio is just right around the corner . It used to be on — it was on Venice

ij

ij

long time until she moved to New York, and she had — hardly ever comes

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who is also your teacher?

MS. SMITH: Let's see.

they — all the peasants had hallucinations and all this stu

natives, but it was more interesting to go places and look at the buildings

become a French teacher . And I just — that just wasn't going to fly. It

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where were you in France?

MS. SMITH: Huh?

Did you go to museums while you were in

that. It seemed — and I spent a summer in France, like I said, in one of

like

— you know, I started out as that. I right away realized that besides, you

not after high school.

France, I think maybe I went to France in a summer during college and

went there for the kind of lame reasons that teenagers have, which is

rmative.\]

1966, yeah.

and lipstick and stu

to Whittier , where there was like a higher class of people, because, the

neighborhood. And I don't remember what the name of it was. And that

forget what the name of the place was. It was like in a Mexican

MS. SMITH: I went to elementary school in — near the hospital. And I

away that you didn't have to come home on the weekend. Which were all

to this school that was close to the beach, cheap, and was far enough

was — graduated from high school and when I went to — and when I

frail and feminine and, you know, all that kind of stu

MS. SMITH: I think I was — I think what I wasn't was real, like, you know,

MS. SMITH: Yeah, because my [mother — AS] died when I was 11 [of

bother her that much when she was in the desert.

like that. So it was a big — and I think it sort of —

and that that was an important influence. Tell me about Palm Springs in

was the house like that you lived in in Whittier?

MS. SMITH: Right.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So anyway, it's not pleasant. I mean, you're

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So where did you move after that?

MS. SMITH: I moved away from the hospital, yeah.

where he gave advice to the locals in a greasy spoon because his

, I think that just did my father in. But

when my mother died young at really — my father was just completely

MS. SMITH: Oh, I don't really — I'm not sure I really know.

— it has that kind of colorful artist's background quality. But you didn't

that I grew up on the grounds of a mental hospital, because it was very

the place. And anyway, but my mother , you know, was like, "I married a

citrus ranch for a while. And —

Metropolitan State Hospital. And that was a mental hospital.

them up and walk them out.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MS. SMITH: Right.

Lucille Lloyd Doak Smith — AS] And —

Where were you — first of all, tell me your parents' names.

MS. SMITH: My full name as I — as it appeared on my birth certificate is

[As you can see, the transcription process has been cut off at some point, resulting in a large gap in the text. Please continue reading from the point where the transcription is available.]
MS. SMITH: Actually, it was 1992. But anyway, yeah, so I never could legally change it to Alexis Smith because she was still alive. And I couldn't legally change it to Alexis — AS to Alexis — ?

MS. SMITH: Yeah, that part is true.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, absolutely.

MS. SMITH: Yeah, that part is true.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, even from this piece about Queen Elizabeth I. And —

MS. SMITH: Oh, God.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MS. SMITH: This — right, Alexis Smith art chair is just — is just got —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Things that are pawned, exactly, and some

MS. SMITH: Well, I copied her signature.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this particular book is text and collage?

MS. SMITH: And that's her actual, the virgin — my copy of the actual

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Things that are pawned, exactly, and some

MS. SMITH: Yes.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it has a less —

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MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Things that are pawned, exactly, and some

MS. SMITH: Yes.
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, before this, I should say way before —

MS. SMITH: I mean, a lot of the stuff made to do the big, public artworks and put the details of the — where things where it was too much him and not enough me. That's all. I mean, I was supportive, I think, of artists working in these unconventional ways, the thing with him I'm pretty sure.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But not in '77. I don't think that's in '77.

I think I started the — when I started painting the props, adding three-dimensional elements? How did the evolution take that to using — painting backdrops, adding collage elements and the — here, and they have — and the — and bits —

MS. SMITH: Yeah, I think —

MS. SMITH: My boyfriend? I don't know. It's hard to go back. And it's so, you know, it's hard to go back.

That's when I started painting all the stuff —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I see right here, in 1977, you have your — on the beach and stuff. And I was pretty much around for that, but once it starts getting into —

MS. SMITH: Right. This is —

MS. SMITH: We had different ideas. Like, a word-of-mouth thing or, you know, where they, you know — where they used to have, like, in the basement, you could come in and stare at him or talk to him or whatever. And this is the way they used to have, like, a more of — a more normal way for them. And it cost, like, $100 or something, so that wasn't any big deal.

And a lot of those things evolved into the big pouncing patterns that we —

MS. SMITH: Oh, Charles shot him? [I don't know who shot him but I don't know, and Charles shot him.]

MS. SMITH: Yeah. I can't remember. I remember that the — I remember that he had —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you were there for —

MS. SMITH: — I need the title of this if we're doing it. 1980, 1981.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The performance where —

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

MS. SMITH: That has the bale of hay and the, you know, the palm tree on the beach and stuff.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The performance where —

MS. SMITH: — I need the title of this if we're doing it.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So these performances he's doing in the —

MS. SMITH: That's in — actually in his studio, which was this incredibly white, enameled everything, you know, brick building and black, gritty smoke and stuff. And he had some kind of stuff —

MS. SMITH: That was the real — the thing — what really got me in trouble was —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, you know, you knew about Hollywood. I thought their studios were cool. And I thought they were, you know, these kind of, you know, they really wanted to be somebody else. And I thought —

MS. SMITH: Second fiddle girlfriend, something like that.

MS. SMITH: Yeah, that's in — actually in his studio, which was this incredibly white, enameled everything, you know, brick building and black, gritty smoke and stuff.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The performance where —

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MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The performance where —

MS. SMITH: — I need the title of this if we're doing it.


MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The performance where —

MS. SMITH: — I need the title of this if we're doing it.

MS. SMITH: I think — I'm not sure whether I ripped a part of this one, but —

MS. SMITH: Second fiddle girlfriend, something like that.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Your artist teachers. I mean, Robert Irwin was more of a, you know — like a more of — a more normal feeling of — I think I met Scott when he was living with Chris’ —

MS. SMITH: Who, Chris?

MS. SMITH: Yeah, I don't know — I actually don't remember how we met, but he really couldn't be electrocuted because he — you know, he wasn't —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So those performances he's doing in the —

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MS. SMITH: — I need the title of this if we're doing it.
vacation. And these guys were, you know, wonderful, and all this kind of
total babe, and she just went wild. And that was the end of that. Don't
architect. And she — I wanted her to be my partner, right? But she, like I
Lawson. [Christine Lawson was my assistant at Ohio State and di much
Convention Center floors. So you were kind of working on them, that
thing appeared again, but the Lewiston monument.

MS. SMITH: — that thing — I can't remember. That thing came — that
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, you do —
MS. SMITH: — that's this one.
MS. SMITH: Yeah, that was —
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean,
them away.
MS. SMITH: Yeah, I know on that — those were beautiful, but they took
MS. SMITH: On Jack Kerouac's —
MS. SMITH: And I did some big pieces. That's
fledgling public art, too.

MS. SMITH: And it was — came out of me doing a lot of soul searching,
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.
MS. SMITH: Yeah.
ff

right?

MS. SMITH: I just needed a new start, that's all.

didn't happen. [My father died during the 1984 Olympics. I was so upset, I
putting them in the, you know, whatever. But that's why — that's what
mean? Those are the kinds of things that I think are i
eight —
shit, I should just break up with Coy, too, and, you know, and just go
in the summer of 1984. And I don't know whether this is something that
young. It was — there was more somebody, like, steering the boat.

a certain amount of work, then everything is of interest. And you, you
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And —

like that. And you just — it's
scale.

time. And it's when I knew you. You were dating Coy Howard.
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and you had another boyfriend at this
I get into an idea, it's like the
the, you know, these ideas about, you know, how are women di
ff
been through that consciousness-raising thing and, you know, all that
are. And so, it was — that was probably — I'd already, you know, sort of
ff

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I wrote — no, I wrote about
sometimes they don't. And a lot of the things that I do now, I don't need
along. And, you know, the ones — sometimes they need words, and
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [A
MS. SMITH: It's amazing, isn't it?

giving you credit for doing these painted installations in the early '80s.
one with the hamburger, "Make Me One With Everything" [I
by little, I realized that I don't really — I just stopped using the text,
actual narrative aspect to the way the work began.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Or the whole picture. Yes, yes.

that thing is, right?

MS. SMITH: Well, see, yeah, also, but — see, look at this one, this one
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But it made you more — it made your work
MS. SMITH: But it has all this weird stu
there was a way to control it. That's basically what everything boils down
realize that — usually, everything that I did, I did because I realized that

MS. SMITH: That one's a, you know, it's like a — it's like the color's perfect,
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How did you evolve your interest in frames?
MS. SMITH: Maybe. There might have been some crossover there —

crappy job working for an insurance company. And I toughed it out for a
people that was looking to work in their own studio, but I worked there —
make a model I, you know, I helped them. The thing I did that was the
MS. SMITH: I was the person that could be spared. I was the person who
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what did you do for —

Paradise Lost
from you, when you look back on it, if anything?

public art contributed a lot, but what did it take away from your career,

— I think it's, at that point, you decided not to take a job working

— I had boots on the ground, telling me

ff

if you didn't have, like, a million

MS. SMITH: But at the time, I don't know how I — in retrospect, it seems

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, at the time, didn't —

MS. SMITH: Well, I don't do it anymore because I can't. So I don't have to

studio a lot. You're very literary. You read. How do you make the

terrifically social person in my opinion. I mean, you work alone in your

brainstorm to deal with something that is unforeseen in terms of trying to

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [A

just have to have a really, really giant wall.

would have to — it could hang it on the wall and look great. You would

MS. SMITH: So it's languishing in my storage. And the thing that's really

years.

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

this sort of weird room that was constructed. And you walked on the rug.

black. And it's — it looks like the flames of hell. It's really a beautiful set

Hickey was asked to organize the biennial exhibition at — for SITE Santa

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right, you were asked to do the — Dave

MS. SMITH: Those are the — so it's five years between the Getty

AS\]. And we had a really wonderful time in Italy. And we made stu

MS. SMITH: So that was great. And we got to go together [Scott and I —

. And so —

MS. SMITH: It's like a — I think it was like a six weeks or two months

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, let's see what — that's quite a bit later .

really did try to make these things so that they — so that people would

beautiful watercolors and stu

asked me to do the Getty restaurant. And that's where all the imagery

AS]. And we had a really wonderful time in Italy. And we made stu

MS. SMITH: So that was great. And we got to go together [Scott and I —

. And so —

MS. SMITH: It's a residency.

remember .

ff

did those illuminated manuscript drawings and stu

like that. And he

1997 .

stu

Bellagio in Italy, and Scott did beautiful little watercolors with gold leaf

of the wall — one of the placements of the, you know, the wall changed

- AS\]

even — I'm proud of the Getty restaurant [\[Scott and I —

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: All right, but are — is football your only

it's also true that you're a football fan.

take over the industry because it was too gross.\[The giant terrazzo sports

MS. SMITH: All right, it's right here. Okay, so here's two of the sports

player and a basketball player, and you know, they have all — they have

it?

MS. SMITH: Well, the bad one was the one at Ohio State because I had to

back for more. I mean, you didn't do just do one public art project. I

to — it was easier to think it up than it was to make it, that's for sure.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So — but it was very nerve wracking?

this. And I worked in his o

Gehry when I was a young person. And I didn't — and he was really

know. But I actually — I did it because I could, basically. And I — the

on the cake, but it's a really big, nasty, dirty, expensive frosting.

lot of people from Asia travel here and stu

Rim would be, sort of, taken out and being made the focal point. And a

ff

Way and stu

FF

going to the Convention Center that were from other places. And they

has gotten so overgrown, that it looks like it was always there.

MS. SMITH: It was a labor of love as they call it. I mean, I did — I don't

MS. SMITH: I'm not as — I'm not very knowledgeable about anything but

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: All right, but are — is football your only

it?

MS. SMITH: You know, I don't really know. I think I must have quit teaching

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you'd had a lot — ate a lot of lobster , if I

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And when was that?

MS. SMITH: Yeah.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I was going to say — well, let's pause for a

in it, it's all this plastic stu

glass and all this stu

is the — it's got all the mother of pearl and the

[They laugh.]

stu

vacation. And these guys were, you know, wonderful, and all this kind of

Way and stu

FF

FF
MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I can't be wandering around.

MS. SMITH: Okay.

MS. SMITH: The everybody.

MS. SMITH: The everybody.

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MS. SMITH: Everybody.
MS. SMITH: You're welcome. You want to go to lunch?

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Thank you for your time.

MS. SMITH: We talked about just about everything.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Thank you for your time.

MS. SMITH: Okay. All right.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, on that note, we'll conclude this interview.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well —

MS. SMITH: I don't have enough money to buy another house — if I had

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He just kept buying new houses and sticking

MS. SMITH: Picasso never thought he made too much

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Picasso never thought he made too much

MS. SMITH: I can't think of anything o

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you feel like it limits other artists that

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you think —

MS. SMITH: You're a big appropriator .

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — sources, narrative, text.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — here that you think we should be talking

MS. SMITH: I don't know.

MS. SMITH: Oh, yeah, but see, those are just people that just came out of

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — for those shows. I've been in. [Laughs.] I don't know. Is there any other questions

MS. SMITH: It's — I've been doing it for so long now that

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. SMITH: Oh, yeah, well.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When you look back now, do those decisions

MS. SMITH: I don't do the giant public art things anymore. And — I just

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. SMITH: I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, I think that I had to be

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [A

MS. SMITH: You work out of — do you consider your

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — that I have to pay storage on.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — that I have to pay storage on.

MS. SMITH: I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, I think that I had to be

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

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MS. SMITH: I don't know. I'm not sure. I mean, I think that I had to be

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — that I have to pay storage on.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — that I have to pay storage on.

MS. SMITH: I mean, that's why you're just carrying around your passport

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — for those shows. I've been in. [Laughs.] I don't know. Is there any other questions

MS. SMITH: I don't even know who these people are that have to defend

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — it limits other artists that

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — it limits other artists that

MS. SMITH: I'm pretty much intuitive. A lot of my decisions are just based

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. SMITH: No. I think you — I think I could be in so many categories. I

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [A

MS. SMITH: And I don't know. It's — I've been doing it for so long now that

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. SMITH: I mean, that's why you're just carrying around your passport

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

MS. SMITH: Right, exactly. And my mother died when I was a kid. And my

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MS. DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: — to do that, I'd just pay the storage.

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