Parsons School of Design Centenary
oral history project, 1994
PC.07.01.01

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Collection Overview

Repository Kellen Design Archives

Creator - Interviewee Barrows, Stanley, 1914-1995

Creator - Interviewee Cole, Suzanne

Creator - Interviewee Constantine, Mildred

Creator - Interviewee Fernandez, Benedict J., 1936-

Creator - Interviewee Greenberg, Albert

Creator - Interviewee Gussow, Alan, 1931-1997

Creator - Interviewee Levy, David C.
Creator Parsons School of Design.

Creator - Interviewee Resika, Paul

Creator - Interviewee Rizzo, Frank S.

Creator - Interviewer Sawin, Martica

Creator - Interviewee Shedletsky, Stuart

Creator - Interviewee Tate, Allen, 1930-

Creator - Interviewee Touster, Irwin, 1921-

Title Parsons School of Design Centenary oral history project

Date 1994

Extent 13 audiocassettes: 19:20:24 duration; 15 PDF transcripts

Abstract The Parsons School of Design Centenary Oral History Project consists of recorded sound interviews with twelve individuals as well as two audio monologues by the project's manager, Martica Sawin. These interviews, all recorded in 1994, cover the history of different academic departments and design disciplines over the course of the twentieth century as experienced by leading former and then-current instructors and administrators. Recordings are all in English.

Preferred Citation note

[Identification of item], [date (if known)], Parsons School of Design Centenary oral history project, PC.07.01.01, box __, folder __, New School Archives and Special Collections, The New School, New York, New York.

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Biographical/Historical note

Parsons School of Design was established in 1896 as the Chase School of Art. While founded as a school of fine arts instruction, it soon added courses in "applied arts," which became the primary focus under the direction of Frank Alvah Parsons. The name of the school changed several times, to the New York School of Art in 1902, then to the New York School of Fine and Applied Art in 1909. In 1940, the Board of Trustees voted to change the school's name to Parsons School of Design in recognition of Frank Alvah Parsons' leadership and to differentiate it from other, similarly named institutions.

In 1921, Parsons' European School opened with headquarters in France called the Paris Ateliers. The Ateliers closed in 1939 due to the escalation of World War Two, and never reopened in its pre-war form. Parsons' summer study tours of Europe resumed in the late 1940s. When Parsons affiliated with the New School for Social Research in 1970, students could for the first time earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the New School (before the merger, students earned either a certificate for a three-year program of study at Parsons, or a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree granted by New York University, by taking courses at both schools). A more robust, year-round overseas program resumed at Parsons in the late 1970s under the leadership of Dean David C. Levy. The 1970s also saw the growth of continuing education programs at Parsons, and the introduction of an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree track. In the 1980s, Parsons developed a number of partnerships with international schools, and merged with the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. The first Parsons graduate program was established at Parsons in 1978, in Fine Arts, with masters programs in other areas added in subsequent years, including a Master of Architecture program begun in 1989.

In 1994, the school's leadership began compiling historical documentation in anticipation of commemorative activities marking the hundreth anniversary of Parsons' founding. Martica Sawin, an art historian and faculty member of the Liberal Studies program, undertook a project to identify and interview key participants in Parsons' history.

Participant Biographies

Stanley Barrows

Stanley Barrows (1914-1995) was born in Texas, and graduated from Washington and Lee University before studying at Parsons School of Design. Following his graduation from Parsons, he took a brief job with Joseph Platt as a design associate. After military service in Italy during World War Two as a draughtsman, Barrows returned to Parsons in 1946 to join the Interior Design Department, leading the school’s renowned summer trips to Europe. He left Parsons in 1968 to serve as chairman of the Interior Design Department at the Fashion Institute of Technology. After his retirement in 1985, he became an occasional contributor to Architectural Digest.

Suzanne Cole

Suzanne (Suzy) Cole graduated from Barnard College, and studied at the Art Students League and the Traphagen School. She was an instructor of fashion illustration for ten years before becoming the chair of the Department of Illustration at Parsons School of Design for thirteen years. She began teaching at Parsons in approximately 1959 and retired in 1981.

Mildred Constantine

Mildred Constantine (1913 or 1914-2008), an American expert in Mexican art and graphic design, was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) when she began instructing students in art...
history at Parsons in 1969. Constantine is known for enlarging the Poster Collection at MoMA and bringing attention to its works with premiere exhibitions. She received an MA in Art History from New York University in 1938. According to her 1980 entry in Baron's Who's Who in American Art, she began teaching at Parsons School of Design in 1971.

**Benedict J. Fernandez**

Benedict J. Fernandez III was the founding chair of the Parsons School of Design Photography Department from 1981 until he stepped down in 1992. Fernandez was born in 1936 in Harlem. After Alexey Brodovitch asked him to join Brodovitch's Design Laboratory in 1963, Fernandez accepted a job as a darkroom attendant at Parsons School of Design and built up a photography, which was attached to Communication Design until it became an independent department. Simultaneously, he ran the Photo Film Workshop, a photography session for low-income youth that met in the basement of the Public Theater. In his professional career, Fernandez is recognized as a seminal photographer of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the anti-Vietnam War protest movement. He has photographed subjects as diverse as biker gangs and the architecture of Ellis Island. After leaving Parsons, he founded the Hoboken Almanac of Photography and the Almanac Gallery in Hoboken, New Jersey, and served as a senior fellow at the Corcoran Museum in Washington, DC. He also served as a fellow to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences and Senior Fulbright Research Fellow, and is the recipient of both a National Endowment for the Arts Grant and the Guggenheim Fellowship. His work is in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian, the MoMA, and many other prestigious institutions.

**Albert Greenberg**

Albert (Al) Greenberg fought in both World War Two and the Korean War. He studied graphic design at the Cooper Union, graduating in 1948. Greenberg was the founding art director of *GQ* magazine. Under his thirteen year guidance, *GQ* became known for championing innovative photography and illustration. He later became vice president of the advertising agency Wells Rich Greene, Inc. In October 1983, he became the chair of the Communication Design Department at Parsons School of Design, which was subsequently renamed the Communication Design Department under his leadership. He retired from Parsons in 1994 after a decade as department chair.

**Alan Gussow**

Alan Gussow (1931-1997) was born in Rockville Center, NY. He graduated from Middlebury College in 1952 with a degree in literature before enrolling in the Cooper Union to study painting. In 1953, Gussow became the youngest artist to win the prestigious Prix de Rome, and he consequently continued his studies at the American Academy in Rome. Returning to New York in 1955, he began teaching at Parsons School of Design and Sarah Lawrence College. Gussow eventually chaired both the Editorial and Fashion Illustration Department and the Fine Arts Department. Gussow presided over a restructuring of the Fashion illustration Department in 1960, which included the introduction of photography and fashion business, an art history workshop, and greater cooperation with the Fashion Design Department. He left Parsons in 1968 to work for the presidential campaign of Robert F. Kennedy. As a painter, he exhibited in over fifty solo shows and published several monographs. Gussow was also well-known as an environmental spokesperson, leading early efforts to reduce pollution in the Hudson River.

**David C. Levy**

David C. Levy graduated from Columbia College in 1960 and joined the admissions staff of Parsons School of Design the following year. He was eventually promoted to Director of
Admissions, and became Vice President of Parsons during a budgetary crisis that resulted in Parsons' affiliation with the New School for Social Research in 1970. Levy served as dean of Parsons from 1970 until 1989, when he was appointed to serve concurrently as chancellor of the New School for Social Research and chancellor of the arts for the New School. Levy left the New School in 1991 to become director of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

**Paul Resika**

Paul Resika was born in 1928 in New York City. He studied painting at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which has his paintings in its collections. His work is also included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of American Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among many others. Resika was the Chair of the Master of Fine Arts program at Parsons School of Design from 1978 to 1990. Previously, he had been an adjunct professor at the Cooper Union from 1966 until he joined the Parsons' faculty.

**Frank Rizzo**

Frank S. Rizzo began attending Parsons School of Design in 1955 after military service during the Korean War, during which he studied textile design in Japan. He graduated from the Fashion Design Department in 1958. After a decade of professional designing at labels such as Jablow, Hannah Troy, and Ceil Chapman, Rizzo founded his own boutique in Midtown Manhattan in 1960. In 1966, Rizzo returned to Parsons as a member of the Fashion Design Department, and in 1982 was promoted to chairman following the retirement of Ann Keagy. He served in this capacity until 1996.

**Martica Sawin**

Martica Sawin is an art historian and writer. She graduated from the University of Iowa after attending Stanford University and the Sorbonne, and then became an executive secretary at MoMA, where she initiated the Art Lending Service. She became a freelance writer and then a professor at Hunter College, Columbia University, and eventually Parsons School of Design. In 1967, Sawin was appointed the Chair of the Department of Art History and Criticism of Art and Design at Parsons, where she remained a member of the faculty until 1995. She relaunched the school’s Parsons in Paris program, and served as curator of exhibitions in the Parsons' gallery. Sawin is the author of several monographs, including works on Wolf Kahn, Alan Gussow (included in this interview project), and Stephen Pace, in addition to scholarly essays on Surrealism.

**Stuart Shedletsky**

Stuart Shedletsky was born in Brooklyn in 1944. Although he was primarily interested in becoming an artist, he studied in the Graphic Design Department of Parsons School of Design before attending the University of New Mexico, and, ultimately, receiving his MFA from Yale University. He then returned to Parsons as a faculty member of a newly created Fine Arts Department, where he taught until 2002. Shedletsky's paintings are in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum. In 2006, Stuart Shedletsky died of lung cancer at the age of 62.

**Allen Tate**

Allen Tate (born Joseph Allen Tate) studied at Auburn University from 1947 until 1952, and taught at the school before working as a professional designer. At the suggestion of William Katavolos, Tate applied for and was hired to teach in the Interior Design Department of Parsons School of Design. Following the resignation of James Howell, Tate assumed the departmental chairmanship, and guided the department into its incarnation as Environmental Design until his termination in 1981. Tate is the author of a textbook, *Interior Design in the Twentieth Century*.

**Irwin Touster**
Irwin Touster was born in 1921. While serving in the United States Armed Forces during World War Two, Touster was a cartoonist for *Yank*, a magazine for servicemembers. Following his return from overseas, Touster cartooned for several publications including the *New Yorker* and the *Saturday Review of Literature*. He received a bachelor's degree from New York University and pursued graduate studies in Art Education at the University of New Hampshire. Touster chaired the Fine Arts Department of Parsons beginning in 1974, and simultaneously served as the art critic for the *Woodstock Times*. He retired from Parsons in 1992. Touster's work has been shown at a number of galleries. He is also the author of several books, including a memoir, the *Motel and Other Digressions* (2012).

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**Scope and Contents note**

Martica Sawin of Parsons School of Design's Liberal Studies Department conducted this series of interviews as part of an organized, documentation gathering effort in preparation for the centennial anniversary of Parsons' founding. According to a planning document (Charles S. Olton records, Committees and Meeting Minutes, Council of Chairs, 1994 Mar 1), the purpose of the project was to "provide an archive through taped interviews that will contain material for an informal history of Parsons School of Design."

"We are trying to develop not just an anecdotal history of Parsons, but to collect comments and observations that reflect a philosophy of art and design education and which record as well the stupendous changes within disciplines taught at Parsons over the past thirty years and the ways the school has met the challenge of these changes."

Departmental chairs were asked to suggest names of potential interview subjects consisting of "significant alumni" and "present or former faculty who should be interviewed." It is unclear from the records how much assistance chairs provided to Sawin in this endeavor. The intention was for the taped interviews to become part of Parsons School of Design's library.

Thirteen audiocassettes comprise the collection, totaling over nineteen hours of audio. Most of the interviews are approximately forty-five minutes to one hour in duration, although interviews with Stanley Barrows and David C. Levy are substantially longer. Several recordings begin or end abruptly, and it is unclear whether this is due to an error in the original recording, or additional tapes once existed and were never transferred onto the audiocassettes that comprise the Archives' collection.

In 2010, the New School Archives financed the professional digitization of the analog audiocassettes and transcription of all interviews. Archives staff members edited all transcripts for clarity and to identify personal names and organizations that the transcriber could not identify. Neither recordings nor transcripts have been edited for content.

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**Organization and Arrangement**
Administrative Information

Publication Information
Kellen Design Archives September 13, 2016

Access Restrictions
Collection is open for research use. Researchers must use digital access copies. Access to audiocassettes is restricted for reasons of preservation.

Use Restrictions
To publish all or part of any recording or transcription from this collection, permission must be obtained in writing from the New School Archives and Special Collections. Please contact: archivist@newschool.edu.

Custodial History note
According to documents in the Charles S. Olton records, these recordings were intended to be housed in the library of Parsons School of Design, which was the Adam and Sophie Gimbel Art and Design Library at the time of the recordings. The immediate source of acquisition is presently unknown.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
Transferred to the New School Archives from Parsons School of Design's Adam and Sophie Gimbel Design Library.

Existence and Location of Copies note
All recordings comprising this project have been converted to digital files (34 files in total) for researcher access. Digital transcripts (PDF file format) for each interview are also available for research use.

Related Materials
The Charles S. Olton records (PC.01.07.01) document the preparations undertaken by the Parsons School of Design administration in anticipation of the institution's centennial in 1996, including this oral history project.

Keywords for Searching Related Subjects
Corporate Name(s)
- New School (New York, N.Y.).
- Paris Ateliers.
- Parsons Paris.
- Parsons School of Design.

Genre(s)
- Audiocassettes.
- Interviews.
- Oral histories (document genres).
- Transcripts.

Occupation(s)
- Educators.

Personal Name(s)
- Katavolos, William

Subject(s)
- Architecture -- Environmental aspects.
- Art teachers -- United States -- 20th century.
- Art -- Study and teaching -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century.
- College administrators -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century.
- Graphic design -- Study and teaching -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century.
- Interior decoration -- Study and teaching -- New York (State) -- New York -- 20th century.
- Universities and colleges -- Curricula.

Other Finding Aids note
For item-level description and sound files from the Parsons School of Design Centenary Oral History Project, see The New School Archives Digital Collections at http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/collections/PC070101.

Collection Inventory
Audio interview with Stanley Barrows (1 of 2) 1994 Feb 1  00:24.26  1  1.A duration; Includes PDF transcript.
In this audio interview, Martica Sawin and Stanley Barrows examine drawings, photographs and old Parsons School of Design catalogs, using them as a prompt to discuss the Paris Ateliers and the type of work expected of interior design students in the mid-twentieth century. Barrows reminisces about Parsons School of Design presidents William M. Odom and Van Day Truex, as well as interior designers Billy Baldwin and Millicent Rogers. Barrows talks about his own career, primarily as a historian and author of articles.

Audio interview with Stanley Barrows (1 of 2), 1994 Feb 1
[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/PC070101_Barro...]

Audio interview with Stanley Barrows (2 of 2) 1994 Feb 10  03:00:26  1  2.A-B duration; Includes PDF transcript
In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Stanley Barrows recalls his experiences teaching at Parsons School of Design, particularly his role in leading summer trips to Europe in the 1950s and into the 1960s. He identifies and tells stories about memorable students and faculty, including Robert Castle, Glenn Boyles, Grace Fakes, Elsie Brown Barnes, Betty Carter, and Leo Steinberg. Barrows discusses the upheaval within the Interior Design Department during the late 1960s, the destruction of the school's interior design research collections, and his eventual move to the Fashion Institute of Technology in 1968. He reviews the history of Parsons School of Design based on stories handed down to him, as well as his own interactions with William M. Odom and Van Day Truex, both of whom he encountered as a student in the 1930s. Barrows relates his experiences studying at the Paris Ateliers in 1939 during the escalation of hostilities during World War Two, the eventual evacuation of students, and his return to the United States. He reminisces about his military service as a topographical engineer after being drafted in 1941. He relates how, after working for Joseph Platt, Van Day Truex invited him to teach at Parsons. He provides an assessment of Dynamic Symmetry's impact on Parsons and what the school's pedagogical aims were. There are numerous recording interruptions.

Audio interview with Stanley Barrows (2 of 2), 1994 Feb 10
[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/PC070101_Barro...]

Audio interview with Suzanne Cole 1994 Apr 14  01:30:03 duration; Includes 1 PDF transcript
In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Suzanne Cole, an instructor and later Chair of the Illustration Department at Parsons School of Design, discusses transitioning the department from a fashion illustration focus to a more general illustration focus during her tenure. Cole describes faculty members she and co-chair Murray Tinkelman hired, including J.C. Suarez, Randy Enos, and Maurice Sendak, and recounts her teaching strategies and those of her colleagues.

Audio interview with Suzanne Cole, 1994 Apr 14
[http://digitalarchives.library.newschool.edu/index.php/Detail/objects/PC070101_Cole_19940414]

Audio interview with Mildred Constantine 1994 Mar 17  00:43:53 duration; Includes PDF transcript
In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Mildred Constantine discusses joining the Graphic Design Department as an art and design history instructor at Parsons School of Design while also serving as a curator at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). She also describes her teaching methodologies and pedagogical philosophies during her time as an instructor of first-year students.

Audio interview with Mildred Constantine, 1994 Mar 17
In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Benedict J. Fernandez recounts joining the staff of Parsons School of Design, initially as a darkroom technician in the Graphic Design Department under the leadership of James Frangides, and subsequently establishing the Photography Department in 1978. He mentions recruiting Richard Avedon to teach Alexey Brodovitch’s “Design Laboratory” course. Fernandez discusses photographing Martin Luther King, Jr. in the early 1960s and later anti-war protest movements, including the “My God! We’re Losing a Great Country” exhibition held at Parsons. Also discussed in the interview is the FOCUS program, a student exchange between Parsons students and Russian photography students between 1988 and 1993.

Audio interview with Albert Greenberg, Chair of the Communication Design Department (formerly Graphic Design) of Parsons School of Design, discusses overseeing departmental transitions during his tenure, including the shift to computer-based design and changing student demographics. He also describes the initiatives he instituted to increase professionalism and develop career opportunities for students.

In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Alan Gussow relates the circumstances of being hired by Parsons School of Design Dean Norman Boothby in 1956 to teach drawing and painting, and the transition to becoming chair of the Editorial and Fashion Illustration Department. He recalls his efforts to recruit exceptional faculty, including his role in hiring instructors such as Diane Arbus and Cipe Pineles Golden. Gussow describes the administrative atmosphere at Parsons, and his efforts to find his own alternate career as a painter. Sawin recorded this interview with Gussow at his home in Congers, New York.

In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, David Corcos Levy, dean of Parsons School of Design from 1970 until 1989, describes being hired as an admissions officer at Parsons in 1961 as a young college graduate, and his efforts to broaden recruitment and enlarge the school’s enrollment. The interview also covers his role in launching Parsons' first degree-granting program and the establishment of the Foundation Year curriculum. Levy recounts the budget crises that led to Parsons' affiliation with the New School in 1970, and its relocation from 54th Street to its Greenwich Village campus in buildings previously owned by Mills College. Additional topics include curriculum planning, an exhibition in the 1970s of Works Progress Administration artists, a 1978 fundraising trip to Los Angeles with Albert Landa that resulted in an affiliation with the Otis Art Institute, and Levy’s own management style. Sawin probably recorded this interview with Levy in his office at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.

Audio interview with Paul Resika, 1994 Jun 7 00:58:33 duration; Includes PDF transcript

PDF transcript
In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Paul Resika describes his role as the founding chair of the Master of Fine Arts program at Parsons School of Design between 1978 and 1990. He discusses his initial conversations with Dean David C. Levy, as well as his initial hiring decisions, including staff members Leland Bell, Patricia Bailey, Paul Russotto, Bruce Gagnier, John Heliker, Robert De Niro, Sr., and Natalie Charkow. He recalls former students, including Mark Heyer and Ying Ying Hu. While relating his background as an artist and teacher, Resicka explains his foundational theory, connecting his experiences at the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts to those he tried to create for MFA students at Parsons.

Audio interview with Paul Resika, 1994 Jun 7

Audio interview with Frank Rizzo 1994 May 13

Audio monologue by Martica Sawin on Parsons Paris 1994 Apr

Audio monologue by Martica Sawin on teaching Art History 1994 Feb

Audio monologue by Martica Sawin on Parsons Paris 1994 Apr

Audio monologue by Martica Sawin on teaching Art History 1994 Feb
Audio interview with Stuart Shedletsky 1994 Mar 8  01:02:49 duration; Includes PDF transcript

In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Stuart Shedletsky relates his blossoming as an artist under the guidance of faculty members such as Marvin Israel, John Kacere and Paul Brach at Parsons School of Design in the 1960s. Much of the interview dwells on Shedletsky's approach to teaching and his desire to be an advocate for students. He also discusses Dean David C. Levy's administrative style, the importance of studying with practicing artists, and the project, “Still Working: Underknown Artists of Age in America.” Sawin and Shedletsky discuss the careers of former students and exchange information about Parsons alumni who have died from AIDS-related complications.

Audio interview with Stuart Shedletsky, 1994 Mar 8

Audio interview with Allen Tate 1994 Feb 24  01:01:38 duration; Includes PDF transcript

This audio interview with Allen Tate, conducted by Martica Sawin, primarily concerns the evolution of the Interior Design Department of Parsons School of Design into the Environmental Design Department. Tate discusses his recruitment by William Katavolos, how he became department chair in 1969, the personalities involved in the contentious debates surrounding the department's direction, and his eventual termination in 1981. Tate's animosity toward faculty member Stanley Barrows (also interviewed for this project) is a reoccurring theme throughout the interview. Also covered is the merger between Parsons School of Design and the New School for Social Research in 1970. Unlike other interviews conducted for this project, alumni are not discussed, although Tate shares his assessment of former faculty members and school administrators.

Audio interview with Allen Tate, 1994 Feb 24

Audio interview with Irwin Touster 1994 Mar 2  00:57:17 duration; Includes PDF transcript

In this audio interview with Martica Sawin, Irwin Touster discusses his tenure as Chair of Fine Arts (BFA) at Parsons School of Design, beginning in 1974. Touster relates the details of his joining the faculty at the behest of Dean David C. Levy and the hiring of many of the department's staff under his purview, including Larry Rivers, Elaine De Kooning, Jane Wilson, Stuart Shedletsky (also interviewed for this project), Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, and Eric Gibson. Touster and Sawin also discuss the post-graduation lives of many alumni, the department's teaching philosophy, and the value of the foundation-year method of art education.

Audio interview with Irwin Touster, 1994 Mar 2 [should this be the date digital? - can't find this info]