

Art Galleries to feature oral histories of renowned CGU artists

CLAREMONT, Calif. — The stories, methodologies, and careers of seven of Southern California's most influential and extraordinary artists will be explored in an oral history exhibition set to open at Claremont Graduate University's East and Peggy Phelps art galleries on Sept. 4.

In Their Own Words: Oral Histories of CGU Art has been assembled from more than 30 hours of interviews with Mowry Baden, Karl Benjamin, Michael Brewster, John Frame, Ted Kerzie, Roland Reiss, and Connie Zehr —all of whom were students and/or faculty at CGU. The audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews reflect in-depth conversations with the artists about their lives and work; their time spent as students and teachers at Claremont Graduate University, emergence into the Los Angeles and international art scenes, and contributions to contemporary art.

"These are legendary artists and we're pulling the curtain back to reveal the experiences that shaped their remarkable careers," said Jill Thayer, the CGU alumna and curatorial archivist who created the exhibition. "They've shared fascinating stories of struggle and success, of balancing teaching and a professional career. It's a treasure of wisdom, especially for today's emerging artists."

Thayer earned her PhD in Cultural Studies with emphasis in Museum Studies from CGU in 2011. After graduating, she launched the oral history project with the support of CGU's School of Arts and Humanities.

Though the post-doctoral project was originally slated to take a few months, Thayer became engrossed with the material, and ended up spending more than a year interviewing the artists, transcribing approximately 900 pages from her digital audio recordings, and curating the exhibition.

The exhibition will feature selected audio clips and transcripts of the artist interviews. Multimedia displays about the artists, as well as their biographies, portraits, and samples of their work will be on display in the galleries.

Each of the featured artists has broken ground with their methodologies and in their respective genres. Benjamin as a master of color and shape, Reiss with plastics, Brewster with spatial effects of sound, Zehr innovated with sand, Kerzie as a pioneer of process, Baden engaged the viewer in perceptual awareness, and Frame with sculpture and animation.

The artists are collectively included in at least 56 major museum collections and 43 solo museum exhibitions. They have garnered more than 200 years of teaching experience and received 20 grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Frame's work is included in the Smithsonian Collection and Kerzie has career documentation in the Smithsonian American Art Museum / National Portrait Gallery Library. Benjamin and Reiss have oral histories in the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian. Reiss, Zehr, and Brewster have been included in the Whitney Biennial.

The exhibition will include a special tribute to Benjamin, who died this July at the age of 86.

Upon completion of the exhibition, the series will be included in Claremont Colleges Digital Archives, CGU Oral History Library, and Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution.

The exhibition runs through September 21. The East and Peggy Phelps galleries are at 251 E. 10th Street in Claremont. Admission is free. An opening reception is set from 6 to 9 p.m. on Sept. 4, 2012 and is open to the public.