



**Smithsonian Institution**

*Archives of American Art*

## **Interview with Michael Asher, March 1981 - Part 1**

Extracted on Apr-17-2024 11:21:55

**The Smithsonian Institution thanks all digital volunteers that transcribed and reviewed this material. Your work enriches Smithsonian collections, making them available to anyone with an interest in using them.**

The Smithsonian Institution (the "Smithsonian") provides the content on this website ([transcription.si.edu](https://transcription.si.edu)), other Smithsonian websites, and third-party sites on which it maintains a presence ("SI Websites") in support of its mission for the "increase and diffusion of knowledge." The Smithsonian invites visitors to use its online content for personal, educational and other non-commercial purposes. By using this website, you accept and agree to abide by the [following terms](#).

- If sharing the material in personal and educational contexts, please cite the Archives of American Art as source of the content and the project title as provided at the top of the document. Include the accession number or collection name; when possible, link to the Archives of American Art website.
- If you wish to use this material in a for-profit publication, exhibition, or online project, please contact Archives of American Art or [transcribe@si.edu](mailto:transcribe@si.edu)

For more information on this project and related material, contact the Archives of American Art. [See this project](#) and other collections in the Smithsonian Transcription Center.

WEBVTT

00:19:41.000 --> 00:19:58.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Do you find it less problematical [[??]] or enjoy doing it or whatever and their really two different animals, you know? And there are a lot of people who justify poor work or ineffectual work or, or tease work, whatever you want to say, with textual material and that doesn't count.

00:19:58.000 --> 00:20:05.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Yeah, but I think that

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: They make up for bad work by saying "Here's what I meant to do."

<i>Michael Asher</i>: OK, the other way around

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Or tell you how you are suppose to feel about it.

00:20:05.000 --> 00:20:21.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: The other way around is to take a figure like Tom Francis and say well, OK, I'm in the studio all the time, but what good has that done for the artist.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Well. Yeah.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: It is

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: The point is, the work should be able to stand on it's own. There should be not

00:20:21.000 --> 00:20:31.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Very much so

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: There should be relief.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: [[laughs]]

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Touche.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: [[laughs]]

00:20:31.000 --> 00:20:45.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: One of the problems I had dealing with Sand, was that, he said, "If you are going to write a catalog for me, you are not going to discuss, me, my history". You know, no. If you are going to write a catalog for me my history or the work.

00:20:45.000 --> 00:20:59.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: So, what good is that?

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: And those are the restrictions under that...

<i>Michael Asher</i>: You have to discuss the work.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: which we had to agree to take it on

<i>Michael Asher</i>: It's got to be

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: I said, "But that's what you do in a catalog". And he said, "But, that's what you are not going to do in my catalog".

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Exactly, he wants mystification, he wants mystification, right?

00:20:59.000 --> 00:21:27.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: No, he doesn't want mystification.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: But, you'd have to discuss the works, unless you'd want to mystify, right?

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Right, unless it's exposed.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Absolutely.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Well, but I see.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: You don't have to discuss him. He's out of the picture. That's fine. That's fine, put him on the side. Because that's the way I feel it should, but he has to do, I agree with him very strongly. But, my God, if you can't discuss the work then you're out the window or out the door. I mean forget it, your production is totally mystified.

00:21:27.000 --> 00:21:45.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Ah, well. It can be. I mean I would like to think that I didn't mystify it. OK? I would like to think that what I did was to put something in context.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Did I? I didn't realize that you did something for him.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Yeah, I did. I did a catalog for the Boston... No, no, no. It's interesting.

00:21:45.000 --> 00:21:50.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Oh, that's funny.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: It really was a challenge. Because I did a catalog for the Boston Museum and one for the County. OK?

<i>Michael Asher</i>: [[laughs]]

00:21:50.000 --> 00:22:00.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Right, one of my... together...

<i>Michael Asher</i>: I, I was the ugliest...

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: No, but it is a perfect example. Because, of he was interesting for me.

00:22:00.000 --> 00:22:14.000

Because, I had been working with [[non-artists?]] for so long. That I had to run... I had to start dealing with another kind of attitude. Which actually turned out to be a similar kind of attitude. [[inaudible]]

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Sure

00:22:14.000 --> 00:22:32.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: ...similar material. But, I would like to see if it wasn't demystifying.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: But, what I'm saying is that, well going back to your original statement, I'm saying that heres a person that's not tolerant. Ah, and he stayed in his studio, and he stayed in his studio and it seems to be by [[?]].

00:22:32.000 --> 00:22:38.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Well, but he said something about [[?]]

<i>Michael Asher</i>: [[?]]

00:22:38.000 --> 00:22:48.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Well, then you have to ask yourself, whether or not, whether, um, mystification is a [[language?]].

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Well,

00:22:48.000 --> 00:22:58.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: Then you have to decide how well you know... I mean, I could talk 3 hours about Corbet Still, OK? You have to decide how calculated that mystification was on his part. Or how...

00:22:58.000 --> 00:23:06.000

And, I mean you could hardly call him a naive. So that's...

<i>Michael Asher</i>: No, no, no, no, no. OK

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: But Corbet still did it deliberately,

00:23:06.000 --> 00:23:11.000

<i>Michael Asher</i>: OK, so did that Reinhardt. [[talking over each other]]

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: He was not at all naive.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: So did Reinhardt?

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: No.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: He got busted?

00:23:11.000 --> 00:23:34.000

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: All that pettiness.

<i>Michael Asher</i>: As a matter of fact, [[Huma?]] did too.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: But, ah, that's OK too. I mean, that's part of the act. You can't separate that. Because there is no way to separate that. There's no way to separate that attitude of Stills. That rigidity is also there in the painting. And I don't think calling it mystification is, is real correct. See what I mean?

00:23:34.000 --> 00:23:41.010

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Yeah, well, I would call it mystification when it's done unintentional.

<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: When it's done unintentional?

<i>Michael Asher</i>: Yeah.



## Smithsonian Institution

*Archives of American Art*

The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

Join us!

The Transcription Center: <https://transcription.si.edu>

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SmithsonianTranscriptionCenter>

On Twitter: [@TranscribeSI](https://twitter.com/TranscribeSI)

Connect with the Smithsonian

Smithsonian Institution: [www.si.edu](http://www.si.edu)

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Smithsonian>

On Twitter: [@smithsonian](https://twitter.com/smithsonian)