



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Transcript of interview with Dow Pugh

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Transcript

Preface

Tape-recorded Interview with Dow Pugh

at the Artist's Home in Monterey, Tennessee

April 2, 1977

Willem Volkersz, Interviewer

Editor's Note:

This transcript is from a series of recordings made by Willem Volkersz over a number of years. They are not formal interviews, but rather records of conversations, often taped during photo-taking tours of the artist's studios or home collections.

The naive/visionary artists in these interviews have unique verbal mannerisms, many of which are difficult or impossible to transcribe accurately into written form. Thus, for grasping certain nuances of speech, researchers will find it advantageous to listen to the original tapes.

Our intent in transcribing these interviews was nonetheless to translate as accurately as possible the spoken word into a comprehensible written form, making changes to clarify but not to interpret. Thus the speaker's grammar is unedited. For example, "them" for "those," "themselves," and "gotta" were all transcribed as heard. On the other hand, certain changes were made for clarity: "cause," was transcribed as "because," "fore" as "before," "yo" as "your," etc.

Other editorial notations are as follows: Bracketed words are of two types. Those with "[—Ed.]" or "[—WV]" are inserted by the transcriber, editor, or Volkersz. Other bracketed words indicate uncertainty: Two or more words or phrases indicate possible alternatives; "[unintelligible]" and "____" indicate words that are garbled or incomprehensible on the tape, the former being a much longer phrase than the latter; "[noise]" is self-explanatory.

The original format for this document is Microsoft Word 365 version 1908. Some formatting has been lost in web presentation.

Interview

DP: Dow Pugh

WV: Willem Volkersz

[**Tape 1, side A**; Volkersz' No. L1-2; originally recorded on reverse side of C. P. Ligon interview, now recorded on first side of tape with Robert E. Smith on the reverse side. 23-minute tape side]

[Due to wind noise and distance to artist, sound often nearly inaudible—WV]

WV: You've been. . . .

DP: I started to painting over my buildings last year and I just got that little bit in that end there. [Discussing the imagery painted on the exterior of his outbuildings—WV]

WV: Oh, that looks real nice.

DP: Yeah. (laughs) Well, I was going to paint it, go back over it again. ____ ____ ____.

WV: Do you think in a minute I could take some photographs?

DP: Oh, help yourself, help yourself.

WV: Tell me. . . .

DP: Show you around here.

WV: Yeah. Oh, I remember seeing that in a little book. That's your self- portrait there, huh? [painted on a door to outbuilding—WV]

DP: Yeah, _____. Did you see it in that book [Contemporary American Folk Artists, by Eninor Horwitz—WV]? [cackles] Are you a craft man?

WV: I'm a painter.

DP: Painter, oh yeah.

WV: I teach at an art school in Kansas City.

DP: Oh, Lordy, yeah.

WV: And I've been going around the whole South looking at people who do things like you. . . .

DP: Oh, _____. (laughs)

WV: . . . who makes things without training, you know.

DP: Ah, I. . . .

WV: I sure was impressed by what they said about you in that book, your paintings and your sculpture.

DP: They're all here. (laughs) Huh, yeah.

WV: Needs his hat to keep him warm [referring to one of the sculptures— Ed.].

DP: I had a couple of _____ around here and gave them away. I _____.

WV: Huh.

DP: _____ I try to paint that about every year. I have my own forty-niners over here.

WV: Looks like you have to. . . . Yeah, you have to almost repaint it every year.

DP: Yeah.

WV: Do you paint it differently every year?

DP: I put different stuff on it.

WV: Oh, that's neat.

DP: I never had it lasting and that's house paint, you know, or enamel.

WV: How do you decide what to put on the building?

DP: Oh, just (chuckles) copy myself.

WV: Uh huh. Now do you use a mirror for that, or anything? Or just do it from your head?

DP: Oh, paint it. Yeah, I never had a lesson. . . . [unintelligible] My hobby is digging out Indians. That's Indian power.

WV: Huh!

DP: _____ for that. . . .

WV: Well, how would you pronounce that? Do you know?

DP: Oh, well, H-o-i. . . . Oh, you got me.

WV: (chuckles)

DP: [sounds like:] Kay-nine-oh-wah-kah, kay-nine-kah-wah, _____ sheep or a deer. Kay-nine-kah-wah.

WV: Look at that. These the storage buildings?

DP: Yeah, that's my cold house in there, and I [am—WV] going to make a workshop. I never laid a block or nothing.

WV: You built these, as well? Good for you. What was your original training or background?

DP: I worked in a machine shop up in Michigan for about thirty-some odd years.

WV: Huh.

DP: Outside of that. . . .

WV: What did you do in the machine shop? I mean, like any kind of machine tooling?

DP: Yeah, I had a classification on the planer and shaper.

WV: Uh huh. Huh.

DP: Found out my education wasn't good enough to. . . . The eighth grade ain't hardly enough to make a toolmaker, you know. (chuckles)

WV: Huh.

DP: And he favored me on the flatwork, I called it, you know.

WV: Right. Yeah.

DP: [noise, unintelligible] double _____ box worker, _____ too much distraction for me. You give me flat work, I can handle it all right.

WV: Uh huh. Were you born in this part of the country?

DP: Yeah, I was born up here in Crossville, Cumberland County.

WV: Right, right.

DP: Out in the. . . .

WV: We passed right by it.

DP: Yeah, but. . . . I got a. . . . A little history: my brother up there runs the, run down the family tree, and [noise] come in from Virginia, my great-granddad, and one stopped off at Crab Orchard. You remember Crab Orchard?

WV: Yeah, right, I remember seeing that. [unintelligible]

DP: Rockbury], now one of them's. . . . Great grand-dad's brother settled there and my Dad's dad. He come on over in Clear Creek by the [Rock, rock] house, you see, on [Interstate—WV] 40. Was right back in the woods, and he was a hunter. Then as they come in, they didn't have nothing but the clothes on their back, and their gun at least. And around 1900 when they built a railroad through, he furnished them deer meat up there for the convicts that built the road.

WV: Huh.

DP: They lived off the land, right back in the woods.

WV: I'll be darned.

DP: This thing here, I got _____ _____.

[Interruption in taping (start of side 2, L-1—WV)]

DP: _____ _____ showing _____ arms on there.

WV: So this is all cement?

DP: You make that [fluid] and then you stick his head down in there.

WV: Huh. That's pretty sturdy, ain't it?

DP: I didn't paint him last year, and I didn't put no primer on it, or nothing. It peeled off about every year. That's two years there now.

WV: I'll be darned.

DP: That's scaling off.

WV: You say you didn't put any primer on?

DP: Uh uh, if I had a primer on there, it wouldn't peel off. I guess moisture.

WV: Yeah.

DP: I had a big old Mexican hat I put on him and it _____ off _____ _____ come back and there it's down on his shoulders here, and _____

WV: (laughs)

DP: I made him one out of some aluminum sheeting.

WV: Oh, he's beautiful.

DP: Painted that one _____ _____.

WV: That's a nice idea, yeah. That'll stay there for a while, won't it?

DP: (chuckles) [noise, unintelligible] over there. [noise] I got a worm that goes over there and a _____ can, and _____ can in the middle and worm over here in another can. [They are looking at a still—WV]

WV: Uh huh.

DP: And I set that [camera] up. You have to _____ _____ California here a few years back, I had it all set up, _____ _____ _____. That's what you call a groundhog type.

WV: Huh.

DP: He got up there and took a picture, and I took an old felt hat and _____ _____ _____.

WV: (chuckles)

DP: And he showed me his eight millimeter, _____ background. Oh, it looked like _____, _____ coming out of that _____ _____ in there _____. Did you ever see one in operation?

WV: No, I never have. Do you operate it once in a while?

DP: Uh uh. Galvanized.

WV: Boy, that looks like a good one.

DP: Now there's a _____ _____. _____ he want me to, he wanted to borrow that big _____ _____. I said, "Why that's an old [furnace], right there."

WV: Ohh. [a baby joins the conversation—Ed.]

DP: "That's copper," I says, "why there are times _____ that _____ pipes _____ _____."

WV: Oh, sure. I recognize it.

DP: [noise]

WV: (laughs)

DP: That's what they call a groundhog type. _____ _____ wood right back in there.

WV: Now did you ever have it work?

DP: Uh uh, no, it wouldn't work. And he was going steal it, and I cemented it in so that nobody would, thinking it was a new one, you know.

WV: Oh, right, yeah.

DP: I had a ____ beehive here, and ____ top for them. ____ ____ in about five years time, ____ ____ . You can see where it come out here at the end.

WV: Oh yeah, huh.

DP: If I had me a full-size ____ here, you wouldn't know the difference [from it].

WV: You use a barrel for this?

DP: No, that's a piece. . . .

WV: Or a piece of culvert?

DP: No, I have a scraped tile here, ____ make ____ out of them. [noise, unintelligible passage] rock stuff, ____ don't ____ much good out here.

WV: Oh, look at that. People would take it, huh?

DP: Take it off of you. [Examining his Indian artifacts: —WV] Here's a ____ rock. There's one hole, and there's a two, and another eight or ten on it.

WV: Now how were those formed?

DP: I call them nut rocks to crack walnuts and hickory nuts.

WV: You mean these were. . . . Were they used for anything?

DP: Um hmm, yeah, the Indians used them.

WV: Ohh.

DP: And these here is mortars.

WV: Huh. You found these, huh?

DP: One of these indentations in ____.

WV: Yeah, they're real nice.

DP: You've seen the one I've got out [under, on] [a, the] [cloth, clock], got that growth on it, you know.

WV: Yeah, yeah

DP: Been there for years.

WV: You do a lot of hunting, I read, after Indian artifacts.

DP: Yeah, yeah, and these, this's nothing but scrap. People carry them off, too.

WV: (laughs) They'll take anything.

DP: Yeah, and I had a good rock collection here one time. I had a piece of limestone that had thirteen. . . . Looked like a ____ horn, you know. It's got certain name, you know.

WV: Uh huh.

DP: And I had a boy from Tech up here, and I come out here at night and looked for it and it's gone. I hadn't missed it, you know.

WV: Ohh.

DP: [noise]

WV: Oh, no.

DP: I got ____ friend _____. [Viewing a concrete sculpture of a man and a woman sunbathing—WV]

WV: (laughs) She's beautiful. Oh, look at these two people resting here. Oh, that's great. Lying out in the sun.

DP: Yeah, I got to paint them, though.

WV: It's kind of cold out today for them, isn't it?

DP: Yeah, I get a kick out of kids. [noise] I painted the ____ and ____ _____.

WV: Oh. That's going to look. . . .

DP: He was eight or nine years old. He says, "What'll you do when night comes?" I says, "Well, put a quilt on 'em."

WV: (laughs) Boy.

DP: Like that snake must [noise] ____ that ____ I'll make something out of it.

WV: Yeah, right.

DP: [noise]

WV: When did you make most of these pieces? These cement pieces.

DP: That is all cement, sand.

WV: But when did make them?

DP: Oh, that's, oh, I guess they are five or six years old. ____ just by the base of them ____ _____.

WV: Oh, yeah.

DP: [noise, unintelligible] That's my Indian down there. They in there, but I put them in there.

WV: (laughs)

DP: ____ in the ground. Down here's the spaceman.

WV: Yeah, I saw a photograph of this. Isn't that a beauty.

DP: He's ____ ____ rider, ____ _____. [noise, unintelligible] They beat that hole in the wall.

WV: Oh, no. So you had to fix that up again, huh?

DP: Put some of that glue on it, and that make that thing [noise]

WV: Yeah, I'm sure of it.

DP: [noise]

WV: That's going to stand there for a while. Now did you use some kind of armature inside?

DP: Yeah, yeah, he's reinforced.

WV: With metal or. . . .

DP: Wire. [noise]

WV: Oh, yeah.

DP: That's all I can do to lift them two arms up. [referring to weight of concrete—WV]

WV: Oh yeah.

DP: [noise]

WV: Oh, he's great.

DP: [noise, long passage]

WV: (chuckles) You need it out here.

DP: Yeah, I've been up and gone about a month.

WV: Oh, you have?

DP: _____.

WV: Where have you been?

DP: Down south. Went down to Plains, Georgia.

WV: Oh, did you?

DP: _____ yeah, that was the biggest kick I got out of anything. Just like old young [President—Ed.] Carter says, they [tourists—WV] just running them nuts [crazy—WV].

WV: Yeah, I'm sure.

DP: Tourists. . . .

WV: All over.

DP: . . . setting out there waiting. It looked just like picture in the paper on in. . . . That village station got signs all over it.

WV: That's crazy.

DP: And right down here in the hills. And he [the president—WV] bought him [Carter's brother—WV] a new place outside of town now.

WV: I heard. He was getting hassled too much, wasn't he?

DP: My uncle, when I was [a, at] Battle Creek at the time. Him and I made [noise] He says that's probably better decoration than he'd get when he died. We've made him and I together. That's quartz column here.

WV: Huh!

DP: Quartz post.

WV: I see, yeah.

DP: [noise]

WV: It's pretty solid.

DP: I'm going to pick up down this summer and bore a hole and put a tin can in there, and ramrod or swabs here.

WV: Oh, that'd be nice, yeah.

DP: I sold one to a feller down at the—oh, that carpettown—Dalton, Georgia.

WV: Yeah.

DP: And he's got it in his office and got some of them plastic balls glued together and painted black.

WV: Oh, yeah, sure.

DP: Some of them put together _____ to _____ that hole.

WV: That would look pretty realistic, wouldn't it?

DP: Oh, it looked good in his office!

WV: Yeah.

DP: And had a sale here a few years back. That's the ____ off a Coca Cola bar, you know, that used to stand up down the panel in back.

WV: Uh huh. That's a nice piece of stone.

DP: I had some glass, thickness near a inch and a quarter, green stuff, and I broke it up, put a ____ on it. [noise]

WV: Huh.

DP: I kick myself for not ____ ____.

WV: Oh, yeah, that would really be nice. Ohh.

DP: That have ____ ____.

WV: That's a nice slab.

DP: That had to have been imported in. [noise]

WV: That's amazing.

DP: ____ next to wood. [noise] come out and build a ____ house.

WV: What are you going to use the wood for?

DP: Put this [oak, old] ____

WV: Do you carve as well?

DP: Yeah, this. . . .

WV: Uh huh.

DP: This walnut ____ ____ there and I work on it.

WV: Yeah, that's good wood, isn't it?

DP: Well, and this. . . . I see where the Appalachian Museum over around Knoxville. . . . Did you see that advertised?

WV: No.

DP: Did you go through Knoxville?

WV: No, we didn't come through Knoxville. They have a museum out there?

DP: Along [Highway—Ed.] 75.

WV: Look like the [hands] like it too, huh? [working on a wood piece?— Ed.]

DP: [Chestnut]. I'll bet they're working on the lumber I have stacked in there for over five years.

WV: Huh.

DP: Ain't had time to clean it up.

[End of interview]