



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Denny Winters,
1980 February 7-October 28

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Denny Winters on February 7 and October 28, 1980. The interview took place in Rockport, Maine, and was conducted by Robert Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT BROWN: This is an interview on February 7, 1980, in Rockport, Maine, Denny Winters.

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Robert Brown, the interviewer.

DENNY WINTERS: Born in Grand Rapids—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't we begin, perhaps, by your describing what you can remember, what seems significant, in your childhood? You were born in Grand Rapids, in 19[0]7. What are some of your earlier memories? What, as you look back from childhood, may have been important?

DENNY WINTERS: You'd like to know when I started to draw or paint?

ROBERT BROWN: Well, whatever. What were some of the earlier memories you recall? What was childhood like for you? Was it a happy time?

DENNY WINTERS: Probably childhood was all right. I seem to remember being shy, terribly shy. And my sister, older sister, was very outgoing, and I always wanted to be like that, and when I tried, I couldn't. I think I was always quite much of an introvert. The happy times I remember were in the spring, going in the woods and finding violets. Those times were just like pure ecstasy. And—but mostly—I was happy when I—I started drawing when I was a little child, and I must have been encouraged by my parents, who gave me lots of art supplies. So from a very early time, I knew I wanted to be an artist, and that's when I was pretty happy. And I wasn't—I didn't mix well with children. They didn't seem to like me, which made me more shy. [00:02:00] And that was true all through school.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. Were your parents protective of you?

DENNY WINTERS: I think I never told them my troubles. My—I kept everything to myself. So, when I would get sick, my mother would say, "Has someone hurt your feelings?" [Laughs.] That kind of thing. So I always thought, "She can read my mind." Then I tried to be more secretive than ever. I never wanted to be exposed somehow.

ROBERT BROWN: Did your parents encourage being to yourself?

DENNY WINTERS: No, my mother would stay awake to hear me talk in my sleep. [Laughs.] She really would. And my father's idea was to josh me out of it. You know, and so he—I couldn't respond to that. I mean, things, I guess, were very tragic to me [laughs]. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: He wanted to—he tried to make light of—

DENNY WINTERS: He tried to make light of it, and that was the wrong thing to do.

ROBERT BROWN: Were either of your parents interested in the arts, or were they—

DENNY WINTERS: Not really, but—

ROBERT BROWN: —scholars or—

DENNY WINTERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: —leaders in the—

DENNY WINTERS: Uh no, but my mother—well, both of them loved the arts, but they didn't know anything about them. My mother always seemed to have this—my older sister was going to be a famous actress, and I was going to be an artist. You know, she always—

ROBERT BROWN: This is your mother's plan for you? For her?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, she sort of divined what our interests were, and then encouraged it. I mean, H=her children were going to be remarkable [laughs], I suppose. Not that she made you feel self-consciously that you had to. [00:04:02] She would always say—and she was always quoting some crazy thing, "Hitch your wagon to a star," she would always say. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Did that mean strive?

DENNY WINTERS: Strive, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Grand Rapids, as a community, was very achievement-oriented, wasn't it? Very hardworking?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, yes. I think there was always—yes, they were hardworking people. Mostly they were German and Dutch. And it was almost sinful to be lazy, or dirty. Also, they were very bigoted and narrow-minded —

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, they were? About—

DENNY WINTERS: —and insular. I despised that.

ROBERT BROWN: What, that you remember, were they so bigoted about?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, everything [laughs]. Politics, religion, races. I remember a great prejudice against Jews. I think we only knew one or two families who were Jewish, and they were lovely people, and yet there was that prejudice. And so when I left home, I quickly renounced anything I had been brought up to believe in. [Laughs.] Religion, politic—my family was republican, and so I became a democrat. Actually, I didn't just become a democrat for that reason. When I went to Chicago, there was quite a ferment, and it was the Depression time, and I became convinced that I was a democrat, you know. [00:06:03] But I also stopped any going to church or anything like that.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think you did rebel?

DENNY WINTERS: Because it seemed very bigoted to me, even then.

ROBERT BROWN: Once you got to Chicago, or even before?

DENNY WINTERS: No, no. I—well, for instance, we were more or less controlled by, "What will the neighbors think?" I thought, "What difference does that make? Why should it make that difference? Why worry so much about what other people think?"

ROBERT BROWN: That was quite a breakthrough for you as a young woman, to have reached that realization, wasn't it?

DENNY WINTERS: I think so. Yeah, I think I was kind of an independent thinker, because both my sisters just went along meekly in the whole family pattern. So I don't really know what it was that caused me to turn out differently.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you openly assert these things to your parents?

DENNY WINTERS: Well yes, and they thought Chicago had really kind of turned my head and ruined me. They thought I got in with the wrong people [laughs] and everything. But they never tried to stop.

ROBERT BROWN: But even though the Depression had come, they were still rigid in their earlier beliefs?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, the Depression changed their bank account, but it didn't change their beliefs at all [laughs].

ROBERT BROWN: Was your father a businessman?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, yes. And really knew little else. Although he had been a very talented—he had been interested in furniture design. It was a furniture city. And as a very young man, he had apprenticed as a carver. [00:08:03] And we had some of the things that he had carved. He loved to do that as a hobby, and I think he

would have made a good designer, but he got married and had to get into something more practical. He started having children, so.

ROBERT BROWN: Now, as far as your art education in Grand Rapids, what are some of the details of that? Did you continue with it through high school? Would you have a—

DENNY WINTERS: Well, in high school we had such a very bad teacher, who liked the boys, and knew nothing about art, and had us copying pictures. And it was just, um—put you to sleep. There was nothing about that, those four years in art class, that did a thing for me. I knew, in my neighborhood, when I was about 13, there was a woman who lived with her father, and they were both real artists, professional artists.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they living there for? Their family simply was from there?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, I think she had been divorced and lived back with her father. He was of the old—I guess he was a pretty good artist. He painted the trees reflected in the stream, and the little smoke from the bonfire, you know. And very camp, really. And that was the kind of work they did, but I loved it. I loved it. They did encourage me a lot, and she did—[00:10:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have lessons?

DENNY WINTERS: —show me—they weren't lessons, per se, but she did show me how to use oil paint and all that, and I did paint in oil from the time I was about 13.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you paint from your imagination?

DENNY WINTERS: No, I went out and painted from nature. And well, I remember one autumn when the coloring was so brilliant and beautiful, and I was putting it all right down, and she said, "Well, when you paint, you have to mute everything to make it more of a picture." At that time, the Impressionists were putting it down just like I was. She should have left me alone. [Laughs.] But anyway, so I muted it, and took out all the nice color, and made it—

ROBERT BROWN: But at least with her and her father, there was kindness and the encouragement?

DENNY WINTERS: There was very much, yeah. Very much. And so with my isolation, I found all of my solace in painting. It wasn't until I went to Chicago that I felt as though I had come into my own climate, you know. I mean, the people I met—I found I was outgoing for the first time in my life.

ROBERT BROWN: Why did that happen, do you suppose? Why do you suppose you were?

DENNY WINTERS: Because I felt I was in my own milieu. I felt at home. I felt that my values were accepted, that I was accepted, that people were thinking the same things I was thinking. And, you know, the whole thing was simpatico.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you thinking then? [00:12:00]

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, it's good to be out of—it's good to be out of Grand Rapids. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: There were probably a lot of others who had left similarly—

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, probably, probably.

ROBERT BROWN: —parochial towns.

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, my. I had wings on my feet.

ROBERT BROWN: This was when?

DENNY WINTERS: That was in about 1931.

ROBERT BROWN: And your parents encouraged you, or at least gave you their blessing to go off to Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, I had been going with this boy. I was in love. And he couldn't get through high school, and I wasn't going to marry anyone who couldn't get through high school. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: He just didn't have the talent for passing courses?

DENNY WINTERS: Or studying. I actually stayed in Grand Rapids and went to junior college, where I just spent two years in the art department. And there, I had another kind of silly teacher. Meanwhile, I was—I had gotten

into tinting shoes. I got a job with a kind of a nice shop that sold expensive accessories, shoes and purses, and jewelry, and gloves, that kind of thing. In those days, people were matching their shoes to their gowns. So, since I was a painter, I was hired to tint shoes. So I could, I could match a color. And I did that, and I was supposed to sell, too, and I was a lousy salesman. [00:14:02] Someone else could mix colors, so I lost my job. But it gave me an idea, and so I went into business for myself. I used a room in my father's office to use for tinting shoes, and I went to all of the department stores, and every shoe place, and they all gave me their work, because I had been doing it for Yeager's, and they knew I could do it. I was charging a dollar a pair, making a lot of money. This was Depression, and I was making a lot of money, maybe \$20 a day, because I charged a dollar a pair. Pretty soon, I had all this money, and I had really gotten disgusted with that boyfriend. He never was going to graduate.

ROBERT BROWN: He was still in high school.

DENNY WINTERS: [Laughs.] And so I decided it was time to quit the whole thing, and use my money and go to art school. So, I took this satchel full of money to Chicago, and I knew my family couldn't help me out at all, financially, so I had to get a part-time job. I went to one of the big department stores, Bullock's. No, first I went to the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. I started out thinking I wanted to be an illustrator.

ROBERT BROWN: What was the Chicago Academy? Was that a commercial art school?

DENNY WINTERS: It was a two-year school that more or less did prepare you to be an illustrator. In those days, that's what I thought I wanted to be. [00:16:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy that school? You stayed—you were there two years?

DENNY WINTERS: I was there two years, half days.

ROBERT BROWN: And working the rest of the time?

DENNY WINTERS: And working the rest of the time.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that challenging? Was that interesting to you, the work at that school?

DENNY WINTERS: It was school that was giving me a lot more than I'd ever had, and they were interesting problems that I had to do. And it wasn't anything in depth, but I did learn—I did have anatomy—you know, the kind of thing that you get in art school.

ROBERT BROWN: So it was a very basic art school?

DENNY WINTERS: It was. Probably they—there wasn't really very much in depth about color theory or composition, or anything like that, but it satisfied me at the time. Besides, I was taking some night courses at the Art Institute, and I was taking a painting course on Saturday and Sunday, and I was filling my time. And uh—

ROBERT BROWN: But even then, you were happy? There was this feeling of release?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh. Marvelous. Marvelous.

ROBERT BROWN: Were there some memorable teachers at the academy?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, there was one. And it was because of him that I, just like that, stopped wanting to be an illustrator and wanted to be a painter. His name was Rudolph Weisenborn. He was very much—very much influenced by Picasso, his work, that was wild and crazy. He was a marvelous teacher, because—I was in a class, painting from a model, doing a portrait, and he was a black model. [00:18:08] So I was using all these nice umbers and tan—ochres, you know, and I was painting a nice brown man. And he, Weisenborn, told me to stand up. He sat down in my place, and he worked on my painting, and at first I was outraged. How dare he mess up my pretty tans and browns? And he mixed in my palette pale blues, pale pinks, and put highlights here and there. I thought, "Who ever heard of colors like that on skin?" But when he stood up, I could see that that skin was alive, and that those lights were alive. And that demonstration changed my whole feeling about color. I mean, I could see color after that. And that he was the one who told me to go over to the Art Institute and look at the El Grecos. He somehow felt that something I was doing naturally—that El Greco was kin to me. Well, he was, because I went there and I saw those El Grecos they had—in the Art Institute, in those days, the first room you went into was filled with El Grecos—and I flipped right then. It seems to me I've always made a quick decision, or something has happened that caused a quick decision to change my whole way of thinking or my life or something. [00:20:03] And this is really—I never thought of it, but it's pretty true. I do seem to make up my mind quickly about something.

ROBERT BROWN: You had when you left Grand Rapids, too, hadn't you?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a quick decision.

DENNY WINTERS: Well, yes. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Weisenborn was a teacher at this academy?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: And he—did you get to know him fairly well?

DENNY WINTERS: Uh, yes. Yes, I did. Well, in later years, I gave him credit. I always told him how much he had done for me, you know, in that brief time that I worked with him. Although he never influenced—I was never—he never influenced me as far as my painting like Picasso, because I couldn't stand it [laughs] in those days.

ROBERT BROWN: But he was—what was he like as a teacher—he would occasionally step in?

DENNY WINTERS: He was like a football coach who thinks, to get the best out of you, they have to insult you. You know, get your adrenaline going. He was sort of like that. He didn't do it to everyone. He thought I was pretty smug, and I was. I had set opinions about what art was, you know, and he stirred them up [laughs]. Well, he really freed my mind.

ROBERT BROWN: So the tactic he used—

DENNY WINTERS: —was right for me.

ROBERT BROWN: —was the one you described? He would come in there and immediately—

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. He could see that I was filled with small town ideas, didn't know any better. He really shook them loose.

ROBERT BROWN: So he was the most influential teacher at the Chicago Academy? [00:22:02]

DENNY WINTERS: He was the most—I truly haven't had very much academic training. I had special classes, and they went on for years at the Art Institute, but not for years, even. Maybe a couple of years. Because my—Chicago became my home. I never went back to Grand Rapids. Oh, yes, summers I would—I trained—am I spending too much time on this? I trained a friend of mine, an art student, to tint shoes, so I would go back to Grand Rapids in the summer, and I'd get back all my old customers, and make some more money to come back to Chicago the next year.

ROBERT BROWN: Therefore, you'd be entirely independent of your—

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. I lived with the family, but I then would make this bulk of money. I forgot to say that the first time I went to Chicago with this satchel full of money [laughs], I seemed to—I don't know if I had a satchel full, or whether I had a checkbook. I don't remember. But it was all my money, and I went to the Chicago Academy first, and wanted to pay my tuition. They said, "Well, you better wait until you get a job, because we won't refund this." I said, "Oh, that's all right. Just take it." [Laughs.] I was so confident. I mean, I just had the confidence of youth, you know? It was fantastic.

ROBERT BROWN: What was your initial impression of Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, I thought it was such a beautiful city. [00:24:00] Oh, I loved every square foot of it. One time—and I walked—I first went to a girls' club, a professional club, and it was up—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean a boardinghouse?

DENNY WINTERS: It was for—yeah, they—

ROBERT BROWN: Residence hotel?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. They served all the meals. No, I guess not lunch, but breakfast and dinner. That was part of your rent. I think it was \$13 a week. Imagine. Dinners and breakfast. And that was about two miles away from school. I had to walk down Michigan Boulevard. That followed the lake, sort of. I lived across from the beach, and sometimes I'd get up early and go swimming. And then I'd walk that two miles. And sometimes I'd walk back to get my dinner, and then walk back to go to night school, because I couldn't afford dinner. Sometimes I'd stay down and go to night school and have my dinner when I got back, and then I'd have to swipe

it from the cockroaches. [They laugh.] So—

ROBERT BROWN: Well, you were getting to know—at the Academy of Fine Arts, did you make some friends there among the artists, or was that not [inaudible]?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. It turned out that one of the girls I had enjoyed looking at—we ate by candlelight, and she was at a table next to me, and I thought, "What an attractive girl. I'd like to know her." But here, I was still shy.

ROBERT BROWN: This was up at the hotel or at the school?

DENNY WINTERS: That was at the hotel. The following day, it turned out she was in my class at school. [00:26:02] So we became very close friends. You know, she had seen me, a newcomer in this place. So, we became very good friends, and she had two roommates in that hotel place—club, it was, and they became my friends, too. So already, I had this nice feeling of friends. So as I say, I did all that walking, and I really was walking on air. Chicago was beautiful. It was exciting. I had friends. I was painting. Fantastic. Well, then came the time when I no longer—the fashion for tinted shoes went out, so I could no longer go home and earn money. Then I was in Chicago, and it was, you know, really the height of the Depression, and one was really broke, and I mean broke. But that was a time of—a fantastic time of goodwill. And then I became much more acquainted—that's when I got to know Eddie Millman and Mitch, Julio and—

ROBERT BROWN: By then, were you at the Chicago Art Institute?

DENNY WINTERS: No, it was after that. After that.

ROBERT BROWN: What were you doing at that time, then? Were you working to support yourself, or were you simply painting full-time?

DENNY WINTERS: Trying to, and painting full-time, and doing some woodcuts, and you know, making a dollar here and a nickel there kind of thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Where did you—

DENNY WINTERS: I had two good jobs during that period. There was the Chicago World's Fair. [00:28:01]

ROBERT BROWN: Nineteen thirty-three, that was?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. And I did dioramas. I didn't design them, but I cut them out, assembled them, and everything for—that was a job that lasted—Mitch Siporin was one of the designers. There were a whole lot of them, and I've forgotten what—this whole room full of dioramas, what that was all about. What the message was. But I had to cut them out and construct them, and you know, make them stand up and all that.

ROBERT BROWN: Was that interesting to you or just a job?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, it was money. Oh, God. I needed it so badly. Fortunately—well, by that time, I wasn't in the girls' club anymore. I was in a rooming house. And I had a roommate. She was out of a job, too, it seems to me. Well anyway, the landlords weren't allowed, according to decree, to kick you out for non-payment of rent, so I think I owed about nine months' rent along in there. Eventually got it, I may say. After that, though, and while the fair was still on—the fair was two years—I got a marvelous job with Bil Baird. I was a puppeteer, and I was a puppeteer for, well, for the whole term of that fair.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you known Baird before that?

DENNY WINTERS: Um, no. [00:30:00]

ROBERT BROWN: But you got to know him fairly well?

DENNY WINTERS: I got to know him—no, first, I got a job as a puppeteer, because there was an opening, and I wasn't a puppeteer, but I learned how. But these were very terrible puppets, and while I was working on them, Bil Baird needed someone. And I had gotten to know him, because he was a good friend of Eddie Millman's, so he asked me to join his group, because he needed to put on another shift. That was just sheer delight, to be—he was such a witty, wonderful person, and it was just an adventure to work, um—

ROBERT BROWN: Was it quite demanding, being a puppeteer?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, we had to do a show every half hour. He had three shows, three different groups of people, three shifts. There were two shows, one on either end of the Swift Bridge.

ROBERT BROWN: Where was this, the fair?

DENNY WINTERS: At the fair. I think—one show advertised Brooksie [ph], the cow, Brooksie and her pals. We had these cows dancing and [laughs]. And another one was Dutch Cleanser [ph], I think, and we had tea kettles, and we had a [coughs]—but they were very witty and fun to do. Bil was a marvelous person to work with.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you keep in touch with him after that?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, he's still a very good friend. I get a Christmas card every year. I have a whole set of them. And he always does his puppets.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he something of an artist himself in background? [00:32:00]

DENNY WINTERS: No, I don't think he ever was. He had started out with Tony Sarg.

ROBERT BROWN: Which was what?

DENNY WINTERS: Tony Sarg was the grand old man of puppetry in those days, and Bil had started out with him and then gone on his own.

ROBERT BROWN: How had you gotten to know some of the other artists, like Eddie Millman? Was he a local fellow that you'd met at the art school?

DENNY WINTERS: No, he was older. I don't know. You know how you meet people? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Sure. Was he your main friend among the artists?

DENNY WINTERS: Um—well, there was kind of—

ROBERT BROWN: Several? What was he like, Eddie Millman?

DENNY WINTERS: Eddie Millman? Eddie was not a very pretty person. Very competitive. But he could be charming. Always, he attracted people around him that were very interesting, and they gave the most interesting parties, he and his wife. And I felt like—from being little Grand Rapids bumpkin, I felt this was life, this was sophistication. Yeah, there was—

ROBERT BROWN: What sort of people would they have? Very learned people, or creative?

DENNY WINTERS: People who were a lot more worldly and sophisticated than I was. And yeah, architects and—oh, people involved in teaching, or the Art Institute, and um—[00:34:07]

ROBERT BROWN: Was Millman himself constantly an artist?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. Yeah. He became a mural painter on the WPA, and he became a supervisor. Well, I started to say before, the WPA, though—am I rambling too much?

ROBERT BROWN: No. You weren't on the WPA yourself until you went out west?

DENNY WINTERS: Right, right. Oh, I lost my thought there.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Second interview with Denny Winters in Rockport, Maine. Robert Brown, the interviewer. This is October 28, 1980. We've been talking, to this point, about your early education and your time in Chicago, into the late 1930s.

[Audio Break.]

DENNY WINTERS: There's a break in—awkwardness.

ROBERT BROWN: No, this is fine. You wanted to talk about your being in a—I guess you were invited to an exhibition at the Art Institute, to have—

DENNY WINTERS: No, I wasn't invited. I passed a jury in an annual show.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. About when was that, in the late '30s?

DENNY WINTERS: Must have been. Well, it must have been about '37, '36. Not too many years after I was in art

school, so that was what pleased and surprised me, that I was accepted into that exhibition. And then a committee from—or an association invited a part of that exhibition to go on tour for two years, and I was—

ROBERT BROWN: What had you in the exhibition? What kind of painting was it? [00:36:00]

DENNY WINTERS: I have a copy of the painting here to show you.

ROBERT BROWN: And was it a still life?

DENNY WINTERS: It was a night scene. I lived in a marvelous old carriage house, and it was a picture of the carriage house by moonlight. It was quite an interesting painting. That was selected to go on tour for two years, to go to museums and public places. I think it was because of that that I was then—

ROBERT BROWN: —listed?

DENNY WINTERS: —listed in *Who's Who*.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that have any result for you, being listed in *Who's Who*?

DENNY WINTERS: I'd never know. I suppose it has some.

ROBERT BROWN: So that was a couple of years before you left Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: This was sort of a high point of your time there?

DENNY WINTERS: I would think so. I had a few one-man shows in small places.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you did? At that point?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What were these? Small commercial galleries in Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. One was, I remember, the [A.] Raymond Katz Little Gallery, it was called. That seemed like another high point. Of course, I was very young.

ROBERT BROWN: From that, did you sell some paintings?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And probably had my first notice in the newspaper. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: But did you spend most of your time painting, as you recall?

DENNY WINTERS: I had a small, very small, paying job that kind of supported me, and the rest of the time I painted.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you unusual among women at that time, to be able to paint almost constantly?

DENNY WINTERS: I seem to think so, because I can't remember any others now, but it was a long time ago. [00:38:01] I seem to think so.

ROBERT BROWN: You've mentioned, or you talked a bit about some of your acquaintances in Chicago. The last we talked about was Eddie Millman.

DENNY WINTERS: Eddie Millman.

ROBERT BROWN: Maybe you could describe some of your other friends of that time, as they were then. You had mentioned Mitchell Siporin.

DENNY WINTERS: Mitch Siporin was one of those—I think I mentioned, seemed so much wiser and more sophisticated. I hung on every word he said. He was sort of a mentor. Then there was Julio de Diego, who had come from Spain. This was during the time of the Spanish Civil War, and he was trying to get people to go and fight.

ROBERT BROWN: Had he come over only in the '30s from Spain?

DENNY WINTERS: No, no, he had been there many, many years.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see. He kept connections.

DENNY WINTERS: He kept connections, and kept his loyalty. I think he never became an American citizen. He was always very Spanish. He was a very interesting painter. I seem to gravitate toward all those artists whose paintings I admired.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you admire in his work?

DENNY WINTERS: His fantasy, I think. At that time, he had a marvelous fantasy, and he was quite abstract. It was at that time, too, that the American Artists' Congress was first organized in Chicago, and I was a charter member of that.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Later on, when I went to Chicago, that was my—I mean, to California—that was my introduction to artists in California, because they had a chapter there. [00:40:11]

ROBERT BROWN: Why did you become a charter member in Chicago of the Artists' Congress?

DENNY WINTERS: My friends were instrumental in starting it, and it was for the protection of artists, and it was, in some ways, directed against Hitler and Fascism, and I was against that. So I was—just joined it as a matter of course.

ROBERT BROWN: What did it try to protect artists from?

DENNY WINTERS: Abuses of commercial people who might use a painting for reproduction, having bought it and not pay. Sort of like Artists Equity, probably the first inklings of Artists Equity.

ROBERT BROWN: Were in Artists' Congress?

DENNY WINTERS: The American Artists' Congress was.

ROBERT BROWN: Some have said it, in some places, was taken over by leftist elements.

DENNY WINTERS: I heard that, too. I heard that, too.

ROBERT BROWN: Did that seem to be the case in Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: So many of the Chicagoans were leftists. How many were Communists, I never knew. Actually, it didn't seem too bad to be a leftist. It was certainly—it was the leftists who were fighting the Spanish War, and most of us were on the side of the Loyalists in the Spanish War—Civil War.

ROBERT BROWN: What about domestic problems? At home, the Depression.

DENNY WINTERS: And then, of course, there had been the Depression. [00:42:01] There was all the unemployment, and—well, everyone was in a state of probably resentment against all those who had caused an inflation that created the Depression, that created the crash.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you on committees of the Artists' Congress? Do you recall some of the work you did as a member of the Artists' Congress?

DENNY WINTERS: Um, trying to think. I can't seem to recall that I was ever chairman of a committee or anything like that. I went along and raised my hand and voted. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of the activities you participated in?

DENNY WINTERS: At that time, there were a lot of sit-down strikes and picket lines.

ROBERT BROWN: Of employers, or commercial art establishments?

DENNY WINTERS: Against—it probably had more to do with unions, against those companies or outfits that refused union. I think that was the time of a great rise in the strength of unions, too. Of course, we were all in favor of unions, because—all of the unions have changed now, to a great degree, but at that time, they were very needed. Maybe had there been unions, there wouldn't have been the crash. Who knows? I'm no economist.

ROBERT BROWN: People like Mitchell Siporin were quite involved in these things. Perhaps his most famous work of the '30s, the depiction of the Haymarket riots.

DENNY WINTERS: Right, the Haymarket riots.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he discuss politics with you to any great extent? [00:44:02]

DENNY WINTERS: I'm sure that went on, but this is like 40 years ago, or 50.

ROBERT BROWN: You described him a few minutes ago as your mentor. In what ways was he your mentor? In terms of painting?

DENNY WINTERS: In terms of art ideas. Also contemporary ideas. There was ferment in Chicago. Everything was happening then. At least for me, everything was happening. As I said, I was pretty green when I went there, and everything was big city and exciting to me. I probably swallowed it all. I do remember being in a high state of excitement, stimulation.

ROBERT BROWN: Was this reflected in your work, as you think about it? Was there some social—

DENNY WINTERS: No. I never painted the people digging in garbage cans. I never joined that Americana school that showed the social scene. Somehow, I rebelled against, even at that time, using propaganda for art, and I've been that way ever since. I don't believe art is to be used for propaganda purposes. I think, if it does, it ceases to be art, in every case, almost. You can except Goya and a few great artists. Toulouse-Lautrec, maybe. But in general, as soon as art becomes propaganda, it becomes illustrative.

ROBERT BROWN: And loses what?

DENNY WINTERS: And loses its integrity, I guess, as art. [00:46:02] Maybe that's a strong word.

ROBERT BROWN: What is integrity in art to you? What would you say? Boil down some of your general thinking.

DENNY WINTERS: Now I'm going to have to pause a really long time.

[Audio Break.]

DENNY WINTERS: I think it's to paint only the essence of what your concept is, with no regard for commercial value, with—turn—

[Audio Break.]

DENNY WINTERS: —with only regard for the needs of the canvas, and the needs have to do with color, line, volume, relationships. Well, statement, but statement can be entirely abstract. Can be realistic, visually. That has nothing to do with it. Those should be the only considerations, in my point of view.

ROBERT BROWN: And that was your gut feeling in the '30s, and it is today?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, probably it was then, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Pretty consistent in your—

DENNY WINTERS: I think so. I think so. I think that's always been true.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you—even then, as a young woman, did you feel impelled to paint? When you were through with your nominal, money-earning job, did you—[00:48:00]

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yes. That was always the very first—of very first importance, and always has been.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you also have an impulsion to have it looked at by other people? Were you interested in having things discussed by other artists, or by the public?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, my, yes. I needed that participation. I think an artist does. I don't think anyone paints, or creates, in a vacuum of outside interest. I think it's a stimulus.

ROBERT BROWN: Then, about 1939, you decided to leave Chicago. Was this a sudden decision, or was this—

DENNY WINTERS: I guess it was. I just felt like moving on. I was a little bit too cowardly to go to New York, so I went to California. [Laughs.] I think my first choice might have been New York.

ROBERT BROWN: Was New York, even then, the mecca—

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, it was.

ROBERT BROWN: —the overpowering center?

DENNY WINTERS: Whenever a New Yorker would come to Chicago, as they did frequently during the American Artists' Congress, to give us pointers on how to run it, they were quite patronizing. Very big city, and we were very second city. [Laughs.] Also, I had an aunt who lived in California, and I had visited there, and I had loved it, and I thought that would be fun to go there, so I did.

ROBERT BROWN: But you felt you ought to leave Chicago?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: Where did you go in California?

DENNY WINTERS: I went to Los Angeles. [00:50:00] I did live with my aunt for about three months, and then I—that was just a stopping place. Then I got a job as a puppeteer in one of the movies, and I can't remember now the name of the movie. It was Russell Patterson puppets, I remember. It was quite a—that was an episode, incidental, in the movie, but it paid very well, and allowed me to find a place of my own. So from that time on, I was on my own. I was on my own—well, I know one reason I wanted to leave Chicago was because I had this small pittance job, which didn't allow me to get on the art project, which I dearly wanted to do, because the WPA was just a marvelous thing for artists. When I went to California, I lived out and worked out, the first year I had to, to determine residence. You had to be there a year. After that, I immediately was put on the WPA. That was the beginning of really most exciting point in my life, because the WPA was so marvelous for all the creative people. I just can't sing its praises enough. I think all the artists you know today are well-known, and were able to develop their potentials because of the WPA, like Jackson Pollock and de Kooning, and—name them. Kline. Just name them. [00:52:00] All of them. The WPA did that. It also—what it did for the theater, what it did for the Index of American Design, what it did for the Writers' Project, for getting historical Americas—what the writers did. But especially for art, and especially for me. I was able, for the first time, to work full-time at painting. Now, imagine what that is. Don't have to worry about any income. You can do nothing but paint, which is your thing to do. I was so inspired to know, for one thing, that my painting was being used. It was being sent on—my paintings were being sent on tour to small galleries, small or large, small towns, throughout the whole country, to be seen by people who hadn't had the opportunity to see art before. It was being used, and I was being paid for something that gave dignity to my life as an artist. That, I think, obtained, with all the artists in the country. There were a few who goldbricked, but I would say not many, because it was just too exciting an opportunity. Unfortunately, the WPA had, by that time, almost run out, so that I only had about two years of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Was your supervision in Los Angeles very sensitive, very light?

DENNY WINTERS: No. No, the supervisor was S. MacDonald-Wright, Stanton MacDonald-Wright, who was an artist himself, who had discovered Synchronism. [00:54:09] A very snobbish artist, who only liked those who copied his style, which was synchronism in color. He was very unsympathetic, but it was great in spite of him. There was—no, he was the director, excuse me. The supervisor was Lorus Feitelson, who was a painter and was sympathetic, very sympathetic, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You wouldn't have to be in touch with MacDonald-Wright very much, anyway, would you?

DENNY WINTERS: No, except he imposed his shadow over the whole thing. [Laughs.] And when there was—there was an exposition, for instance, in San Francisco, showing artists' work from all over. The only Los Angeles artists who were shown were those who painted the way he did. The only ones. So, they were his stooges, you know? But that didn't matter.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever get to talk with him, MacDonald-Wright?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, sure.

ROBERT BROWN: What was he like? Because you said he was snobbish.

DENNY WINTERS: Well, he was. He was very superior. Very superior, very patronizing and condescending, and much older. He had been a very important person, and his importance had run out, so he had to [laughs] impose that on us younger people.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you try to object or retort to him, or was he too [inaudible]?

DENNY WINTERS: I was given, finally, a very disgraceful chore to do, like copying something, it seems to me—he reduced, more quickly than he needed to, the easel painting to just chore-like. [00:56:05] So I just quit like that when I was finally given the final disgraceful thing to do. I quit like that. I didn't have—

ROBERT BROWN: You mean he assigned you something that was really pretty—

DENNY WINTERS: I wish I could remember what it was, but it was the final degradation for an artist to have to do. It might have been copying something of his, for all I know. [Laughs.] So I did quit, and there were hard times after that. I forgot to say, meanwhile, I had married—

ROBERT BROWN: In California?

DENNY WINTERS: —Herman Cherry. Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: He was a fellow painter?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Had you known him, or you met him out there?

DENNY WINTERS: I met him out there. Then there were—there was quite a short, lean period, when a very unexpected and very interesting job turned up to go to New Mexico. That was to do props and costumes for a pageant that was commemorating Coronado's 400th year of his conquest of the Southwest, and it was sponsored by the Department of Interior. The friend who got us the job was doing the sets.

ROBERT BROWN: Who was that?

DENNY WINTERS: Les Marzolf. He had been a Chicago friend. He was a set designer in Chicago. [00:58:01] Then he had been in California, too, and we knew him in California. Before I leave California, there were a lot more interesting jobs. We go back to California from this job. Yes, we do.

ROBERT BROWN: How did that job work out?

DENNY WINTERS: That was marvelous.

ROBERT BROWN: Where was this staged, in Santa Fe or someplace like that?

DENNY WINTERS: It was assembled in Albuquerque, and there were about three months of making Indian headdresses. I had to airbrush Indian designs on blankets. The blankets were monk's cloth, but they passed as Indian woven blankets. The stage was—the show traveled after that, and the stage was football—baseball fields in various towns. The whole thing followed Coronado's tour—trek—of the Southwest. It went through Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and—what's the one I left out?

ROBERT BROWN: Kansas?

DENNY WINTERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Oklahoma? Arizona?

DENNY WINTERS: Arizona. Arizona.

ROBERT BROWN: Did it get a big turnout? Was it very professionally acted?

DENNY WINTERS: It was—there were—the key actors were trained actors. We traveled as sort of a caravan. This is after the props are all made. The Coronado's props, the armor, all this elaborate gold and silver and enamel armor, had to be made of papier-mâché. [01:00:03] The Indian headdresses were exactly like the real Indian headdresses. It was a very exciting kind of crafts thing to have to do. Then Cherry and I were hired to be stage managers, so we traveled with this thing, and we traveled as a caravan, taking all the trained actors, livestock, all these props that were great canvas drops, and pueblos, and teepees, and all these things. We traveled with that, and we were such a caravan that a carnival started following us and setting up right near us, in our tracks. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Because you were good for their business?

DENNY WINTERS: Because we were good for their business. And the trained actors we took were the voices, and it was loudspeaking thing. There were four directors who went on ahead and trained the townspeople to be the actors on the stage. And these major voices were done over the loudspeaker. The rest was mime. And so, the Junior Chamber of Commerce usually played the leading roles, and the young kids played the Indians. They were all made to look brown. That was a terribly exciting thing, to travel and see all those places. We visited all of the Indian pueblos and did a lot of exploring. Saw the snake dances, you know, and [inaudible]. Taking too long on that?

ROBERT BROWN: No, this—not at all. [01:02:01] This was a pretty lasting impression?

DENNY WINTERS: It was a marvelous job, and the purpose of the whole thing was to establish good relationships with Mexico, and that's the reason the Department of Interior was the boss of the whole job.

ROBERT BROWN: With Mexico?

DENNY WINTERS: With Mexico. At that time, we were—

ROBERT BROWN: To show that we were a common culture down there, to a degree?

DENNY WINTERS: At that time, America was doing a lot to make good friends—

ROBERT BROWN: The Good Neighbor policy—

DENNY WINTERS: Good Neighbor policy.

ROBERT BROWN: —of FDR.

DENNY WINTERS: That's right. So that is what created that job. And then from—

ROBERT BROWN: But you felt it was worthwhile, did you? What was the effect—

DENNY WINTERS: It was a marvelous adventure.

ROBERT BROWN: What was, say, the—do you remember what the effect was upon these people in Texas and Colorado and so forth?

DENNY WINTERS: I think they all had a marvelous time. I just was never around to see how they were affected by it. Everybody had a good time.

ROBERT BROWN: You wouldn't pick up the paper the next morning and—

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, well, I'm sure they all liked it. The show—we'd stay in each town about a week. It would take two or three days to set the whole thing up, and then I suppose there would be a day of rehearsal. I've kind of forgotten. Maybe two days of the production. Most of the townspeople in some of these were in the thing. There wasn't too large an audience in some of them. [They laugh.]

ROBERT BROWN: Were you pleased with your work, with your designs?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yes, yes. Everyone was.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was in the early '40s?

DENNY WINTERS: That was in '40, 1940.

ROBERT BROWN: So you were still in the WPA? This was sort of a leave of absence from that? Or had you finished the WPA? Well, it doesn't matter.

DENNY WINTERS: I couldn't have finished it. [01:04:00] If I went—you see, I forget years. Okay, that—

[END OF FILE winter80_1of2_reel_SideB_r.]

ROBERT BROWN: Side two—this is still your time in California?

DENNY WINTERS: Right. Then, of course, came the necessity, again, to earn a living.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean after the ending of the WPA?

DENNY WINTERS: After the ending of WPA. The first thing that came along, and that came directly out of the pageant that we had done, was an offer to work on—to do the silk-screening of some costumes for a musical called Jump for Joy.

ROBERT BROWN: A musical—

DENNY WINTERS: A musical—

ROBERT BROWN: —a movie, a film?

DENNY WINTERS: —no, it was a musical, stage musical, that was supposed to go to New York from there, after Houston, since there it wasn't successful. But it was a marvelous thing. It was Duke Ellington music. Duke

Ellington composed the music for it. And this great Negro actress. It was her first acting role.

ROBERT BROWN: Hmm. And it was popular in Los Angeles this first time?

DENNY WINTERS: It wasn't well enough organized, and it didn't have a long run, and it didn't move anywhere, and it didn't make money. But the song "Jump for Joy" became popular all over the country.

ROBERT BROWN: And you did silk-screening of the costumes?

DENNY WINTERS: First, I silk-screened some of the costumes. What was the—the costume designer was French, and he was very sophisticated, and this was not a very good idea. It cost a lot more than it should have. He was also supposed to do the sets, and so he turned the sets over to me, Cherry and me. [00:02:02] So we did all the sets for that.

ROBERT BROWN: What conception did you have for the sets?

DENNY WINTERS: Since it was all very different acts, each act had to have a new set. There was one, I know, where I had to paint a screen with a certain kind of paint, so that it turned from a log cabin into something else when they changed the lights. There are lights that, you know, bring up one set of colors, and lose another set of colors. There was another one where there was an eccentric dance. Those same lights brought out skeleton—the skeleton of the person dancing, I remember, because of patches sewn onto a black costume. And—oh, I can't remember all of them. But that's where the phrase "Zoot suit with a reet pleat" came from. There was one very clever writer who was on that. God, I wish I could remember the name of that black singer. I think she was in Porgy and Bess. She's famous. I can't think of her name. Well, she was in that, and that was a marvelous job.

ROBERT BROWN: So there were a lot of technical challenges for you?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: But you enjoyed it?

DENNY WINTERS: I enjoyed it.

ROBERT BROWN: It wasn't tedious for you, doing set—

DENNY WINTERS: No, that kind of thing I loved designing anyway. Oh, I forgot to say that after the trip, on the Coronado thing, we spent about six months in Mexico. It was my first trip to Mexico, and I did a great many paintings in Mexico. The women washing clothes in the stream, and walking, and they wore—it was the first time I had been able to paint the human figure. [00:04:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think you could in Mexico?

DENNY WINTERS: Because of the grace, the way they were costumed. They wore these long, full skirts, and the rebozos, and everything leant itself to grace and design. They were barefoot, and very close to the earth. Anyway, I did. I painted a lot of—and I have the photographs. I can show you them later if you want to see them. That led to another job in Hollywood. Lillian Hellman had written a movie called North Star, and that was at the time America and Russia were allies in the war, and so we were very friendly with Russia, and a lot of Russian directors were coming over to the movie industry. Lillian Hellman wrote this play called North Star that Goldwyn was producing, and it had to do with the German invasion of Russia. The Russian women were—the people were burning their homes, and fleeing and all that. I remember Ruth Nelson was in that one at the Group Players Theater, the old—Corwin [ph] just died. Did you read that in the paper? [Cross talk.] Anyway, that's an aside. Because I had done those Mexican women, which—

ROBERT BROWN: Which you—had you shown—had that been exhibited? How did people know about it?

DENNY WINTERS: They had been exhibited. They had been exhibited, and someone remembered them from the studio, Goldwyn Studio. They had tried out a couple of costume designers for this, and they weren't able to get the peasant feeling. [00:06:05] I guess they were real costume designers, who were kind of in the studio idea of how to costume a Russian peasant, you know. A little—

ROBERT BROWN: A little too artificial?

DENNY WINTERS: A little too artificial. And so I was hired on a temporary basis. I had to pass the approval of Lillian Hellman, so I did a whole lot of sketches and all, and she passed on me, so I did that job.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you tackle it? How did you overcome the shortcomings of the studio designers who had failed?

DENNY WINTERS: [Laughs.] I didn't know enough. I just did—I did research on how the Russians dressed, and it wasn't too utterly different, you see. The full skirt, the peasant blouse. Of course, the peasant blouse, the Russian women didn't wear that. I've forgotten what they wore up above, but it was very plain. Anyway, peasant, more or less, would dress about the same. I just didn't run into any problems that way. There was a Russian girl there who guided me on, they do this, this way, and they—you know. She was technical advisor to the whole movie. Her name was Zina Voynow.

ROBERT BROWN: Voynow?

DENNY WINTERS: Voynow. She lives in New York now and edits movies, motion picture—um, short films, I think.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was very lucrative work for an artist, wasn't it?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: The movie industry.

DENNY WINTERS: I mean, it was a big break. Then another big break came along, based on that, because working on that was William Cameron Menzies, who was, um, continuity director. [00:08:14] He kind of planned the scenes and how they should look. So, having gotten to know him—he was next on a movie called Address Unknown, and that still was about the war, and had to do with a Jew who owned a gallery, an art gallery, and how Jews were being persecuted. This is in Germany. The first letter would be, oh—there would be difficulty in exchanging mail. I've forgotten. It was a story—difficulty, and the Jew was being harassed. Finally, this correspondence was interrupted. The letter came back and said, "address unknown." You know, he had vanished. So Mr. Menzies called me up and said how many paintings did I have, and he filled the whole gallery with my paintings. I mean, I was the—

ROBERT BROWN: What gallery was this?

DENNY WINTERS: The Jew—

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, the gallery in the—

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah, in the set. In the set. So I had all these paintings that were part of the set. [Laughs.] I was paid just for the rental of those. That was fantastic.

ROBERT BROWN: Mass exposure.

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Scale no other artist—

DENNY WINTERS: And then there was a period when we had art classes. [00:10:03]

ROBERT BROWN: You and Herman Cherry?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. We had this great big studio.

ROBERT BROWN: Where was this? Where did you live?

DENNY WINTERS: We lived in Los Angeles, on Alvarado, right near Westlake. It was quite wild in those days. It looked out over—it was full of trees, and on a hill, and it looked out over Glendale, and I don't think you'd even be able to find it anymore, because now it's an upper-lane highway and a lower-lane highway. I was back there to visit, and I couldn't find it. Well, the person in that—as I said, we had art classes, and that was interesting, because we had gotten to know Sylvia Sidney quite well, because she was going around with Fletch, Fletcher Martin. When we decided to have these art classes, she got all of the Adlers—there are a whole bunch of Adlers. You know, Luther Adler's family? Pearl Adler and—oh, I forget all their names. We had movie actors in that art class, and people who had worked on North Star with me. They all wanted to learn how to draw. We had models, and went around teaching them how to draw. That was three times a week, and that was rather—well, it was lucrative enough so that we could live on it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy it, or were they difficult to teach, these people?

DENNY WINTERS: Um. Well, some were, and some weren't. There were some regular pupils. Also, there was a psychiatrist who sent some of her patients for therapeutic purposes. [00:12:04] There was another class.

ROBERT BROWN: Is this the first time you had taught?

DENNY WINTERS: It was the first time I had, yes. It did work out that, pretty soon, Cherry did all the teaching, and I did more of the drawing. We had marvelous models. It worked out better to have one teacher rather than two.

ROBERT BROWN: That was a particularly good place to get good models? Or just—

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, yes. Had marvelous models. I've forgotten how we got them. But anyway, this lasted for quite a long time.

ROBERT BROWN: How did you go about teaching? You sort of backed out of it eventually.

DENNY WINTERS: I backed out of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you enjoy it for a time?

DENNY WINTERS: No, I've never enjoyed teaching. I've done it quite a lot, but I don't enjoy it.

ROBERT BROWN: Why not?

DENNY WINTERS: It seems like too great a responsibility. It seems like you have to be able to say, and divine what to say, at the right time, or you can set the pupil back, or you can inhibit him. It's a great worry. I taught here for 10 years, adult education, and I began dreading it the day after I had my weekly lesson. [Laughs.] So after 10 years, I thought I had done enough for the public.

ROBERT BROWN: Even though you might see a few of your pupils catch fire?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, mm-hmm [affirmative], and a few did.

ROBERT BROWN: During these very fairly lucrative assignments, or things you did in California, did you continue to paint a great deal? [00:14:02]

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, because there was always unemployment insurance that lasted quite a long while, and that was the bonanza. So after a job, you'd have I don't know how many weeks where you could draw unemployment insurance.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you and—

DENNY WINTERS: Then Cherry and I sort of took turns, too. It would be his turn—after I had done a stint, it would be his turn. It worked out okay.

ROBERT BROWN: So the two of you worked very easily together during that time?

DENNY WINTERS: Seemed to. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROBERT BROWN: Were his goals in painting similar to your own?

DENNY WINTERS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. I don't think he had as much, oh, maybe zest for it. Maybe he was more self-critical. He suffered more. I just loved to paint [laughs] and I never wanted to stop.

ROBERT BROWN: You mentioned, just a bit ago, Fletcher Martin. Was he a painter you met at that time?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yeah. Yes. Yes. He became a very close friend, and remained so until he died a couple of years ago.

ROBERT BROWN: What was it that drew you to him in the '40s?

DENNY WINTERS: He was also a member of American Artists' Congress. That's where I met nearly all the artists I met, and that's where I met Gabe Kohn, whose picture you just saw.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that where you had met Herman Cherry, too?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. We just naturally gravitated to him.

ROBERT BROWN: What was Fletcher Martin like in the '40s?

DENNY WINTERS: In the '40s, he was just beginning to have a very big name. [00:16:01] He had painted a picture called Trouble in Frisco, and it caught fire with the—it was a picture—it was at the beginning of union organization. It was about sailors, and they were having a fight, and you were seeing them through a porthole. I

could show you examples of all of these if we had time.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Was Fletcher Martin a very outspoken person?

DENNY WINTERS: Outspoken? He was very direct. He was actually humble. He never got a big head for all the publicity he had and all that. He was always a very simple, very likable, very generous person. Absolutely one of the nicest people.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he one of your closest friends of artists in California?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were some of the other artists that you were friends with at that time?

DENNY WINTERS: There was that Gabe Kohn.

ROBERT BROWN: Was he a Californian, too? Was he—

DENNY WINTERS: He was a born Californian. Fletcher Martin was a transplant. He had been born in the West somewhere, maybe Colorado. I forget. Who are some of the other friends? There was—my closest friend was a woman, Eula Long, who was a one-time painter. Then all of those, um—

ROBERT BROWN: How had she become your friend? She was no longer a painter?

DENNY WINTERS: She painted—she was married and she had a lot of other interests. She was a good painter, but it wasn't her major interest. [00:18:02] It wasn't her *raison d'être* the way it was with some of us.

ROBERT BROWN: But nevertheless, she was your closest friend?

DENNY WINTERS: She was my closest friend.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose she was?

DENNY WINTERS: We just liked each other a lot. She was a member of the American Artists' Congress, and we did have many things in common. I don't know, why do you like some people better than others? [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What was the Artists' Congress up to during the Second World War?

DENNY WINTERS: One thing we did was open our own gallery.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you did?

DENNY WINTERS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. That took a lot of financing, a lot of attention, and held a lot of interest. It was right on Hollywood Boulevard, and we sold through that. That seems to be about the major activity I recall. There weren't picket lines or anything like that, as there had been in Chicago. We put on artist balls. Maybe it was more frivolous. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: Was the congress's gallery on Hollywood Boulevard well-attended?

DENNY WINTERS: As I recall. As I recall. It didn't—

ROBERT BROWN: Would you take turns sitting the gallery?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, and then we—one of the artists had a wife who didn't mind doing that, and we sort of paid her a small amount, or she got commission from what she sold. I don't remember. But we did have to earn money to support it, or it was supported by commissions from the things that sold. I don't remember that it was a whale of a success, but it was a good chance to show our work. [00:20:00]

ROBERT BROWN: What about commercial outlets? Were there commercial galleries to speak of?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, there were. I became attached with Frank Perls Gallery. He was the brother of Klaus Perls, the New York dealer. He did have one of the best galleries in Los Angeles. He was out on the strip. I remember the first time I went out to show him my work. He wasn't going to let—you know, he wasn't going to take up my time, or let me take up his. He came out to the car. I had things in the back of the car. He looked at one or two, and he immediately said, "Bring them in." Right on top of that, he offered me a one-man show. The reason he liked them were that they were these Mexican paintings. He loved these Mexican paintings. So that—

ROBERT BROWN: What do you think he liked in these Mexican paintings?

DENNY WINTERS: I don't know. He liked the quality of them. He thought they were good pictures. It was quite a good show. I know that Ted Cook wrote the foreword to the catalog.

ROBERT BROWN: Who is Ted Cook?

DENNY WINTERS: He used to be well-known, and he was quite well—I think he used to be syndicated. There was a column called "Ted Cook's Cuckoos." Does that mean anything to you?

ROBERT BROWN: No.

DENNY WINTERS: I think his fame was mostly in California, but he did go to New York to work on the New Yorker at one point. He was asked by Ross to come and be on the staff, based on his "Ted Cook's Cuckoos." [00:22:03]

ROBERT BROWN: So he gave you a good writeup for the show?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. Well, he wrote a big blurb on the catalog, having gone to the WPA and seen my work there. If I could find it, I'd show it to you.

ROBERT BROWN: He was already beginning to follow your work?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: What were some of the—when was this show, this show with Frank Perls? The mid-'40s?

DENNY WINTERS: That must have been. I had more than one show with him then. He handled me from that time on.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you have sales, quite a few?

DENNY WINTERS: I don't think I ever sold a great amount. I never had that marvelous feeling of a sell-out show. I never did. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: What was Perls like, Frank Perls?

DENNY WINTERS: Frank Perls. He was a very respectable, sensitive person. He was a very marvelous dealer to have. As a matter of fact, I had nothing but encouragement all the while I lived out there. It seemed I was getting off to a fabulous start. I really—the first time I went to—I had a one-man show at the Los Angeles Museum. I took photographs up to San Francisco, and went to the museum there, and the lovely woman who was director of the museum—I can't remember her name now—offered me a one-man show there. I had a wonderful review from the art critic—I did in Los Angeles. As they said, I seemed to have gotten off at a whale of a good start. [00:24:00] Not quite sure what happened [laughs] after that.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, looking at your work—we're looking at some photographs of your work from when you were in Chicago, the example that was picked for the traveling exhibition through the Mexican pictures, and a couple you did for the WPA. There seems to be, running throughout them, a rather, to me—of course, they're black-and-white—really gloomy quality to them, rather heavy. Does that seem fair to say?

DENNY WINTERS: I think so. I think you'd agree—I think you'd say that's true. For one thing, those are painted with a palette knife.

ROBERT BROWN: The Mexican figures?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I regret that I fell in love with the palette knife. The heavy paint quality, I think, probably came from van Gogh. That juicy, heavy paint. That stayed with me for a long time. I was influenced by—

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you say you regret that you used the palette knife?

DENNY WINTERS: Because now, I don't like heavy paint at all. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: At that time, you did?

DENNY WINTERS: At that time, I did, and I seem to have—and you mentioned a heavy quality. It was a long time before my color took on any of the quality that the Impressionists had discovered for us. My color remained more traditional, you know, local color-color. It was as though I was a long time in learning what was there for me to know, what the Impressionists had discovered about light and color, and what Matisse was practicing so

beautifully. [00:26:00] I wasn't up to appreciating it for a long time.

ROBERT BROWN: So you had stuck, really, with what you had learned at the Art Institute?

DENNY WINTERS: Right, right.

ROBERT BROWN: Which was still quite traditional when you were there?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: You were comfortable—

DENNY WINTERS: I was always a romantic, as you can see. Usually, the skies are overcast. You can see the clouds.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes. This was Los Angeles River.

DENNY WINTERS: The Los Angeles River. That is typical of my paintings of sky. If you think of California, you think of clear, blue, hazy sky, as a rule. There's only about one or two months of the year where you get those clouds. But I carried that over from Chicago. I carried my feeling for the grays. I love gray anyway. The gray days of Chicago, the sooty, dirty Chicago days. [Laughs.] I loved it. I didn't like that bright, clean color. It looked, I don't know, too artificial.

ROBERT BROWN: As you look at these now, was there any commentary in these, intentional or unconscious?

DENNY WINTERS: No, no. The fact that you see industry back in there shows that it was there, and I did a literal painting from it. You can see in this, though—I don't know whether I mentioned earlier, my great love in the Chicago days was El Greco. I think I mentioned that.

ROBERT BROWN: You may have, but it's apparent in—

DENNY WINTERS: It's apparent in this.

ROBERT BROWN: In this swirling, linear movement.

DENNY WINTERS: And in all those variations of light against light, and dark against dark, and all the lights and darks, the way they pulsate against one another. [00:28:00]

ROBERT BROWN: We certainly see the same in these Mexican paintings as well.

DENNY WINTERS: You see it in all of these. El Greco maintained an influence on me for many, many years. In fact, I still see evidence of it.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, it's much more apparent then than it is today.

DENNY WINTERS: Right, I hope so.

ROBERT BROWN: This is certainly—this view onto the pier—

DENNY WINTERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: 1942 or [4]3, you dated it. Certainly the contrast of light and dark.

DENNY WINTERS: Right, right.

ROBERT BROWN: This looks really quite ominous. Again, was that intentional, or do you think it was just a byproduct of—

DENNY WINTERS: To me, it was romantic. To me, it was beautiful.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you sitting there, painting?

DENNY WINTERS: No, I—

ROBERT BROWN: Are these worked out from sketches?

DENNY WINTERS: I have always made sketches on the spot and painted in the studio. I've never taken the canvas to the place. I don't—I like to reorganize in the studio. I'm distracted by all the little accidental things

that happen if I'm painting on—now, I can see why Monet painted the haystack on the spot, because he was experimenting in color. But where I was doing a scene, I could do it much better—and I could imagine those waves, and how they hit against those piers, much better than I could do them with it constantly moving. That would have been totally confusing. But I could imagine how it seemed, and then I could pin it down on the canvas. I have always had a very good memory. And then—

ROBERT BROWN: And yet you aren't—

DENNY WINTERS: And yet what?

ROBERT BROWN: You aren't trying to be literal.

DENNY WINTERS: No. But I have—the memory goes a great deal with feeling. I'm feeling how it was. I'm feeling how it seemed. I'm feeling almost how it would be if I were in it, or if I were it. [00:30:03] This has always been true. I can recreate something from memory. It's not that I have a camera in my eye or my brain. In a sense, I do have, I guess. But then that's only for the salient things. Then the rest is composed of my reaction to it, and how it works best on the canvas.

ROBERT BROWN: And those are all things you could best do back in the studio?

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: We'll look, once again, a little later at some of your work. We'll return to it. Other friends you had in California?

DENNY WINTERS: I didn't mention the Magafan twins.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you spell that?

DENNY WINTERS: M-A-G-A-F-A-N. They were identical twins from California—from Colorado—who had come to California, and were both painters, and had—they were identical in every way, including their tongue. Seemed to —

ROBERT BROWN: How did you run into them?

DENNY WINTERS: Met them in Colorado, when we were on that Coronado trip. And then I forgot to say that we had spent the whole winter in Colorado, that first winter, that winter after the Coronado thing ended.

ROBERT BROWN: You stayed on in Colorado?

DENNY WINTERS: Stayed on in Colorado.

ROBERT BROWN: Painting, teaching?

DENNY WINTERS: Painting. Painting. [00:32:00] And exhibiting in the Denver Museum there, and the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Oh, and we took lithography at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. So that was a valuable winter to spend there, and we met these girls, the twins.

ROBERT BROWN: Had they been trained in Colorado?

DENNY WINTERS: They had been trained in Colorado, I guess at the Fine Arts Center. One of the twins died. Jenny died. They moved—they were the first ones to move to Woodstock from California, and they sent back word about how much fun it was to be east, and what exciting artists were east, and how wonderful it was to be close to New York. So Cherry and I got the idea that it would be fun to move east. We had been long enough in California.

ROBERT BROWN: You had been there, what—

DENNY WINTERS: I had been there, by then, about seven years. I think. I lose track of these years.

ROBERT BROWN: You had one other job—

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, there was one other—

ROBERT BROWN: Animated cartoon.

DENNY WINTERS: I was a background artist for animated cartoons for about six months. It's the only job I ever got fired at.

ROBERT BROWN: What was this? For what studio was that?

DENNY WINTERS: That was for Schlesinger Studio. They did Bugs Bunny. But we were doing animated cartoons for the armed forces. They were, oh, telling them how to use their gas masks and everything, but they had a bit of humor. That was very tedious, very confining, very hard work, and as I said, I got fired. [00:34:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Why? It didn't come up to their expectations?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, I just was not realistic enough. They—I just couldn't drop, all of a sudden, the way I had been painting and become that—I was the wrong person to have hired in the first place, so it was never smooth. Also, I couldn't make those airbrushes not clog up, and they got [laughs] it just was the wrong job. But it was interesting to learn how animated cartoons are made. That's all.

ROBERT BROWN: This was shortly after that that you and Herman Cherry—

DENNY WINTERS: We decided to Woodstock, having—or move east. There was a halfway point. Some friends of ours owned a farm in Pennsylvania, in Kunkletown.

ROBERT BROWN: Where was Kunkletown?

DENNY WINTERS: Kunkletown was near Stroudsburg. It was in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country. That was a fabulous experience.

ROBERT BROWN: Why?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, for one thing, it was on a country lane, miles from anywhere, and we arrived by train, and no car, and dependent on these Pennsylvania Dutch farmers to take us, once a week, shopping. It was during a period when you couldn't buy cars. It was during—

ROBERT BROWN: This was immediately after the war?

DENNY WINTERS: Right after the war, and it was impossible to buy a car. Finally, we did. Finally, we got a car.

ROBERT BROWN: So this really threw you upon your own resources?

DENNY WINTERS: Exactly. So we did an awful lot of walking around the countryside, and these farmers, these Dutch farmers, couldn't figure out why two people did so much walking. But we saw a lot, and [laughs] it was really interesting.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do a lot of painting?

DENNY WINTERS: And a lot of painting. Was all there was to do. A great deal of painting. [00:36:00] At that time, I had gotten a gallery in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you had?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. That had—I had gone—driven east with some paintings from California, and taken some paintings, and there was a gallery, new gallery, opening, looking for artists. It seemed to be going to be a very good gallery. It was pretty good. Now, I can't quite think of the name of it right this minute.

ROBERT BROWN: Is it the Mortimer Levitt Gallery?

[Audio Break.]

DENNY WINTERS: The Mortimer Levitt Gallery. I had my first show of work that I had done in Kunkletown at that gallery. I think I had—oh, and I also showed these Mexican paintings there. I didn't stay with them too long, because the fine print, which I had neglected to read, said that they sold through, very often—not always, but very often, sold through interior decorators, who got 30 percent, and they took 40 percent. So turned out that I was getting about 30 percent on every painting I sold. One painting, meanwhile, had been on view in the Modern Museum, in a romantic show. It had been selected for the romantic show by Dorothy Miller. I think, out of that painting, I got \$95. [00:38:00] So I withdrew from that gallery. I didn't have a gallery, then, for a couple of years, until Fletcher Martin, who had also moved to Woodstock—we kind of migrated as a whole group—took me to the Frank Rehn Gallery and showed him my work. He took me on—Frank Rehn did—and I was with him ever since.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Rehn quite a patriarchal figure by then? What was he like?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, my, yes. He had launched Hopper and Burchfield, and all those earlier boys. Thank goodness, because—well, then Mr. Rehn himself decided to bring the gallery more up-to-date and take on younger artists, who were in another school. I don't think he was ever totally convinced about us, though. He didn't quite know how to sell us or promote us. His heart was still with the Hopper group. I mean, his taste in art—by that time, I was rather abstract. Um. So where are we?

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Were these friends at Kunkletown, the farm, were they—these were painters, too?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, no, no, farmers. Farmers. As I said, Kunkletown only lasted through that one winter. That was a snowy, hard winter, but a good experience. Then we moved to Woodstock, and—

ROBERT BROWN: How did you find that to be?

DENNY WINTERS: And found [laughs] the first place we found was congenial enough, but not very great for painting. [00:40:01] But it was wonderful to be back with artists. In fact, Woodstock was probably the best place for an artist to be at that time. At least we felt so. There were so many congenial spirits, and we all believed that art was all-important, and we all backed each other up. Meanwhile, Eddie Millman had gone there from Chicago. Phil Guston had—well, Phil Guston and Mitch Siporin and others came some summers. They never established residence there, but Fletch did, and these Magafan twins did, and we did. Of course, there was Eugene Speicher from the old days. Yasuo Kuniyoshi, who was a great friend and a great influence.

ROBERT BROWN: On you, at that time?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: In what ways?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, because he took a great interest in my work. He was very supportive. He tried to get his dealer, Edith Halpert, to take me on, and she never took on women, and she didn't take me on, but [laughs]. It was always marvelous to talk art with him, because he was very articulate. I guess he was a marvelous teacher. I never studied with him. He taught at the Art Students League. It was nice to be around artists who knew so much more than I did.

ROBERT BROWN: This was in some contrast with California, then, was it?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: They were much thinner on the ground there? In Los Angeles, there weren't—

DENNY WINTERS: No, there weren't too many, and there weren't too many who were advanced in their thinking or—you know. [00:42:01]

ROBERT BROWN: They're sort of dominated by the rigidified thought of MacDonald-Wright?

DENNY WINTERS: Well, I don't know if he cast such an influence around there, but there wasn't very much in ferment there as there was in Woodstock. At least it was terribly exciting for me. It's always been fun to be around artists. I don't know whether you've ever noticed. But they do have a great sense of fun, too, and play, and we had marvelous parties and balls and everything there. Yasuo Kuniyoshi was usually director, chairman, of the balls. He had a great sense of fun. And picnics, and swimming, and everything. Woodstock had wonderful terrain. Rivers to swim in, and places for picnics, and—good times.

ROBERT BROWN: There were enough artists there to make all of this—

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, there were.

ROBERT BROWN: You weren't seeing the same people all the time?

DENNY WINTERS: No. Although I suppose we became kind of a large group. Funny, the artists never mingled with the natives. It wasn't, I don't think, the artists' fault. It was the natives' fault. They remained separate, distinct from, as though we were kind of crazy or queer. I don't know whether that's changed now, but it was true then.

ROBERT BROWN: But at that time, there weren't a lot of tourists and shops and the like?

DENNY WINTERS: No. No, Woodstock hadn't become popular with those people who follow after artists.

ROBERT BROWN: Kuniyoshi was a very sympathetic figure with you at that time? [00:44:00]

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. And then there was Arnold Blanch, and Doris Lee. I'm talking about the older ones now.

ROBERT BROWN: What were they like?

DENNY WINTERS: The established.

ROBERT BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Was Alexander Brook there at the time?

DENNY WINTERS: No, he wasn't. He came—he visited. I knew him in California. He was out in California quite a lot, doing portraits of movie stars, and I first met him out there.

ROBERT BROWN: Did he become a close friend, Brook?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, he used our studio in California to do portraits, so when Cherry and I went to New York for the first time, we stayed in his studio. Then he and Niles Spencer decided to show us the big city, and they took us all around, pointing out the skyscrapers. It was the first time they'd ever looked at them [laughs] themselves, and they looked like bigger hicks than we did. I remember there was a big opening at the Museum of Modern Art, and Léger was being featured. It was his show, I think. We'd met him in California, and so he came up. "Hello, Cherry. Hello, Denny." We introduced him to Alex [laughs] and Niles Spencer. They couldn't get over it. [Laughs.] That was really funny. Well, you know—

ROBERT BROWN: You had upstaged them? [They laugh.]

DENNY WINTERS: We upstaged them while they were showing us the city.

ROBERT BROWN: You stayed in Woodstock for several years. Those were—

DENNY WINTERS: Five. [00:46:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Did you get into New York City quite frequently, I suppose?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, quite often. It was only a hundred miles away.

ROBERT BROWN: You were exhibiting with Mortimer Levitt, and then with Frank Rehn. So you had a—

DENNY WINTERS: At that time, yeah. Yes. I went with Frank Rehn, and had a very big show with Frank Rehn. Sometime later, he had his—he had the whole floor of one of the buildings. I think it was on Fifth Avenue. I've forgotten. Maybe 57th Street at that time. Later, he condensed and made his gallery smaller. I had a very big show there, my first one with him. Well, I stayed with him. He died eventually, and his assistant kept on until about a year ago, and then the assistant became 80 years old and decided he had had enough.

ROBERT BROWN: And ended the business?

DENNY WINTERS: Ended it.

ROBERT BROWN: At that time, in the late '40s, early '50s, the Rehn Gallery was still one of the most prominent.

DENNY WINTERS: It really was. It was. Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Frank Rehn—was he given to giving you advice? Was he very fair-minded? What was he like?

DENNY WINTERS: He was a lovely gentleman of the old school. He loved a good joke. He loved a good story. He loved to be around good conversation. [00:48:00] I enjoyed him, and I respected him, but since I lived in Woodstock and he was in New York, and I didn't get there too often, I never did get to see too much of him, or get to be that intimate or that friendly.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you ever think of moving to the city?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, and I did move to the city—well, I think it was in '48 I won a Guggenheim Fellowship, and went to Europe for about eight months, I guess. Until the money ran out.

ROBERT BROWN: What impelled you to apply for the Guggenheim?

DENNY WINTERS: I had been applying every year.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see. [They laugh.]

DENNY WINTERS: I had been applying. I finally won it.

ROBERT BROWN: What did you intend doing when you got—you went to France and Italy for almost a year.

DENNY WINTERS: I wanted to paint, and I wanted to study—on my application, I said I wanted to study the paintings before the Renaissance, the primitive. Right now, I don't know why I applied for that, but it turned out that I was more intrigued with the mosaics that I saw than almost anything else, and a lot of the sculpture, but the exposure to everything did me a lot of good, I felt. I did do a lot of painting, and in Paris, where I set up a studio, I studied etching and lithography. The man I did lithography with was either the son or the grandson of the lithographer who had done all of Toulouse-Lautrec's lithographs. [00:50:05]

ROBERT BROWN: Which firm, or which person, was this?

DENNY WINTERS: Either the son or the grandson.

ROBERT BROWN: What was their name?

DENNY WINTERS: I guess it was Lautrec.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, I see. He was the son or grandson—related to Lautrec himself?

DENNY WINTERS: No, no, excuse me. I can't think of his name. No.

ROBERT BROWN: But they were first-class instructors?

DENNY WINTERS: First-class firm.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you do much printmaking before then? You mentioned earlier you—

DENNY WINTERS: I had only done lithography at Colorado, and it seemed like a good idea at the time. The old man I studied etching with was the last of the old steel engravers, but he died, meanwhile. I mean, right while—he got sick and then died. So that study was cut short.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you recall what his name was?

DENNY WINTERS: I can't, no.

ROBERT BROWN: So this was a pretty productive time, then, wasn't it?

DENNY WINTERS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And I did a lot of paintings. I have some of those paintings that I did there. I mean, photographs. I mean—

ROBERT BROWN: You were away, then, from your family, friends, and all. You didn't mind? You were—this was just immediately postwar. There were a lot of Americans over there at that time, weren't there, on GI Bill?

DENNY WINTERS: Um, let's see.

ROBERT BROWN: It was 1948 to ['4]9.

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. I did know quite a few people in Paris. Then I traveled through Europe. Of course, Cherry and I did all this together. We went through all the caves down—we traveled through the South of France. We went through the Lascaux Cave, which is now closed to the public, and was one of the great experiences, to see those murals. Looked as fresh as though they had just been painted. They were only discovered in '26, and they had been opened up. [00:52:03] The cave had been opened up to the public, had been lit and—so that was fabulous.

ROBERT BROWN: It was a memorable part of the—

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah, that was.

ROBERT BROWN: But then the money ran out, and you had to—

DENNY WINTERS: Then the money ran out, and I went—

ROBERT BROWN: That's when you came back to the city?

DENNY WINTERS: Came back to the city. I came back and went to the city, yeah. Cherry stayed on. He wasn't ready to come home. He stayed on for about six more months, scrounging, the way one can scrounge if one is alone in Paris and is desperate to stay on. We were at the point of breaking up then. So I went back, and I went to New York, and I was able to rent a loft, sublet a loft from a friend of mine, and I lived in New York then, for the whole winter, until—the place I lived in in Woodstock had to be abandoned in the winter. It wasn't a winter place. Then I went back to Woodstock. Now, is this a good place to stop?

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: This is about 1950 or so, is it? Were you trying to find a permanent place to stay? You were living in—

DENNY WINTERS: I had—the places in Woodstock had always been winter places, so there was always the move to a place that was winterized.

ROBERT BROWN: They had been summer places.

DENNY WINTERS: Sometimes it was in Woodstock. One of the places in Woodstock belonged to Karl Fortress. [00:54:00] So there was always that moving twice a year.

ROBERT BROWN: Was Fortress one of your friends you met during those years?

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yeah. He had a place in New York that he went to in the wintertime, with his wife, Lily. She had a teaching job. I guess it was in New York.

ROBERT BROWN: And so, what, you thought you'd like to break this pattern of having to move twice a year?

DENNY WINTERS: No—

ROBERT BROWN: From Woodstock back to new York.

DENNY WINTERS: I was content. I was content to do that. It seemed to be out of the question to buy a place. The studio I went back to every year in Woodstock was a marvelous studio. It was called Skylights, and it had skylights in seven rooms, all with skylights.

ROBERT BROWN: This had been specially designed for studios?

DENNY WINTERS: It had been designed by a man who [phone rings]—

[Audio Break.]

DENNY WINTERS: —who was a dreamer, and he dreamed of having a self-sufficient art colony. The rents were rather inexpensive. At the time I was there, he had died, and his son had taken over, and he was not quite as much of an idealist as his father was. But still, the buildings had all been built for artists and their best use. Artists and craftsmen. So this was a great studio. It was crude, but it had marvelous light, and I loved it, and I went back to it every year. So that was why I was willing to put up with moving to another place every winter. [00:56:00] So I went back to that. Well, as I said, Cherry and I had broken up. Just before I went back, there was an artists' ball, and I met Lew at this artists'—

ROBERT BROWN: This was in New York or in Woodstock?

DENNY WINTERS: In New York, at the Astor. I met Lew at this artists' ball. I could go into that, but I don't think I should now.

ROBERT BROWN: Go ahead.

DENNY WINTERS: Huh?

ROBERT BROWN: Go ahead. This was—

DENNY WINTERS: Well, it was run by Julio de Diego, who, at the time, was married to Gypsy Rose Lee. I was on his committee, making masks for the ball. I really didn't have an escort, and didn't plan to go to the ball at all, but Gypsy said those of us who wanted to, we could go in the crowd, and we could go through her wardrobe, and use any of her costumes we wanted to, and that seemed too good to miss. So I did, and I was dressed all in black jet [ph], and it was very exotic. I went to the ball with a group, and that's where I met Lew, who had been

to a cocktail party, and they had insisted he go to the ball. That's how we met.

ROBERT BROWN: He wasn't intending to go?

DENNY WINTERS: No, no. He was in New York to revise a book for his publisher.

ROBERT BROWN: He was already based in Maine?

DENNY WINTERS: He was based in Maine, and had this New York agent. [00:58:01] He was in New York on business. So, at this cocktail party, they persuaded him, he should go to this ball. And I gave him some long red underwear, and lipsticked his top, and that's how he was dressed. I had a mask and this black jet things, and black lace stockings, and black headdress. We just sort of met in the middle of the ballroom floor and started dancing, and that's how the romance started there. [Laughs.] Appropriately, at an artists' ball. He said he'd like to see me again, and I said I'll be in Woodstock. If he wanted to see me, come there, and he did. Never expected I'd see him again, but that's how it all started. Then he wanted me to see where he lived in Maine, and I came here.

ROBERT BROWN: You had never, of course, been here before?

DENNY WINTERS: I had never—I had been to the Skowhegan Art School.

ROBERT BROWN: Oh, you had?

DENNY WINTERS: Just once. I had been in Maine just one time. I had driven with Sara and Yasuo Kuniyoshi, and Phil Guston, and Cherry. They were all giving lectures at the Skowhegan school. So I had only seen Maine that one time.

ROBERT BROWN: You really already knew it then?

DENNY WINTERS: No, I didn't know it. I had never seen the coast. Lew said that he lived on the coast, and he said he put his shoes on when he wanted to go out to a party or something. I thought about him like Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth*. Do you know that book?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah.

DENNY WINTERS: And I expected he'd be in a shack, you know, down on the river—on the harbor. [01:00:04] Then I came to this house, and I felt like he had really lied to me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: He was really an elegant [they laugh].

DENNY WINTERS: Yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Nicer.

DENNY WINTERS: Anyway, that's how that all started. About a year later, we were married.

ROBERT BROWN: You decided you'd like to live here, or you could tolerate it, or were you still essentially focused toward New York?

DENNY WINTERS: My morale and my heart was in Woodstock. I loved it. I loved it here physically. I loved it. But I felt a great lack and loss for my friends and the moral support they gave me. Here, there was none, and here I felt conspicuous. I was the only one doing this kind of thing, and I felt I was an object of suspicion, almost, by—you know, crazy artist. That's the way I was treated a little bit, too, by some.

ROBERT BROWN: Who were the people you met here? It would be the locals, plus the summer people?

DENNY WINTERS: I met all of Lew's friends, and they were some of both. I don't mean that they treated me so much that way as did the native people, like the grocery man or the meat man or the neighbor. The man down the—people down the street. I was a little bit odd, because I was an artist. I felt, for a long time, that need for the support of other painters. It was a very lonesome time in that sense. Even though the friends of Lew's were very nice to me, I didn't feel I had anyone who spoke my language, my language being that of shop talk, I suppose, but important to me, and support for my work. [01:02:15] It was a good thing I had the Rehn Gallery, that connection, in New York. But gradually, I got to know more artists. I got to know craftsmen. Even though they were scattered around the state, there was this feeling of things were happening in Maine.

ROBERT BROWN: But you had to go quite a distance to find these [inaudible]?

DENNY WINTERS: Right, right, right. We did start—there was a group called Maine Coast Craftsmen, and the Maine Coast Craftsmen—crafts were always stronger in Maine than painting was. They had a show here in Rockport. I think it was the first or second year I was here. That was the last time—they abandoned—they disbanded as an organization that very year.

ROBERT BROWN: Had they been a cooperative group of a gallery?

DENNY WINTERS: No, they hadn't had a gallery, but they had been an organization that met, and once in a while, had an exhibition, group exhibition. Well, that decided, some of us who were around here, and myself, to start something and call it by that name, Maine Coast, only we called it Maine Coast Artists. Because we then invited people like Reuben Tam, who was on Monhegan, [Bernard] Blackie Langlais—[01:04:02]

ROBERT BROWN: Who had just come up here.

DENNY WINTERS: Who had—who—I don't know just when he came, but he was already here. Neil Welliver was a young artist, unknown then. Alex Katz was—

ROBERT BROWN: When was this, in the '50s now, we're talking about?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah, we're talking about in the '50s, in about '52 or ['5]3. These were artists I had learned were here, and they were invited to show. Neil didn't live too far away, it turned out, and neither did Alex Katz. So we showed all them. First, we started out over at the post office, and we only had that one year. Then there was a school, abandoned—

[END OF TRACK winter80_1of2_reel_SideA_r.]

ROBERT BROWN —the Maine Coast Artists, which were founded about 1952?

DENNY WINTERS: About '52.

ROBERT BROWN: And this was going to be something that would mainly be active in the summer?

DENNY WINTERS: Only in the summer. At first, we showed crafts as well, because of the Haystack School of Crafts, and two of the artists—

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, which was just beginning.

DENNY WINTERS: Which was just beginning at that time. Francis Merritt, who became the director of it, was one of the leaders in this organization we called Maine Coast Artists. He was a painter—he was a trained painter himself, and a very good one. So we had it, then, in the Hoboken School, which was thought to be owned by the town. It later turned out to have been willed to Maynard Ingraham. Then we had a brief time in the opera house. I think we had three or four years in that. Then there was another interlude, until the old fire station became available for sale, and Lew, my husband, thought it would be wise to buy it. At that time, Millie Cummings, who had been directress, or wife of the director of Skowhegan Art School, was living here, and offered to be director of it.

ROBERT BROWN: This was when, 1960 or so?

DENNY WINTERS: This is 1967.

ROBERT BROWN: So you existed a rather—

DENNY WINTERS: Sporadically, up until—

ROBERT BROWN: —gypsy existence until that point?

DENNY WINTERS: Exactly.

ROBERT BROWN: Then the old fire station in Rockport—

DENNY WINTERS: Then that was for sale. She formed an association and raised the money to buy it. [00:02:00] It was only \$1,600. [Laughs.] It was in pretty bad shape.

ROBERT BROWN: But she felt it was important for a cooperative—

DENNY WINTERS: It was fabulous space, and she was able to raise enough money not just to buy it, but to redo it for a gallery. It's one of the showplaces, actually, of Rockport. Have you ever noticed it?

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah. Right here?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah.

ROBERT BROWN: It's been—had to be greatly fixed up, then, and—

DENNY WINTERS: It had to be, yes. There was a lawn put in, a walk put in. The whole thing was face-lifted.

ROBERT BROWN: What had your purpose been in the beginning? To provide a place for members to show?

DENNY WINTERS: We became a member group. The member group was thought to be the best artists practicing in Maine, and not just along the coast, though it was called Maine Coast. There was Reuben Tam, Bill Keimbush, Helliker [ph], Blackie Langlais. Well, you don't want—need to know the whole group, but they were considered the best.

ROBERT BROWN: Who approached them? How did you go about approaching them?

DENNY WINTERS: Most of them had been invited to show, and then they were asked if they would like to be part of the member group.

ROBERT BROWN: Who did the inviting in the beginning?

DENNY WINTERS: I suppose Millie did, Mildred Cummings.

ROBERT BROWN: You're talking about from '67 on?

DENNY WINTERS: Now we are, yes, because before it was just a loose kind of organization.

ROBERT BROWN: You'd call up people you knew, friends of friends.

DENNY WINTERS: Then it became more of a formal organization once she took hold of it, because she patterned the whole working structure of it after the Skowhegan school. There was a board of directors, an advisory board. [00:04:00] So she asked Hugh Gourley of Colby, and Masterton [ph]—not Masterton, but Holverson of—

ROBERT BROWN: —of the Portland Art Museum?

DENNY WINTERS: —Portland Museum, and all that, to be advisors.

ROBERT BROWN: I see a problem that could arise fairly soon, and that would be the best artists.

DENNY WINTERS: It wasn't advertised as such. It was like a private thing. It wasn't advertised, but these were member groups. They showed in every show, but other artists—and we tried to find as many as possible, who were up to standard, to show in the shows, so that it was not ever just that rigid—

ROBERT BROWN: So it wasn't static?

DENNY WINTERS: No, it wasn't static.

ROBERT BROWN: Did you know what your audience might be?

DENNY WINTERS: No. No. Rockport/Camden has always been quite a place for tourists. Also, it's been quite a place for people with sophisticated tastes, so that we had—we knew we had a large audience to draw upon, and we did. That's continued operating since that time until the present. It has changed its form. There is no longer a member group. That was thought to be too—

ROBERT BROWN: —restrictive?

DENNY WINTERS: What's the word? I forget the word that was used. Well.

ROBERT BROWN: Elitist?

DENNY WINTERS: Elitist. That's the word, elitist. That was thought to—

ROBERT BROWN: Thought by whom? By the members or by outsiders? [00:06:01]

DENNY WINTERS: Not by the members, by the people who became in charge of running it, and some of the board members. It's now run on a different basis. There was a man who had been director of exhibitions and acquisitions at Potsdam University, who ran it for two years. He did inviting, planning the shows, and hanging

the shows. I must say that for the last two years, they've looked better than they ever did look. He really is a professional. Then there was someone else who managed the gallery, who seemed to have management know-how, and that's worked out better, I think. Then we instituted a larger program of education. We had lectures every week, or demonstrations, for the last two years. The reason for that is that we needed money from arts and humanities, and we could only get that—also, we have quite a teaching program. We could only get money from arts and humanities to help run it if we had that kind of program, but it's proved to be very popular. That's the end of Maine Coast Artists. [Laughs.]

ROBERT BROWN: You're been nonprofit all along? I mean, you plow the money into the building or—

DENNY WINTERS: It has been. Actually—

ROBERT BROWN: In the beginning—

DENNY WINTERS: Actually, we've had to do all kinds of things to raise money to support the salaries that we paid and all that. It's nonprofit, except in the sense that they try very hard to sell art, and the artist benefits if they sell a picture of his. But there's been no money to put in the bank for the organization. [00:08:03] It's nonprofit in that sense. Last year, they—for three years, they've given an auction to raise money. Last year, they gave quite a fancy ball to raise money with. Dining, dancing, and—

ROBERT BROWN: Up here?

DENNY WINTERS: Up here, at a private home.

ROBERT BROWN: What do they see as its role, as a showcase?

DENNY WINTERS: As a showcase for the best work that can be seen in Maine, and as an educational force in showing the public.

ROBERT BROWN: Now that you no longer have members exhibiting—

DENNY WINTERS: So far, the standard has been just as high.

ROBERT BROWN: Is it juried? Are they outside jurors?

DENNY WINTERS: There has been a new thing added, and that is there are three shows instead of two, and one of them is a juried show, which brings in a lot of the unknowns and younger artists, and it's a very good thing. Very good.

ROBERT BROWN: Do you find that you're getting entries from all over this state? You also allow to open to people from other parts?

DENNY WINTERS: No, only Maine. Only Maine. It's always been an all-Maine thing.

ROBERT BROWN: Is that simply for convenience, you do that, do you think?

DENNY WINTERS: No, because it's stressing Maine art and Maine artists. It's a state thing. It does have the best reputation for quality of any other gallery in Maine, and has right along. So we're very proud of it. Also, it's very attractive, and kept so. You should see the flowers and everything in the summertime. Last summer, we had a Moss Tent-designed structure in front of it, that was a piece of cloth sculpture. Do you know who bought the moss? You don't? Moss Tent Works. [00:10:00] He's become an internationally known designer, and he happens to do a lot of tents. Most of them are custom-built. There is a museum owner, a very rich man in Florida, who flew all the way up here from Florida to see his tents, and had him design one for his sculpture garden, because it is sculpture, too.

ROBERT BROWN: You've been very involved in community things, consistently, since you've been in Maine.

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, yes, yes. I have. In the historical society, or any—

ROBERT BROWN: That's quite a change from your earlier time, when you were—well, you were a member of the Artists' Congress, and did some things there, but—

DENNY WINTERS: I think I've always felt a sense of obligation, a community feeling—a feeling of community obligation. So that when I've been asked to do something for, let's say, the historical society—I've painted I don't know how many dioramas for their displays and all that—I always say yes. Sort of—oh, I don't know, I suppose it's my way of being a club [ph] woman. [Laughs.] Not that I ever would be, but—

ROBERT BROWN: How about being a painter? Have you been able to—have you thrown your—developed most of your time to your own work since you've been in Maine, as you had before?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. I've devoted all of my time to my work here, because I haven't had any jobs, or taken on any jobs, with the exception of teaching. [00:12:06] I've had private pupils. As I said, I taught adult education.

ROBERT BROWN: But you basically have been able to support yourself from that?

DENNY WINTERS: Right. Oh, I've done illustration for some of Lew's books, juveniles.

ROBERT BROWN: Does he produce books quite frequently?

DENNY WINTERS: He did more in the past than he is now, but he's written about—how many books? Twenty?

LEW DIETZ: What are you talking about?

DENNY WINTERS: You. Books in all.

LEW DIETZ: It must be about 20.

DENNY WINTERS: He writes magazine articles.

ROBERT BROWN: Has your own work—do you see it as having undergone market transformations since you came here?

DENNY WINTERS: I think so. I think so. I think my work has become much more—I am so much more responsive now to my environment. My roots are really here. I am now a part of Maine. I see my work reflecting this. I see my ideas becoming more personally myself. I see a continuity in my work that's more specifically me, and less taking on the coloration of other artists. For one thing, I work alone. And for another, I think as I grow older, I don't think of the marketplace at all. By that, I mean New York City and what's the latest thing happening there and all that. [00:14:00] I think I'm much more—really, everything is now within my own shell. I'm all integrated. I'm integrated with my environment, with how my work reflects it, and how I react to and respond to it. I see it. There's a consistency now in my work that was not true before, I feel. If you had time, I'd like to show you my studio sometime, and some of the work.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT BROWN: Why don't we, now, for a bit, go over some of the progression in your work since the late '40s. Why don't we begin with the time when you had the Guggenheim Fellowship to France and to Italy, what kind of work you were doing there. Perhaps we can—

DENNY WINTERS: Do we have—did I bring any—oh, here.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, they're right here.

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. I was doing the subject I was finding there. I think I was doing something that was different for me, and that was making a much more formal, structural format in which to put the material.

ROBERT BROWN: Yes, this is much more rigid compared to the flowing lines of the El Greco-type fluidity we saw in your earlier work. Why do you suppose this rigidity set in?

DENNY WINTERS: I don't know. I think I was being influenced by what I was seeing, and by the movements that were prevalent then, and very much, probably, because I was attracted to that—well, this is more like German Constructivism. [00:16:08] I did like the way I could use the material separated in that way, separate—

ROBERT BROWN: Into compartments?

DENNY WINTERS: —compartmentalize it.

ROBERT BROWN: The figure here, the fish here.

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: Another figure, another figure.

DENNY WINTERS: Compartmentalize it. It gave me a wonderful chance to use arbitrary pattern that way. I wish we could see it in color, because it—

ROBERT BROWN: Arbitrary pattern, you mean?

DENNY WINTERS: What did I say?

ROBERT BROWN: Arbitrary pattern.

DENNY WINTERS: Arbitrary.

ROBERT BROWN: You mean chance, or ones you could carefully—

DENNY WINTERS: I mean a pattern that wouldn't logically be there, like a structural pattern like that. There's no—it seems to work with the picture, but there's no real reasons for it to have been built that way.

ROBERT BROWN: We don't see any structure depicted.

DENNY WINTERS: No. So I—I don't know. I enjoyed doing that. This one that I—

ROBERT BROWN: And this switch all occurred within a few months while you were in Europe? It was a very tense time, was it?

DENNY WINTERS: I'm not quite sure what I was doing in Woodstock that may have led me into this, because I don't have everything organized [laughs] that well or that—

ROBERT BROWN: But it's evident that this is quite a change from the work you were doing in California, say, a few years earlier.

DENNY WINTERS: I think so, yes.

ROBERT BROWN: Now [inaudible].

DENNY WINTERS: You see, in all of these, there's a sterilization in the figures, and in the background.

ROBERT BROWN: Well, certainly. Now, the ones here, done in Europe, have a sort of pattern quality to them, but now we're looking, suddenly, at figures on an escalator, which you did in New York, when you returned in '48 or ['4]9, and there's a very haunted, very powerful quality of—almost terrifying quality written on their faces, which are very—they remind me a bit, again, of German Expressionism. [00:18:17] But they're not simply designs and patterns, as with the—

DENNY WINTERS: Well, I think they are pretty designed and patterned. I mean, that was—

ROBERT BROWN: I know, but in addition, they're—

DENNY WINTERS: In addition, probably—New York seemed kind of terrifying. In fact, it was. I think you don't see that any better than you do on an escalator, especially one going down to the lower depths of the subway, or you know, wherever they happen to be. Well, I think you do see these distressed faces. I was exaggerating that, probably, because [laughs] maybe the mood I was in while I was there.

ROBERT BROWN: Which in itself—you were somewhat distressed at that point?

DENNY WINTERS: I was living in a loft, and I was having Jack the Ripper phone calls, and I was having all kinds of—and I was on a street that was full of trucks in the daytime, and I was the only living soul on that street at night, and I had to run up four flights of stairs. Mostly, they were dark. It was a very scary place. So I suppose that showed. Anyway, I didn't stay there long.

ROBERT BROWN: No, and when you came to Maine—

DENNY WINTERS: When I came to Maine and saw the beauty here, and the safety, the safety of it, I think my work changed a great deal, too. Now.

ROBERT BROWN: Yeah, let's—could we discuss that, say in the '50s, after you had come here? [00:20:02] What about this one, this group of The Four Seasons, which you produced [ph]?

DENNY WINTERS: I was with—

ROBERT BROWN: —the Frank Rehn Gallery?

DENNY WINTERS: I was with the Rehn Gallery, and having come to Maine, and being very close to nature, living on the seashore, or on the harbor, it makes you aware of it all the time, because of the changing of the tides and

everything, plus the changing of the seasons. I decided I'd have a show called The Four Seasons. I did a painting that included all four seasons, which again used that structural format to break up the painting. So I start with winter, go into a little inset like that spring, and that shows growth and the roots in the ground, to symbol of summer as a beautiful bouquet, and then into fall, which is falling leaves. Although it added up as a very interesting painting, it was a little too self-conscious, I feel, and a failure as a painting, at least in my terms.

ROBERT BROWN: Self-conscious, you mean you were too consciously thinking out thematic symbols?

DENNY WINTERS: It wasn't a normal, natural thing for me to be doing. It was forced.

ROBERT BROWN: Compare it with something you did in Rome or Paris.

DENNY WINTERS: They were more or less forced, too. I was forcing them into this—although the subject in those, I think, fit more naturally than it did in this.

ROBERT BROWN: But now the compartments of this Maine painting of the seasons are much smoother. [00:22:02] There's less strong a structure than there was in the late '40s.

DENNY WINTERS: That's true. They slide more rhythmically into one another. That's because it's neither interior nor ex—well, it's more exterior.

ROBERT BROWN: This kind of smoothness—there's no sort of sense of struggle or anguish, or even strength of structure, that there was in the earlier—

DENNY WINTERS: No.

ROBERT BROWN: Did this continue for a while? Do you think this was because this was a very peaceful, placid time for you?

DENNY WINTERS: I suppose so, because I did do quite a few like that. Here is another, that's bouquet and plant, and inside/outside elements, that add up to a very graceful, contemplative kind of expression.

ROBERT BROWN: These were quiet years for you, or at least years of bringing things together after—

DENNY WINTERS: I don't think it's terribly easy to go to a brand-new place, and be married to a brand-new husband. I don't think that's all ever very serene and easy. But certainly I did love the environment, and when I painted, I had my studio, and I had a home in it.

ROBERT BROWN: You said you were [inaudible] yet you also said that it was a long time before you were settled in here with the people, the local people.

DENNY WINTERS: That's true.

ROBERT BROWN: Perhaps you retreated, therefore, into your—

DENNY WINTERS: It was a retreat, that's right. It's a place where my things were, and my work, and it all belonged to my past. [00:24:04] There was a continuity, of course. So—

ROBERT BROWN: Let's look at this next, of sailing vessels, or at least of pleasure boats.

DENNY WINTERS: That's probably the first painting I did of the subject matter of Maine, per se. The subject matter being the boats, which I saw outside the window every day.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you almost becoming a Maine patriot by then, would you think?

DENNY WINTERS: When I first did this, no, I don't think so.

ROBERT BROWN: It was just the happenstance of—

DENNY WINTERS: I was using—because I always had used what was around me. I get my inspiration firsthand, from what my eyes take in, because I've never been a cerebral painter. I've never been a pure abstractionist. I've always started with reality, and abstracted it, more or less. So I have to use what's there. It's all the material I have. So, if I'm in Mexico, I use what's there. If I'm in Florida, I use what's there.

ROBERT BROWN: But you did make a point earlier of this being the first wholly Maine subject. So that happenstance that you washed away past imagery, and you were now concentrating on what you could see?

DENNY WINTERS: It's the first one I ever did of boats, using the material that's right out the window. Now, I may

have done ice floes earlier, or something like that, or I may have done autumn trees earlier, but—

ROBERT BROWN: In these paintings, you're getting back a bit more of the strength of structure, and although it's recognizable objects, there's whole areas that are simply painted passages. [00:26:04]

DENNY WINTERS: Right.

ROBERT BROWN: We're much more aware of the canvas and the painted surface than we are of representation.

DENNY WINTERS: The fact that they are a certain kind of boat. No, you can't tell where the boat is that belongs to this sail or that sail. This looks like a beach boat.

ROBERT BROWN: Now you move from this, in the '60s, into the use of very different medium, the acrylic paint, fairly new, and then on paper, rice paper, at that.

DENNY WINTERS: I didn't do it quite as fast as that. I wish I could find—well, actually, this came before that. This painting of driftwood on the beach might be one that led into these that are in acrylic. Some of them are not as abstract as the ones you see here. The medium itself—I was led into the use of this medium by a friend of mine, who lives in Florida and was a teacher down there, who was using acrylic with Japanese rice paper. He got me all enthused about acrylic and how quickly it dried. I was having a problem with my paint not drying fast enough, my oil paint, so I switched to acrylic. Then a friend from Japan sent me this rice paper, and I began soaking it in the acrylic, applying it with my hands, pushing it around with my hands.

ROBERT BROWN: Were you applying it to canvas?

DENNY WINTERS: To canvas. Putting down, first, a ground color, and then pushing this in with my hands, with a subject in mind. [00:28:06] But pushing it so that what came out was some heavy, some light, some transparent. It became terribly exciting, the whole thing. Led into a whole new way of painting that carried me for 10 years. Some were more—

ROBERT BROWN: This was a real freeing-up process for you?

DENNY WINTERS: Yes, it was. I also went into doing paper collages. I had hundreds of paper collages. I'm sure you're getting tired [ph].

ROBERT BROWN: No, no.

DENNY WINTERS: I did hundreds of paper collages, and I've got a lot of those right here. I started tearing up paper and everything. For the first time, I was having—I was working totally non-objectively with those paper collages. Then, sometimes, they would find themselves into a larger picture, but usually I started with a subject matter in mind. But for the—only at that time did I ever work totally non-objectively. There was always something about that that left me dissatisfied. It's as though I always wanted to have a point of reference, maybe, or a way—I always enjoyed the fact of starting with a subject, and departing or staying with it as much as I wanted to. [00:30:13] So what I've done today, let's say, for the last—see, this all goes through the '60s. If we came to the '70s—and when I stopped using this medium. One reason I stopped using it was because I got homesick for the smell of oil paint and turpentine. [Laughs.] I didn't like—my studio didn't smell like anything. I think I got all used-up doing that. I think I got to the end of the line doing that. I began going, then—having lived here, by this time, 20 years, and getting deeper and deeper into my relationship with the Maine—the bones of Maine, let's say. I just began, without any conscious thinking, getting closer, going back and getting closer, to what Maine is, what it looks like. What the essence of it is. To quote myself [laughs] I said in one of the statements I made that I paint what is always changing but never lost. [00:32:00] Like things are eroding, but they're not gone forever. The rocks are changing. The sea is changing, but it's always there. I don't any longer—because they never did feel like they belonged to what I am trying to express, that thing that's just the purest form of nature. So I don't paint the boats or the houses, or anything that is transitory. I only paint what's going to stay, that's always been there and will remain, in one form or another.

ROBERT BROWN: That would include the geology?

DENNY WINTERS: That would.

ROBERT BROWN: The water?

DENNY WINTERS: Right, right. The changing clouds. You'll see that in all these paintings.

ROBERT BROWN: This applies to also when you go south, although it's—

DENNY WINTERS: Except for those little sketches. Also, I—it's not that I don't like the human person or the

human figure. I do, and I go to a sketch class and I draw from a model, and once in a while I do a painting of figures, or portraits. But they don't reach as deeply into me as do the landscapes. My response to the landscapes.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you suppose that is?

DENNY WINTERS: And seascapes.

ROBERT BROWN: Why do you think that is? Go far back in your past, or is this a wisdom that you've acquired only in the last 10 years?

DENNY WINTERS: I think it goes far back into the way I was, when I was born, maybe, or as a small child. [00:34:01] I'm told, and I can remember, my happiest times were being taken into the woods in the springtime, and looking for violets and arbutus. Those memories are so sharp, and I must have been a tiny kid. Those are the happiest times. It's always been that way. I've always felt that way at an awesome or even a beautiful tree in the fall or something. Something that is so gripping, you know?

ROBERT BROWN: It's in such things that you see the essence of your experience, rather than in the boat or the building?

DENNY WINTERS: Now, I see the boat, I see the house, as giving an air of illustration to it. To me—I see great paintings with those things in, but for me to do it would be like illustrating.

ROBERT BROWN: It would be just a commentary for you, as you said earlier?

DENNY WINTERS: It would be like—it would—it would be like comment—it would get away from what it is that I try to paint.

ROBERT BROWN: It would be superficial now to you.

DENNY WINTERS: It would be to me. It would be to me. I can name you the hundreds of paintings that I love of other artists who do that, like some of the boating scenes of Monet, you know, and—now I can't think of any. [Laughs.] [00:36:00]

ROBERT BROWN: Your depictions of figures, of the manmade, are the exception, except in the small watercolor sketches that you do mainly in Florida?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah. Well, those are just like little illustrations.

ROBERT BROWN: Are they little studies, just little souvenirs?

DENNY WINTERS: Yeah, they are. If you're looking down at the sea, and these little figures are walking past—you see, the house we go to is on a sand dune, and it looks down on these little figures. Well, they give scale to the—they're little bitty things, and they give immensity to the sea. You could look at it that way, but when I paint large, I don't.

ROBERT BROWN: How do you see your work continuing?

DENNY WINTERS: I hope to purify it more and more. I don't think I've gotten to the essence. Maybe when I do, it will get more abstract again. Possibly it will. I think maybe I'm still too in love with how it is. There is such beauty. Even though I do abstract, and do put in what I consider only the necessities for that particular canvas, still I may be able to make a better statement about it in more abstract means. As you can see through all of these, I don't stay in one place. [Laughs.] [00:38:01]

ROBERT BROWN: No, that's quite—right now, you're in a balance between the naturalistic and the abstract.

DENNY WINTERS: Yes. Well, also, I seem to—maybe at the end of 10 years of doing this, I might get totally abstract again.

ROBERT BROWN: They have a more robust quality to them than did the paintings of only a year or two ago, some of which were rather more peaceful, like some of these surf scenes and others that I saw.

DENNY WINTERS: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative]. Well, who knows what will happen to these? [Laughs.] New canvases.

ROBERT BROWN: Canvases about to be sized.

DENNY WINTERS: Nice big canvases. [Laughs.]

[END OF TRACK winter80_2of2_reel_SideA_r.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]