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Oral history interview with Fairfield Porter, 1968 June 6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Fairfield Porter on June 6, 1968. The interview took place in Southampton, New York, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's June 6 and Paul Cummings talking to Fairfield Porter in beautiful Southampton. You were born in Winnetka?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Winnetka, Illinois, June 10, 1907.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Tell me about living there. Do you come from a large family? Small family?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Five children. One sister, who is the oldest. Next is my brother Elliott, who is the photographer, a very famous photographer. Then another brother, then me, and then the younger brother.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are they all involved in the arts?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. Only Elliott in photography. But he's an M.D. He taught bacteriology and endocrinology at Harvard Medical School but never practiced medicine. Then he gave it all up for photography, which he had done since he was a little boy--taking bird pictures, you know, hiding in blinds and taking pictures of birds opposite their nests. So that really his first interest was photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Your parents must have decided you all needed good educations, because you went to Harvard.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of place was Winnetka to live in then? Did you live there till you went away to college?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. We went to Maine in the summers. Winnetka is a wealthy suburb of Chicago. It s like Scarsdale or Bryn Mawr.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you go into Chicago?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I remember being taken to the Art Institute by my mother, and I remember the first paintings that.... I remember I always liked to see paintings, and the paintings that I can remember in the Art Institute are Giovanni di Paolo. I think it was because it had the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* in it, which was sort of fascinatingly gory.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That appealed to youth.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: When I was twelve ... And Rockwell Kent I liked very much. Then I remember, when I was about twelve or thirteen, an exhibition of Picasso, that Egyptian period, those great big heads. That impressed me very much. I thought, if this is what painting is today, it's a significant activity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This must have been around 1920 or so.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that your first adventure into the museum?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I was always good at art in public school which we went to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do drawings when you were very young?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I copied Howard Pyle and I copied photographs. I remember once in art class in grammar school. Everybody was supposed to bring a flower to school and paint it, and I didn't bring anything. So they gave me a piece of timothy grass. I had a brush that was crooked; it was bent. And the teacher liked my rendering of timothy grass better than anybody else's thing. She held it up before the class and said: Look what he did, and with that terrible brush.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. That was when?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That was in grammar school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of schools did you go to?

PAUL CUMMINGS: They were very good public schools. Since then, since my time, the Winnetka public school system has become one of the best in the country. In my time, it was good; that's all– good, ordinary public school.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: What kind of family background did you have?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: My father was an architect. He built the house in which we lived. I still think it's one of the most beautiful Greek revival houses in the United States. I like it better or just as well as anything I've seen in Virginia, which is a little earlier, of course, not Greek Revival. But he didn't remain interested in architecture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So what did he do?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: He just looked after his own affairs and his own real estate in Chicago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you had a very comfortable family life.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Very comfortable. Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you involved with your brothers and sister very much?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, certainly. Yes, very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I know some of the people I've talked to have been very insular because of their art interest, and the other children didn't understand it much.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. My art interest wasn't that decisive or active, and anyway it wouldn't have isolated me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, if you lived in a house like this in an area... You didn't play the same kind of games that apartment dwelling children play.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have a lot of friends in school?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I was rather isolated at school except the first school I went to - which was a private school- when I was five and was there for about three years. Then I went to public school, and public school sort of frightened me partly because I was a good deal younger than the other kinds in my own grade. I was two years younger. I wasn't very athletic but neither were my brothers. We were all like that, but they didn't have the disadvantage of being a couple of years younger than their group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It makes a lot of difference.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, yes, it does. I realize that. It's very important.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the prep school that you went to?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I went to Milton Academy for a while, but that was just to.... I had already been admitted to Harvard. That was just to hold me back a year. I didn't finish the year at Milton. I came home to my sister's wedding and didn't go back to school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you must have gone to Harvard very young then.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I was 17 in my freshman year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you study there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I majored in fine arts but just barely. I got an S.B. degree, which meant that I didn't take the Latin requirements which they wanted then for an A.B. degree.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's an S.B.?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Bachelor of Science in the fine arts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they figure that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It only meant the Latin requirement has not been passes. That's all it meant. It was an inferior degree to an A.B. In a certain sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. Well let's not really get into college yet. Did you do a lot of reading in childhood? Did you have books around?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I read H.G. Wells science fiction. That's what I remember. I remember mother used to read a great deal to us, Dickens. What I read to myself was H.G. Wells, *The First Man in the Moon* and everything that I could get by him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's very exciting. I read a lot of him, too, at one time.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think because of H.G. Wells, my brother Edward, older then I, and I and two neighboring girls spent a lot of time making up a country in Mars; and we drew maps of it and discussed its sociology and that sort of stuff. This all came from H.G. Wells.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you really built a whole world. That's great. Were you interested in music?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I'm not particularly musical. The family isn't either. There was a player organ in the house which father played. There were certain things that I got very familiar with and liked very much. I like music when it's easy for me to pay attention.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't have any languages at home, did you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: German. We had a German governess. I knew German very well. The last time I went to Germany which is a long time ago, I found that German came back to me very, very fast. I was mostly in Italy; that was 1932. I went to Germany and I came back to Italy. I had picked up Italian, so I could play bridge with the people in the pension. There was an Austrian woman in the pension; and she said: You speak German better than Italian.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were languages easy for you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don t know if it was easy for me or not. I think that an ability for language goes along with an ability for math, which I never had. I I've never tested it, so I don t know whether languages are easy for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you learned Italian.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I learned Italian when I went there. Yes. And I learned it in a few months. I read the newspapers and I talked to people, but it was a very limited knowledge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you read German?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don t read any foreign language now except French with great difficulty. I mean, that s the easiest for me to read. I can t read German any more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think you could pick it up if you went to Germany?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I might, yes. The pronunciation is easy for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get a German governess?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, this was before the First World War, and German was the prestigious foreign language for people to learn. That was stopped as the result of the First World War. I think the chief influences on me as a child were my father s interest in art and architecture. We had photographs all over the house of great Italian paintings and of architecture. He used to talk to us about how Gothic architecture was organic and how Greek architecture was organic, too. I don t really understand that. I now think that Greek architecture perhaps you couldn't say was organic. But he didn't understand the Renaissance at all. He didn't like it.

When I was fourteen, we were in London. We went on a Mediterranean cruise, and we went to London. I remember in the National Gallery going to see the Leonardo *Virgin of the Rocks*, which I liked very much because it was familiar to me from photographs. I discovered something which I didn t know from photographs at home; and that was Titian, *The Rape of Europa* and Veronese's *The Family of Darius Before Alexander,* and Turner. These were my own discoveries. Nobody told me anything about them except they were names, of course.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you didn't see reproductions?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. Nobody said these are great. My father didn't say these are good nor did anybody else. My father liked Leonardo and Michelangelo.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you really discovered the Renaissance on your own in a way.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. And when I studied art at Harvard and I came home--we lived for a while at my grandmother s house after she died-I realized that what was art history for my father began where with my education it had stopped. The primitive was Leonardo, and for me he was almost the very end except the Venetian painters. The early Venetian painters, my father didn't consider. It was the 17th century Italian painters--the Mannerists, the Roman School, and so on--that he thought were the great names. And I hardly knew who they were. But he didn't know anything about Giotto or Piero or the 14th and 15th century painters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Just that one block of time. That s very strange. Well, did you have paintings around the house?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Just photographs. And you know those casts made in Boston-I don t know if they still sell them there--of the Parthenon frieze? We had maybe ten of them around the house. So I got very familiar with fifth century Greek sculpture, you know, from just that. And then I remember father once.... The casts got sort of dusty. They were of plaster, and he got sort of tired of this texture. So he painted them with a green copper paint and then rubbed shoe blacking on top. They looked as though they d been made of bronze with patina and hollows and so on. I liked that very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a great transition from pure white to patina bronze. Well, did you ever have an interest in being an architect because of his influence?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I did. I think I took some private lessons in painting, when I came home in the spring from Milton Academy to my sister s wedding, to give me something to do. Then when I went to Harvard, I took a beginning course--the course open to freshmen in fine arts which was called Drawing and Painting and Principles of Design. The teacher was Arthur Pope. I learned a tremendous amount from him. I remember telling my tutor that I liked his course as well as any in fine arts. He said: Well, there can by only one awakening. Pope wasn't a particularly popular lecturer. He kind of mumbled, and people went to sleep in the class. But I was interested in what he was saying so I heard everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you have him? For one year?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: For one year only. After that, I took historical courses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you take painting courses at Harvard?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They didn't have any. They had a very few but they weren't.... I was more interested in the historical ones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you really have a solid background as an art historian?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, superficial.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I mean, you know, who knows? I'm interested in your discovery of Titian.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think it was the color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How old were you when that happened?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: About 14, I think. I was 13 or 14, 14 I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was your first trip to Europe, was it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, around the Mediterranean, a Mediterranean cruise.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, very, very, very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you don't it again?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Last summer I took the two little girls and my wife to Italy. But, no, we went through; we

took the Italian Line. The ship stopped at Gibraltar. We passed the Azores. The Azores were the first foreign land that I saw. The ship stopped; it was a cruise ship. We walked around Ponta Delgada, which is the capital, I believe. That seemed to me just incredibly beautiful– these Mediterranean plaster houses painted like the colors of a Parcheesi game.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the light was so different there from where you'd been before.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. The Azores... Sometimes I think I'd like to go and stay for a while and paint. We passed by last summer very close to it, to another island, Santa Cruz; and it's very wet apparently. Its; not like Ireland. I mean there's plenty of water, because there are waterfalls falling off the cliffs all around. Then there are these little villages and little Portuguese churches, white with black stripes. It's all sort of a lump, Santa Cruz is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of family background do you have? It wasn't German. Is it English?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Its English. My parents were born in the middle west. My father was born in Racine, Wisconsin. My mother was born in Chicago. My father's mother was born in Chicago on a farm at something like Randolph and Wabash Avenues, which is where the family money comes from. They had the good fortune to have been born on a farm that turned out to be the Loop later on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's pretty great. So really, they've been here for quite a while.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, from the 17th century. I think I have ancestors who came over on the Mayflower. I'm not sure but I think I do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh that's entrenched American. When do you really think your interest in art started? When you were an early teenager? Earlier?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, children, you know, like to draw. That doesn't prove anything, but I sort of stuck with it for some reason. I don't know why. I think I might have had literary interests except that, for some reason, I read very slowly. I managed to do very well in school in spite of that. I'm what they would call nowadays a reading problem. Although it didn't especially show except that it comes out in that I Read at about half the speed of a normal person. It's probably the thing that there's so much of nowadays. Its so noticeable nowadays when they try to teach people to read a sentence at a time. They never learn the words. But I was taught the old-fashioned way, to spell out each syllable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think the art interest then was communication or escape or a kind of focal point?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I was just always very interested in looking at paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a visual like.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there anyone that influenced you to continue when you were young, or was it your won motivation would you say?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, I don't think anybody influenced me to continue, but being a painter was somehow related to my father'... my father really didn't present any example of an abiding interest which was his work. He was interested in architecture and the arts, but he didn't do anything about it anymore except... He had given up his architecture.
I have a feeling though about his architecture, you know, modern architecture when it came along, Frank Lloyd Wright and so on... I have a feeling that he understood something that modern architects don't- which is the plan. Modern architects, you know... there's a great deal of feeling, or there used to be, that classical ornament is old- fashioned. So they sort of concentrate on- or they did for a long time- the look of a building. And they said a classical building... My father's house they would have said was a monument, not a functional building. But as a matter of fact, it's very, very much more functional; because it's more practical. The difference between a modern architectured house and what my father made was simply that they gave up the look of the classical monument and decided to make something that had the look of something else. But they don't go any farther than just how it looks on the outside. It's just a change in fashion, and they're not the least bit more functional than anybody else. You constantly hear stories about that, you know. A house is a machine for living; Corbusier likes this phrase. But you see a house by Corbusier, and it always leaks. The rain comes through the roof. He doesn't keep out the weather.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's not a functional house; it's a building.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. It's an amusing and tricky thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. That's true. Many people I know who live in modern homes find them extraordinarily difficult. They're too removed from...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. What happens is that instead of using conventional, classical ornamentation, they use something completely whimsical and personal, which might be better but hardly ever is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of buildings did you father do? Did he do homes?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Homes and a railroad station or two. That's all. He was a domestic architect.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, let's get back to Harvard a little more. You spent what, four years there and you got the degree?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Then I went to Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you studied with Robinson and Benton?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, before we go to the League, how would you evaluate the art education you got at Harvard?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think it was very good. I don't think I could have gotten a better education anywhere else at that time just as far as history and so on is concerned, in aesthetics it was weak, but weakness came from the fact that there wasn't any relation to practice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was all theory?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It was theory, and the theory didn't go very deep. It was superficial theory, and I found that our much, much later when I met de Kooning. First I thought I found it out when I studied with Benton. He seemed to go further. But then when I met de Kooning, I thought Benton, too, was not too deep. It didn't, with him, come enough out of practice. It came a little too much out of the idea comes first and you apply it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was illustration in the sense of...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, yes. Sometimes the illustration is very good in a person who is like that. They do it very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of theory did you find or did your acquire at Harvard?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, they would say, "Here's the surface of the painting" and "This is well composed." Composition is the most important thing, and composition means that they analyzed it. I think Professor Pope did too. Repetition and sequence and probably another thing, I don't know what, harmony maybe. I found out many, many years later that composition isn't good because something is repeated but because it is not repeated. It was just the opposite. If there's something that never occurs again in painting, that's what...

PAUL CUMMINGS: Its unique quality is what makes it work.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's see, you were at Harvard in about the early 20s?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I graduated in 1928, 1924 to 1928.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there anyone there interested in modern art at that point?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, Pope was interested in modern art. He explained Cubism to us in an interesting way. Analytical Cubism he said was like jazz, which I think is true. That's an intuitive remark, but I think is true. Analytical Cubism he said was like jazz, which I think is true. That's an intuitive remark but I think it's true. Also we were presented with the aesthetic theories of Berenson, and that was a very strong influence on me. I think that I can't even today look at Florentine painting without doing it in Berenson's terms.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Has it maintained itself as an influence or has it changed?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: What?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Berenson's aesthetics applied elsewhere.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't know about them applied elsewhere. I met him when I was in Italy in 1932, and I remember telling him that I liked Tintoretto and Rubens because I'd learned to like them from Thomas Benton. And he said: Yes, I know what you mean about them, but the best painter of all is really Veronese or Velazquez. At that times I didn't like either Velazquez better than any other painter now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you make that discovery or decision?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think when I saw the Velazquez after the last war. There was a show of the paintings of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in The Metropolitan, and there were some Velazquez Infantas. I'd seen then before in Berlin. But I saw them again, and I was struck by the... I was interested, I think... I was beginning to be interested in what you can do with paint, what is the quality of paint, what is its nature. And this liquid surface of Velazquez, I admired and also what might be called understatement. Although I don't like that word really. The impersonality... I don't know what word to use. He leaves things alone, you know. It isn't that he copies nature, but he doesn't impose himself upon it. He is open to it rather than wanting to twist it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In other words, he will let it dictate to him.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I think there is more there, you know. Let the paint dictate t you or let yourself be dictated to. I think there's more there then there is in willful manipulation. It's like I used to like Dostoevski very, very , very much. No w I prefer Tolstoy for the same reason. He is like Velazquez for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You just let that happen.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. And he knows what... He's open and he also knows when it's unimportant to pay attention. Or Chekhov. I mean Chekhov and Tolstoy have that quality of not being on top but being "with it" as people say nowadays.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, I see what you mean. Well, was there anyone besides Pope at Harvard who you feel was influential?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Porter (who is no relation) in fine arts. I took a very interesting course with him on pre-Romanesque.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's his full name?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Arthur Kingsley Porter, pre-Romanesque art. It wasn't a set course. He didn't know everything yet. It was as he was discovering things he gave them to us. We were sort of watching his research. And I took a course with Whitehead in philosophy that was very, very interesting. And Langer in history. He's the ex-husband of Susanne Langer, the aesthetician. I was very interested in his course on 19th- century European History.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Whitehead like as an instructor?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: My wife also studied with Whitehead at Bryn Mawr and at Radcliffe. He didn't expect that his students would understand everything, but he want in any way patronizing,. Although he sort of treated us like very small children. He also thought that the whole subject of philosophy was really very simple. I remember his examinations would consist of twelve questions, and he would say write on any four. You'd look over these twelve questions; and you'd realize that, if you answered any one of them, you'd tell the whole course.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember what kind of questions he would ask?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, what I remember of what I got from him- I got it a little later when I read a little bit of him and I also got it at the time- was the importance of having very clear terms in your discussion and knowing what they mean. In other words, he wanted to escape from vagueness. For instance, he drew a diagram on the blackboard, a circle, an irregular enclosed curve, and then another irregular enclosed curve, and then another irregular enclosed curve which maybe he slapped over it; and he called one A and the other B. And then he said that A has the relationship of extensive connection with B . And he said: To escape from poetry of the phrase, the relationship of extensive connection, I will call that phrase R. So A, R, B. Then he said you don't use synonyms; you don't write good English in the sense of never repeating yourself. If you are sure of your terms, you repeat yourself; because he knew what he wanted to say. So he used.... That was the word: "to use." He "used" it again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Over and over and over so it really made its point.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Then I realized again reading him that, even if you used symbols, you can't get away from poetry. Because if you say A, R, B, somehow it's a little different from saying B, R, A.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: H pointed that out. So, I mean, it's impossible perhaps. He also told us that the.... This relates I think, to what I'm interested in painting, too, in aesthetics. That's why I mention it. But he taught us that Hume's criticism was practically unanswerable, you know. What do you know? And Hume's idea that all you know is one sensation after another; you do not know the connections between them. That was what he was concerned with doing, finding an answer to Hume who he thought had not been adequately answered by Kant, I guess. And he thought he did have an answer, but still, you know, it's... And I think, therefore, what I like in painting; because it seems to me to relate to that. I mean, I like in art when the artist doesn't know what he knows in general; he only knows what he knows specifically. And what he knows in general or what can be known in general becomes apparent later on by what he has had to put down. That is to me the most interesting art form. It expresses that. In other words you are not in control of nature quite; you are part of nature. It doesn't mean that you are helpless either. It just means that the whole question in art is to be wide awake, to be as attentive as possible for the artist and for the person who looks at it or listens to it. That, of course, comes out in people's fondness for drugs nowadays. I've never taken any, but what it apparently gives hem is it enables them. It just gives them the ability to be attentive as they never have been before. I've talked to people who admit it, and that's what comes out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It clarifies.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. I hadn't actually heard that from any of the people I know who use drugs. They've all had different kinds of experiences.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I'm interpreting what I've heard. One of the persons who's use drugs wouldn't have told me just that. I sort of led it around that way. But he's a painter too, and he doesn't use them any more. Then from what I've read, for instance, Alan Watts and so on... When he takes drugs and when he doesn't close his eyes and have a vision... But when he looks at what's there, he sees what is revealed to him is what anybody could tell you is there without taking drugs. Only it comes as a revelation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because he just doesn't normally see it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, he isn't attentive enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Do you still read a great deal?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is there any particular area of literature that intrigues you more than others?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't know. I can't say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you read things like history and novels and all that sort of thing?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Not terribly much. I don't like most modern novels very much. I just can't get into them. I can't get interested. I do like Tolstoy very much. I read some Tolstoy recently; just thins year I've been reading the things I haven't yet read, short things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So Harvard was really rewarding for you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you meet any people who became long- term friends or students who were important to you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No I didn't. I haven't maintained those friendships that I had. I was again rather isolated there. I didn't really much meet people on a basis of easy give-and-take until I went to the Art Students League.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Why was that, do you think?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, because they were... I didn't feel I had any apologies to make for myself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were also very independent it seems. Well, what about the League? How did you pick the League after having gone to Harvard?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I had some friends in New York, one of whom became my sister-in-law, who had gone to the

League. I used to come down to New York once in a while from college. They were going to the League, and that's what decided me to go there. I like its setup; it didn't seem to me to be academic. And, of course, it's run by the students. They chose artists whom they admired to come and teach id they would. And the artists, the people who were teaching there – people like Boardman Robinson, Thomas Benton - were people who I respected more than teachers who were simply teachers in other schools.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Two years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you work with anyone else besides Robinson and Benton?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like them as teachers?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I liked Robinson best, because he was a teacher. He taught you; he didn't teach a system. He taught the person he was talking to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it would change with the students?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. He didn't seem to ever repeat himself. I listened to his criticisms as he went around the class. There were certain things that he said again and again, but there was always something new. Whereas Benton had a system which he could present to you, and he presented the same system to everybody. And then you did it or not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How were they as personalities? I've heard about Benton a little but not about Robinson.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, Robinson was a more interesting man. He was like that in life, too; he was interested in lots of things. He would bring ideas from the outside to the class. Benton's style as a man was that there is a body of knowledge, and it is three feet long and three feet wide and one foot thick and that's it. He had also what James Truslow Adams calls the mocker pose. He liked to pretend. He liked to act as though he were completely uneducated and just the grandson of a crooked politician. I found that sort of tiresome.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He really is well educated though.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, yes. But he's a little bit like that ancient joke about Gene Tunney and the book salesman. Gene Tunney these were you first studio classes then?

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's great. Well, lets see. At the League there were you first studio classes then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. They were life classes. They were drawing. Nobody taught painting there. You could paint if you wanted to, but they didn't know how to paint. There wasn't anybody in the League who knew how to paint. None of the teachers did. I don't think anybody in America knew how to paint in oils at that time. The Armory Show was a complete disaster to American art, because ti made people think that you'd got to do things in a certain style. They gave up what they did in order to do this new thing. It was a little like selling whiskey to the Indians.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was a new thing for the Indians.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. A few painters got something from it - got a lot from it. Marin got a lot from it. American art was provincial before, and it became more provincial as a result of the Armory Show. Of course, there were people who were... Provincial might mean dependent on somewhere else, or it might mean isolated form the world. In the latter sense, provincial meaning isolated from the rest of the world, there were certainly very good painters in America; but they weren't mainstream. Or they were dependent upon something else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Who was in the Mainstream in the 1920s?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: France. Paris.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. But I mean in this country. Nobody?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, Marin accounts for himself; the people who Stieglitz showed, I guess; Benton. The mainstream in this country? I suppose Kenneth Hayes Miller in this country.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The American impressionists were almost...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, people like Sloan and the illustrators of the American scene, who were naturally good painters, but then they... They had native talent , and they knew better than they thought. They didn't have any confidence or something. They couldn't keep on; they didn't know what to do next.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was just thinking, you said that there wasn't anybody who painted at the League but that they all did drawings. I've just been looking at older American drawings and various things, and there seems to have been- through, well, from the Armory Show to even today - people who draw much better that they paint. They're still sort of afraid of painting or in awe of painting. They don't understand it or something. It's interesting that you, even in the 20s at the League, felt that.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I didn't feel it then. I thought they did know how to paint, but they didn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So Benton really didn't interest you as a painter then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, not really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about Robinson's painting?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, he wasn't as a painter. He's a more interesting draftsman. I heard that Virgil Thomson once aid, I think in the 20s, that the center of intellectual live in Vienna is composers or musicians and in France it's the painters perhaps, I don't remember, and in America it's the journalists. That was in the 20s. So journalism was somehow the way that painters got a connection with the world. And cartoonists, for instance. *The New Masses*. *The Masses*. Radical journalism. Or else the American painters were expatriates or they were isolated, I think. I remember when Eakins died. I think he died about 1910, but he was completely isolated.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Marin was to an extent, although...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, but he sold. He sold. He lived well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, but Dove certainly didn't live well.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He had a terrible time.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: But he had original ideas. They were just as original as any ideas in France. But that wasn't enough. You have to have more than that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. They have to go out and do things. They just can't stay home.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, he did things but they.... It was somehow an unnatural activity. There wasn't anything natural he could do about these ideas. I mean you couldn't do anything except isolate yourself further.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I've often had the feeling about the painters of that period that the really modern ones - like the Stieglitz group as opposed to the newspaper illustrators and that whole Philadelphia crowd- were so distant from each other. The newspaper people - like Luks and Sloan and those people - were so involved in the sociology of the street and done in oil paints or something rather than painting problems and art situations.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, where it showed was in Bellows, who was a very, very talented person, and the journalists took him up. He was the favorite of the journalists. He wasn't an artist/journalist, but he was a journalist's artist. Then he began to read books about art theory and so on, and his painting just became no good at all. He applied theories of dynamic symmetry and of color and so on and so on instead of having a direct contact through his sensibility with the medium and with the picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They didn't believe in themselves, in other words. They always had to look elsewhere for reassurance and confidence.
FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I suppose it's still because visually, at least in the arts, the country is still young.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, there were good painters in the nineteenth century.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Nineteen hundred was a funny year.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It's very curious. When I see that picture of Manet's of the naval battle of the Civil War, which Manet observed and painted a picture of it... It's very hard to think of Manet as contemporary with the American Civil War; because his art is contemporary with the Harding administration or Coolidge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. Well, I suppose it was at the League that you really started to meet other painters and get involved in the art world and the art scene in New York.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who did you know there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: The person I chiefly knew was Alec Haberstroh, who doesn't paint now. He makes props for a science fiction television program.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, back to H. G. Wells. Was he a painter at the League?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: He was studying art at the League in the Benton class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And he gave it up after a while?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how about the older painters? Did you start to meet some of the older painters who were around then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I met Marin about 1938 or so. I met him in New York, as a matter of fact, at a friend's house. Oh, what was very influential was that I lived in New York on 15th Street. I had a room, when I first came to New York, in a rooming house. Once I left my room to go to the bathroom in the middle of the floor; and when I came back, a man came down from upstairs and introduced himself. He had seen a painting of mine in my room by Harold Weston. He knew Harold Weston and he invited me up to his apartment. He and his wife had a collection of Marin, O'Keeffe, Dove, and so on and so on. They were friends of Stieglitz. So I met Marin there at their house, and I also met Paul Rosenfeld at their house, who influenced me very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way, would you say?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, as a critic. But his gift for language, his gift for language, his gift for being able to describe what something was like, to put it into words... When I wrote criticism, I was thinking of his criticism, not just of Berenson. I remember thinking of his criticism, not just of Berenson. I remember things that he would say. I remember telling him I didn't like Odilon Redon. And he said: What's the matter? Is he too ultra violet? And I thought that's exactly it! He had this impressionistic way of talking, which was extremely accurate, beautiful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you had an early interest in language it seems.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I guess so. I got that from my mother. My mother always had an interest in language, wrote very good letters.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start writing then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Not till after the war. I started writing art criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the later 40s?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I got into that from Elaine de Kooning who had been a reviewer in *Art News*. We went to a show at the Whitney Museum- a retrospective show of Gorky - and she talked to me about how good they were. I talked to her about how bad they were. We had a complete, thorough disagreement about them. Apparently I expressed myself so well that, when she was leaving *Art News* and Tom Hess asked her who could she recommend for a reviewer, she recommended me. I had just moved out here; and I sort of jumped at the chance because I had always thought that I would be good at this, better than anybody. I had always thought that, and they liked me right away at *Art News*. As a matter of fact, Frankfurter, who was the editor-in-chief then, said I was so intense he'd give me a year; but I stayed for about seven years. I could have kept on forever, partly because I as painting, which would give me new ideas. You see, if you're not painting and you're critic, you might get to an end and you'd have to repeat yourself. Or that could happen. At least I knew I got ideas all the time from what I was doing, which sort of renewed me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, as the painting developed, the criticism would change and develop?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. And then I went around to artists' studios and looked at their work, because I was assigned to review something or other. The reason I was good was that I would try as much as possible, when looking at something that I had to review, to cease to exist myself and simply identify with this so that I could say something about it. But that wasn't simply my own idea. I learned that because I was told to do that (not in those words) by my editors. I remember once writing a review, and I was given a criticism by Frankfurter that I

shouldn't sort of go like this all the time. He said what you should do is just report. Frankfurter said that the best criticism is simple the best description, and I think that is true. It's like the first page of the *New Yorker*. There's no finger shaking there. They just tell you as accurately as possible about something; and when you've read it, you have a very good idea of what you think and what they think and what judgment they make by their putting it definitely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: By their manner of description, because there are many ways of describing a thing.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I know, but accuracy is weapon, too. Sometimes this wasn't an unfriendly weapon either, because I have gotten letters from painter who said: What you say is true, and I've never seen it so well expressed before. Things like that. And de Kooning once told me... I wrote for *The Nation* for a couple of years after *Art News*, and the first thing I wrote was a criticism of de Kooning's show in 1959. Afterwards he told people - and he told me, too - that was the best thing that had ever been written about him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lets' see now. We've jumped way ahead. The Art Students' League... You must have left there about 1930, 1931.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes; 1930.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did the [stock market] crash affect you, the beginnings of the Depression?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, my father still was able to support me. I didn't have any financial problem until jut before the war. My father died, and things weren't doing so well. Then I thought I'd have to get a job somewhere, so I studied mechanical drawing and got a job. As a matter of fact, that was what I did during the war, because I was working for an industrial designer who was working for the Navy. They didn't want me to be drafted, so they kept telling the Navy that what I was doing was important. So I stayed on there throughout the war; and as soon as VJ Day came, I quit like that! I did have a little more money then, too. Then I studied with Jacques Maroger at the Parsons School. I learned a great deal from him. He was an art restorer. His background was that he had been head of the technical laboratory at the Louvre Museum.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right. He invented that Maroger Medium.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, which I use now. And I also met somebody else then. In 1939 I was copying a Tiepolo at the metropolitan Museum, I was using the Maroger Medium; and a little man with very, very bad breath came up and spoke to me and said: You have light in your pictures. I don't know what I said about that. Then he said: I have never copied. And I said: Really? But I thought Renoir copied and so on. I mentioned all the Impressionist painters. He said: No, none, of them copied. I knew them all. Than he went away with his wife. He came back the next day, and I said: Oh, I'm very glad to see you. I thought here's somebody who knew all the great Impressionist painter. He said: Really? Sort of surprised. Then I got to know him. He was a painter named Van Hooton. He came around to the house with his wife. He gave me some lessons, a few, about three, in which he told me what I needed to have told me. I already knew it in a way, but I needed to have somebody say it - certain things about painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was he?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't know. He went back to France; he didn't like it here. He hated it here. He had fled from German Army to Vichy, France; from there to Tangiers; from there to Florida. He's been here five years, hated every minute of it, he and his wife. They went back as soon as they could.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you get involved with Maroger?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Friends of mine, Edward Laning chiefly, were studying with him. And Reginald Marsh. I had a feeling that I didn't know how to paint, and I didn't know what to do. I mean, I had never learned it. It was very difficult. They said: Oh, he knows how to paint. He tells you the way that it used to be done. Then, when I did study with him, he showed me this Medium. It seemed to be so easy, natural that I stayed with it only for that reason; because it made things simple.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you still use that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Sometimes I don't. All of these pictures here use it. Sometimes I don't. If I don't use it, the fact that I have studied it somehow help me in painting just ordinary with turpentine. I don't know what it is, but something comes through so that the ease that I get from that passes over when I don't use it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That' interesting. I talked to John Koch and he uses it. He kept saying it's so easy. He said he can change a whole area without having a big disaster.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. You just move the paint.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. I didn't know that Maroger taught at Parsons.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: He did for a while. He taught mostly in Baltimore. But what I got from him was just the Medium. He didn't interest me otherwise, because he talked about the history of art. He measure everything by what he called the Medium. If you spoke of Goya, he would say: Well, he didn't have the Medium. And that was all he'd have to say about Goya. The last person he was interested in was Fragonard, because he did have the Medium.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. Well, what about Van Hooton? What did he say to you that was so important?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I could tell you, but it wouldn't sound interesting; because it's something that you have to do in paint. I mean, he showed it to me in relation to something I was doing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean the manipulation of paint with...?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. Partly that; partly how to see it. I got things like that from de Kooning, too. If I told you the remarks that he made about a particular painting that I haven't got here and it isn't in the process of being made, it would sound banal. It's only banal when it's separated from what you're doing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see what you mean. So it's really an in-the-works kind of commentary that he provided.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. He might say, for instance, that tree up there, that apple tree or the middle apple tree, he would say: That's not the shadow for the grass. I know he means when says that. If you just hear that remark, you might thinks it's not it's not the right shape or you might think all kinds of things. He would mean something about it's not in where it's supposed to be. The reason it's not in where it's supposed to be is because you haven't yet found the right color and thickness of paint and all kinds of things like that. It's It's like somebody criticizing a college theme and saying you haven't found the right noun in the sentence or the right verb. You're using adjectives because you haven't found yet the right words. If you find the right words, you won't have to ind these adjectives.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see what you mean. We're leap-frogging in two different ways here. After you left the League what did you do?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I went to Europe; that was in 1932. I painted in new York, and I went to Europe in 1932. I came back and I got married. I have five children. And I just kept on painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you lived in New York?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I lived in New York and outside New York near Croton, near Peekskill. When my grandmother died, we moved to Illinois to her house right next to my parents' house for a couple of years. Then my father died and we moved back East again. And very soon the war came. I didn't have any gallery then. I showed occasionally in group shows at the Art Institute, or at the Philadelphia Academy once in a while, or with the Artists' Union in Chicago. I also got interested in radical politics. But what I was interested in was... I met in Illinois- in Chicago- some German Marxists who weren't Communists. They were Marxists. They were more radical than Communists. They had never been Communists. They were associated with some American ex-IWWs, things like that. I was interested because of Hitler's advent to power. I thought this was too bad. I had been in Russia in 1927. I sort of read things- you know, what people said- and I noticed that the Trotskyites said there should be a united front with the Socialists. I thought obviously that is right, of course there should have been. I didn't like the way the Communists reasoned or rationalized. I thought I was a Trotskyite. Then I met these radical German Marxists and they showed me. They demonstrated. They didn't say, but I learned that Trotsky was just another Bolshevik and that the trouble was with Bolshevism, not Trotsky versus Stalin. It's Bolshevism that is the mistake, because of its method of organization .
The interesting thing about these Germans was that they had belonged to something in Germany called the Communist Workers Party, which was somewhat Rosa Luxembourg. I mean, she died before it was formed; so you can't say it was she but they were very concerned with... They thought it was very important that her criticisms or Trotsky's early criticisms of Bolshevism shouldn't come about; that is this becomes a centralized thing, one man dictates. So they were organized in a way that their enemies were never able to call them by a man's name with "ite" on the end of it, because they couldn't find anybody like that. They were organized in this way: Every year in Germany, the central committee of this party would sit in a different city in Germany; and it would be elected totally from the members in that city. One year the central committee was in Dresden, and it consisted entirely of the Dresden members. The next year it would be in Berlin, and it would consist entirely of the Berlin members. There was never any one bureaucracy or something that controlled it. So it was democratic. They thought that was essential.
They were very, very intelligent people. Paul Mattick was sort of a leading personality, and there were other Germans who were just as clever as he- and some Americans, too. What I got from them, from him was that they were sort of anti-theory. I mean, what you do comes first; and there isn't a theory which you then put into

practice. You are what you are right now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: While you're doing it.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Which also, I like to think, is a common American way of thinking - that action comes before theory. Or it's a common Anglo-Saxon way of thinking. It's like British empiricism a little bit, and it's like...

PAUL CUMMINGS: Theory is history. You said you went to Russia in 1927. What prompted that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It was just curiosity. I was abroad with my brother, Edward; and we were walking around in France. Eliot had just gotten married and was on his honeymoon, and we met him in Paris. Once I wasn't with them, and they met a neighbor from across the street in Winnetka, Illinois, who was going to Russia with a group of American journalists, economists, and labor leaders. They were in a bad way; they needed some money. My brother said that I would like to go to Russia. He said, well, I think that can be arranged if he'd give us some money. So I went along with them. One fo the people was the Superintendent of the Winnetka Public Schools, a progressive superintendent. That was after my time. I was 20 at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find Russia then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I thought it would be fascinating and it was. What I expected was I couldn't go to a place - not even China- that would be queerer or more interesting to see. That was what it was like. It was just absolutely... Everything was upside down; it was sort of different. Moscow, for instance, was a big city then; and everybody in the streets looked as though they had just come in from milking the cows. They didn't look like city people. The city was like a sea with big swells which had frozen. Red square looked like a great big wave of pavement. It was shabby and junky. There were a lot of wooden houses outside. We flew in by plane, and you looked down and there didn't seem to be any roads anywhere. There just seemed to be worn places where grass didn't grow, which were roads, I guess, and little trees, all second growth. AS you came down and approached Moscow, there didn't seem to be any reason for there being a city there. It was as though you'd find a city in the middle of the Northwest Territory or the woods or something. Nothing led up to it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, but it's on a river.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, a little river; but when you came down, it didn't look that way. I mean you came into the city; and there were glass houses on the way in from the airport to the city, completely glass with bulbous domes. I said: what are those? They looked like greenhouses. They said: Oh, those are former summer houses of the nobility. It looked like Coney Island. The church on Red Square, you know the famous church, was like something in Coney Island. Everything is different. The church is very small, and it was painted on the inside like the decoration in candy boxes of about 1912. The walls were greasy from people's overcoats pressing against them. And this monument lifted from Coney Island...

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's extraordinary. How long were you in Russia?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Five weeks.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you go besides Moscow?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: To Leningrad for a few days and to the Crimea, which is very beautiful and not so strange. I men, that is somehow related to Italy. We stayed in a sanitarium, which was supposed to be a sanitarium for incipient tuberculosis; but there were a lot of people who were there just because it was a nice place to spend a vacation if you had some pull.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what did you think of Leningrad?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It was terribly shabby. The streets were all tar blocks, which I had never seen before except that my father had a tennis court once made of tar blocks, you know, cubes of wood tarred. The hotel was more modern, more Western than the hotel in Moscow; but there were little bullet holes in the plumbing and the pictures on the walls. I thought that was the Revolution. It just hadn't been repaired. Before the Revolution, the aristocrats used to entertain themselves by shooting in their hotel rooms. Russia was so strange that it seemed to me probably true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It fit.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, it fitted. It wasn't that Russia was strange because of the Revolution; Russia was just strange anyway.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's extraordinary. You couldn't have met too many people in that length of time.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I met a few Russians. Arthur Fisher, who got me in... Most people got sick in Moscow. They got colitis because they hadn't been inoculated for typhoid or something. They were terribly sick. Arthur was very sick in Moscow. This group of people wrote a report afterwards; his field was to write about foreign concessions in Russia, He sent me around to interview American businessmen, and it was very difficult doing that. It took all day to find one address and get there in a droshky over these streets in Moscow paved with round stones as if from the beach. All the streets in Moscow and particularly Red Square was like a great big gravel beach. There I saw that Shchukin and Morosov collection of modern art. These great houses of rich merchants were all sort of askew like this. They were settling. Moscow isn't on Bedrock; and the earth moves, I guess, a little bit so everything gets out of whack.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, if it rains, all the buildings sort or lean to one side or something. That's extraordinary. Well I tell you, it's almost one o'clock.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, let's go.

MACHINE TURNED OFF

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now we're starting again here. You did a little teaching. You said the first teaching was for the Socialist Party in 1936.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Rebel Arts, I think, was the Socialist Club in imitation of the John Reid Club. I taught drawing to a class of amateurs, and then I became one of the editors of *Arise* which had four issues. It was a Socialist imitation of *The New Masses*. The other editors were Alex Haberstrill [Alec Haberstroh?], whom I've already spoken of; Sam Friedman, who was a real Socialist, an active, full time Socialist; Gertrude Weil Kline, who was also an active, full-time Socialist, a colomnist on the then *New Leader,* I think, which wasn't a bi-weekly but came out more often; and John Wheelwright from Boston. I wrote one article for them about mural paintings. I called it "Murals for Workers," which seems to me now like a very pretentious name. I wrote about murals that had been made mostly by the WPA or some of them not, because I included Thomas Benton and Orozco. I met at an editorial meeting John Wheelwright in New York and invited him to come out to Croton where we lived. He was interested in my wife's poetry and my ideas. I mean, we liked to discuss our ideas. I think he was sympathetic with Trotskyites who had joined the Socialist Party, and I was sympathetic with them, too. I was never an official member of the Socialist Party. I made a mural myself for a branch- Alex Haberstrill [Alec Haberstroh?] got me this for the Queens' branch of the Socialist Party- the subject of which was turn imperialist war into civil war, which also now seems to be very pretentious. It was in imitation of Orozco more or less, and I illustrated some of Wheelwrights poems for a time [‘Poems for a Dime'] which he published with linoleum cuts. I knew him quite well. We moved to Chicago when my second son was born and my grandmother died. Soon after that, he was killed in an automobile accident, but I always was interested in pets. My wife was a poet when I married her. She still is, but she doesn't write much now. Wheelwright's poetry I had read and admired before I met him. I think it's because I am somewhat in awe of any written of poetry. That continues after the war when I got in connection with the Tibor de Nagy Gallery who published O'Hara, Ashbery, Schuyler, and Kenneth Koch. I met them through the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, which I got into by Larry Rivers' and Jane Freilicher's and Bill de Kooning's and Elaine de Kooning's recommendations. After I had been writing for *Art News* for a few months, I wrote an interesting review of the Tibor de Nagy Gallery's first shows. When I saw their shows, I thought this is the place I would like to be in, and that was the place I did get into. I got just exactly what I wanted.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great. You mentioned that, in 1936 when you were involved with the Socialist group, you started writing?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: The first thing I wrote was for *Arise* magazine, which was art criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And that interested you into writing more and more?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I didn't write any more after that; that was the end of that. But when we moved to Chicago, we still had somewhat of a connection with the Socialist Party. Soon it was more of a connection with this group of Council Communists group with Matik and so on. But my wife in Chicago was asked to write something for May 1 in celebration of the anarchists, and she just by tour de force wrote something that could be sung. I remember Anne showing it to Wheelwright and Wheelwright saying: Of course, it's a tour de force. It's not very good, but I couldn't do it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you knew a lot of people involved with Socialist politics and so on.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, but they were obscure people, the people I knew best. I liked them. I got to know these Germans; because when Hitler came to power, I used to see the advertisements for little publications; and I wanted to know what was going on. I wanted to see every point of view, and one thing would advertise another. Though their publication in which they announced a meeting, I met Paul Matik and Fritz Hentzler and Walter Auerbach. Those were the Germans whom I knew best; and there were some Americans - Givens I think his

background was IWW and Bereiter, a German-American. His background was maybe something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it about these.....?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They seemed to me to be more intelligent; their ideas seemed to be better than anybody else's. That was why I was interested in them. Then I found out that they were among the few people in the world who had really read Marx all the way through, not just a little bit of it. At the same time, they weren't interested in measuring every opinion against Marx. As Matik once said - and this again seemed to be very intelligent of them - when somebody said to him: You're a good scholar, and you ought to stick to that. You don't know anything about practical affairs. This was a union man in Chicago at one of the meetings. His answer to that was: I don't care what Marx said; I'm only interested in action. It seemed to me that he was saying, too, that what is valid bout Marx is not that he is an authority but that it is scientific, and what is scientific is a description of the world. And a description of the world isn't to be measured by a book; it's to be measured by the world. I couldn't agree more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did this interest in the Socialist group maintain itself?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I realized I never was good at reading Marx because I read too slowly. I liked these people because they were bright, clever; and they seemed to me to be... Well, they just knew more than American liberals or American Communists, who were also a form of American liberals I guess. I suppose it's a kind of dilettantism on my part; but still, if you're going to be interested in things out of curiosity, there's no point in taking second best.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, that's true. Well, was this your first active...?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I wasn't really very active.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...interest in politics?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you always maintained this interest in politics?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I used to read, because my family got *The New Republic* and *The Nation*. I read what they said about the Spanish Civil War and I'd read these other things. I realized that what they were saying *referred* to things that came out in other publications and that disagreed with them. So it showed that these things were not untrue, were not made up; but they suppressed them. So I felt... Well, this liberal point of view or the Communist point of view about the Spanish Civil War is not true. It's an edited one. It's a censored one. Walter Auerbach himself said that his interest in the radical movement in Germany after the First World War... I mention this because his interest came about in a similar way to mine. After he got out of , I suppose secondary school, he just stayed at home and read. He was interests in radical politics, and his brother said: Well then, you should go to the Communist Party. They're the people that put that into practice. So he went to a Communist meeting. They were denouncing the Trotskyites, and he didn't know who the Trotskyites were. He just knew that some people were being denounced. He said he'd like to hear what they have to say, and he was denounced. So he thought that was not for him. Then he found the Trotskyites weren't for him either.
Oh, I know what I wanted to say. What impressed me most deeply about this group of Germans was not just that they were more intelligent or that they knew more than anybody else but their manner of discussion was something that I had never met with before. If anybody said anything at one of those meetings, they were never interrupted even if they talked for three hours. People just sat and listened until the person had said everything that he had to say before somebody else got up to speak. There was no interruption. There was no bullying. I admired that very much. I never had seen that, and I don't see it now much either.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It doesn't happen much now. While you were in Chicago then in 1939, you had your first one-man exhibition?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. That was sort of arranged by my mother. That was a family thing. She thought I wasn't enough known. She was pushing her son. She used the facilities at hand and got me an exhibition at the Winnetka Community House.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember what went into that show?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I only remember one picture which went into that show which I still have. It's a terrible picture; except it has one part in it that's nice and that's my son Lawrence my second son as a baby sitting in his mothers lap. I still like the way he's painted. The other pictures, I think, I've destroyed; and form that one, I think of cutting out maybe the bit of Lawrence and saving it.
Oh, this leads on to something else. The part in that painting I liked very much was the baby, my second son

Lawrence. Later on when we moved back to New York, we kept seeing the Auerbachs, who lived in Philadelphia. We didn't see the other members of the group so much. Well, I used to paint pictures of Lawrence. I would say to Walter or to anybody: I don't think this picture looks much like him; He looks like his mother and this doesn't have that. Walter said to me one day: It's very interesting that when you paint pictures of Lawrence which you say look like him you bring out his resemblance to yourself, and when you paint pictures of him that you say don't look like him you bring out his resemblance to Anne. I thought that I thought just the opposite.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's funny. Well, maybe it's hard to see. But about seeing all the paintings out of the studio and on exhibition...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh I'm sort of ashamed of them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It didn't do anything for you at that time?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, it made me see what a lousy painter I was, I guess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It wasn't really an enthusiastic response.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I mean, people were very polite and interested; and even quite a good Chicago painter expressed real interest in it. But that was like an older person seeing ability on somebody younger. I think that was all. That isn't what I was interested in. I was interested in performance, not promise.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you done any other teaching besides this one drawing class you had?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I taught at Southampton College a couple of years ago. That was pretty meager experience, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Only a few signed up and fewer came. They weren't really interested. I had to sort of sell them the idea that this is worth doing, and I'm not interested in selling. If they're not interested already, I don't want to do anything about it. But then I've been invited to be a visiting critic quite often at art departments all over the country, and that's always very successful. It interests me and interests them. I have a good time, but that's at most a few day' thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where have you done that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Alabama, the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, Oregon University, Kent State University in Ohio, Yale, the New York Studio School, the Maryland Institute, the University of Pennsylvania, Cornell.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You go there usually for a week or something?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Often just for one day. Alabama I went for a week, and I've been for several days at the Maryland Institute. I usually go to the Maryland Institute every year. They ask me back, I've been to the University of Pennsylvania several time and to Yale twice or three times. Yale has been my worst experience. Once I went down there and I was supposed to speak and I didn't write anything down. This was the second time I went to Yale. The first time it was all right. It took me a long time to get going; I didn't quite know how to talk then, The second time I didn't prepare anything. I thought it would be better to be spontaneous. I go very relaxed; and when it came time to talk, I had absolutely nothing to say. So since then, I've prepared something very carefully, written it out, and then read it. And that's what worked. ...also Skowhegan in Maine and an artists' association in Rockport, Maine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you do?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I either give a lecture on some subject or other... At Kent State University, they gave me a subject. I like it when they do that. Then I can contradict the subject. The subject at Kent State was "The Arts Today - the Symptom of a Sick Society?" That was sort of fun; you know, that set you off. There were other people: an architect, Stockhausen, the composer, Agnes de Mille, and other people. They all talked before I did, so that gave me more and more things to say. You know it's always easier to talk second or third. And then, sometimes I've written those things up and given them as an article to *Art News* afterwards.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't criticize students' work?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I criticize students' work, yes. In these cases, I usually criticize students' work, too. There's a lecture, and then there's a couple of days... Sometimes it's just a lecture. Even if it's just a lecture, just one day, I'm taken to the students' studio for a couple of hours.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you find in the studios? Things that interest you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I think they're mostly very good. The thing is that students are often very, very good; but once they graduate, there' a drop. There's a falling off. I don't know why that is. It's a different environment. They don't know what it's for. I found that to be true in cases where I didn't criticize. For instance, when Albers was head of the art department at Yale, the Museum of Modern Art showed students' work from Yale or just graduated from Yale; and they were very good. Then two years later you didn't hear from them again. Maybe they need this environment where there's somebody over them to encourage them or to whom their work is addressed. Then I've gone back to places and seen the same students the next year, and there's sometimes a falling off. They're just repeating themselves. If they really repeated themselves, actually you would be able to say the same thing; but usually the repetition of themselves also leads to a diminishing of the first thing. They don't quite live up to it, to themselves.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how about the New York Studio School? That's somewhat of a different kind of school.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, yes; it's very informal. It isn't so different, say, from Skowhegan, which is very lively. Of course, Skowhegan gets the pick of art students from art schools from all over the country in the summertime. They were good, but they weren't any better than students in other places. One thing that I did notice about them was that they were more figurative than the general run of art students or the majority. As you get farther away from New York, the more they are like abstract expressionism, the more abstract they are, the more nonrepresentational they are.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It takes a long time for things to travel west.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Maybe so. They school of Hofmann seems to have percolated into the remotest corners of the United States.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he taught for a long time, and there were lots of students, many very, very famous ones.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well certainly, judging by his students, he was the best teacher who ever lived.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't study with him?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know him ever?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I've met him, yes. I'd heard about him first when I was studying with Benton. He came over to this country then; he was just out of Germany. Benton had written something in Arts magazine called "The Mechanics of Form Organization." Benton said that he had heard that Hofmann had said: Oh, that' very good, those articles of Benton; he has used all my ideas. Benton as very annoyed by that; he never had even heard of Hofmann. That's kind of Germanic, I think, to trace everything back to one source.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, that's very funny, very dissimilar people. Let's see, what else was going on in the 30s? Actually then the war started to come along.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: In 1939, yes. That's when we went to the Pacific Coast- my wife and I and one of these Germans and his American girl friend. He was a very interesting person. He had been a lawyer in Germany and also a radical, and he knew German law and the way things were organized in Germany very, very well. I remember his being quite scornful of the fact that, during the war, he was assigned by the United States Government to teach Americans, who would be in the Army of Occupation in Germany, to teach the Germans democracy. He said that what these people were supposed to present t the Germans as an example of democracy was the government of the city of Milwaukee, which, as fritz pointed out, was copied from the government of German Socialist cities. They were just getting it back. There was a certain naiveté there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was this fellow?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Fritz Hentzler. He also was the person who pointed out the similarity to me between the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. He knew it in detail. When he first said this in a talk in Chicago, people were very offended that they were almost the same thing. He said the only difference is... he said they both even have red flags. He could give specific examples. He said that, for instance, the difference was that aside from anti-Semitism, which was more overt in Germany and no so overt in Russia... he said, for instance, that one of he economic differences was that in Germany there was much more local initiative. He pointed this out as the example of the Hitler regime being really Socialist. He said, if you're a ship manufacturer, you have to first get permission from the German government to build the ship; and before they give you permission, you have to sign a contract with them as to what cargoes this ship will carry for several year and where. So he said it's

private capitalism, but the government says exactly what shall be done, how it shall be used. Then about local initiative, he said the difference in the agricultural policy, the farmer' organizations said what they could raise instead of the State telling hem what to raise, where there was certain reference back to the producer as to what the situation is. So it was less foolishly centralized.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you lied in Chicago for two years, and then you came back to New York. The war came along, and you got the war job. Had you had any other jobs before that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. That was the first job I had.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you had any other ones since then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, just teaching at Southampton College.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then the associate editor of *Art News*.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That was a valuable experience for me to work for this industrial designer; because, when the war began to peter out, they would give me things that had to do with peacetime activity. I would read in the *New York Times* there is a significant artistic effort in this country's industrial design and it's Walter Darwin Teague, There would be an article by him or by one of his chief competitors and they were very interested in that. At the same time, I had always felt a little guilty about being an artist, so to speak, and having no connection with the real world. I saw, working for this person who was considered to have a connection with the real world and engaged in a really useful activity, that his activity was no more socially significant than if he'd owned, say, a one-thousand foot yacht and employed one hundred people to run it around. It was just his own entertainment. It didn't really matter. He would redesign things that usually were perfectly well designed already.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right. Everyone who's done industrial design has told me that you design something and it looks beautiful. Then three years later you've got to change it because taste has changed. That's very interesting.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: So after that I never felt guilty again about it being....I realized that probably a great deal of business in practical life is just as whimsical and personal as this and why not do what you like to do.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. A lot of big business is make-do work anyway of some kind or other. Have you had any hobbies ever?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I sometimes like to make something out of wood. I once wrote poetry for a while. I started to do that because met all those poets who were published by the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, and they used t meet at the Cedar Bar and pull something out of their coat pocket and show them to each other. I envied that very much. I thought Id like to do that, too. So I tried to see if I could, and for a little while I could.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have things published?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But what happened? It didn't sustain itself?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, it didn't sustain itself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, you liked the activity of writing poetry?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I like the activity of writing. It's very hard, but I like writing criticism. I like putting words together in a sentence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you've never collected pictures or anything?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I've bought pictures, yes, since I was in college, off and on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you didn't really collect any?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have no viewpoint of things that you like?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How, at this date, would you evaluate your art school education and training? DO you think it

did much for you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think the historical part did most for me. I think I learned most as a painter from painters; or I learned most as a painter from painters; or I learned most as a painter from de Kooning and Van Hooton and Maroger and my own contemporaries now, Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, Alex Katz, John Button. I've learned a lot from all of those.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're the people you see frequently?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And some of them live out here.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I learn from students if I have students and I criticize their work. Here in Southampton, there are a couple of students who bring me their work and I criticize it; and then they give me criticisms too. It's an exchange.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't have private students though, do you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. But I have an unofficial connection with the College, or an official connection, I guess. They call me adjunct professor, which means nothing except it's in the catalogue. They call on me sometimes to be on a panel or something and I do if I can. But since I'm in the catalogue, art students know that I'm here, so... I like seeing people's work anyway. I enjoy it, so they can come around. I consider that's what that means to be called Adjunct Professor of Art at Southampton College. What it means is, if any art student wants to show me his work, I will look at it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very good. They don't have you as a full time professor but somebody on the outside they can go to.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, let's see. You started writing, you said, for *Art News* through Elaine de Kooning's recommendation. When did you meet Elaine?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: In 1939 we moved back from Chicago to New York. I knew Walter Auerbach, who was this German Marxist. He and his wife lived in Philadelphia, and they knew Edwin Denby. I met Denby through them; and through Edwin Denby, I met the de Koonings and Rudy Burkhardt.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were saying that you didn't really get involved with the other quote "abstract expressionists" as much as you did with Bill de Kooning.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And did you meet Rothko and Pollock?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I met Rothko, I think, once, but just in a gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about that other group of people, the Tenth Street crowd? Were you ever involved with them?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. That was Alex Katz and Lois Dodd and...

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the Camino Gallery people?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, I don't think I knew them. Who else was in the Tanager Gallery? Angelo Ippolyto, who is now at Michigan State where my son is professor of French.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you show on Tenth Street in those group shows ever?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I've been invited. They hung shows just marvelously at the Tanager Gallery. In that one little room, I've seen an exhibition of 90 pictures and it didn't look crowded. They just sort of moved them around and around and around and around until they finally found no more motion.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was a great little gallery, but you never belonged or...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I was already in the Tibor de Nagy Gallery. I got in the Tibor de Nagy Gallery in 1951. They gave me a show and it was some new pictures and some old pictures. It was a kind of scrappy show. Some of them shouldn't have been in the show, but people were interested. I think they were interested because it

was realistic and realistic in a different way from what they were used to. Then artists were interested in it. They kept coming to those shows and sometimes abstract artists like Tworkov... They'd be asked: Are there any realist artists today? And he said: Well, there's Fairfield Porter. Some of them accept me. In a way I feel more at home with them than I do with people who aggressively call themselves realists. I don't feel at home with them. I don't fee; at home either with people who aggressively call themselves abstract, you know, like the American Abstract Artists. I couldn't have any connection with them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you didn't have anything to do ever with the WPA projects?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. Because I wasn't on relief, I couldn't have.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know any people who were?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I knew lots of people who were on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody was on it, it seems, at some time.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I knew Edward Laning, who was on it. He painted the Library murals, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well at *Art News* you were, what do they call it, editorial associate or associate editor?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, that just means a reviewer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you didn't work at the magazine offices ever?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You just reviewed exhibitions and wrote occasional pieces?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I was given an assignment - a certain number of exhibitions is all the reviewers do - for that month, then when I quit *Art News* I was called up by Robert Hatch of *The Nation*. It just so happened he didn't know I had quit *Art News* of anything. I was recommended to him, I think, by Lincoln Kirstein. Did I want to write reviews for *The Nation*? Again, I jumped at the chance. I thought I'd really be on my own; I'd be writing reviews. So I accepted. There I chose what I wanted to review; it was a different kind of thing. I kept that job for two years and then I quit there. I was beginning to sell my own paintings; and I didn't want to spend that much time, I thought, writing. I could sort of foresee the same artist's show would come up again and again and again in the course of one season after another. You don't want to write about them again and again and again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once around is enough for a while.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: In two years, that's the way it went, once around for most people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you wrote for *Art News* for seven or eight years.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Well, people did keep coming up. One person that they kept assigning me to was Roy Lichtenstein before he....

PAUL CUMMINGS: When he was at John Heller?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, before he was a pop artist. I felt that I was married to him by force. He even brought me paintings to show. Then he began going into this other line, and I didn't like what he was doing any more very much. When he first made his success as a pop artist, he asked me what I thought of his paintings. I said that I don't like them. I was sorry to say that, because he's an awfully nice man himself and very bright and very humorous, a very nice person.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you find this writing? You wrote quite a bit for *Art News* over the years.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Well, they saw what I wrote about; and Hess, I guess, would think of things for me to do. I had a feeling that I was typed as the person to write about American art. I thought I didn't like American art. I thought I didn't like it very much so I was a little less enthusiastic. My reviews were more critical maybe more interesting for that reason when I wrote about it. So they gave me Sargent to write about, a big show of Sargent in Boston, and Bellows, whom I put down - Bellow not Sargent. They wouldn't give me the people whom I really would have liked. They did give me Winslow Homer, whom I was glad to write about, and Marin, whom I still have this kind of filial feeling towards. I don't know how much I like his pictures, but I can't ever get over this memory of how much he meant to me at one time. So he could never mean nothing to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In a personal way?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, no, as a painter. I didn't know him very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did this effect your life in the art world because you were a critic for this magazine?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It didn't affect me; it didn't have a bad effect. I didn't know a great many of these artists. I knew almost none of them. I knew de Kooning. SO I didn't have a feeling that here is a friend whom I have to... Only once in a while was I assigned to a friend whose work maybe I didn't like very much, but I was able to do something with that. You can somehow manage to tell the truth and to seem warm friendly without putting somebody down.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do any of those "So-and-So paints a picture" series?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I did a lot of those. The first one I was assigned to was Philip Evergood; I was just assigned to him. The writer was usually allowed to choose the artist to write about. But for this one, they lost their writer who was to do it; so they asked me if I wanted to do it. I thought I would- to get into this, you know. That was quite difficult for me, but it came across all right. And he liked it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How were they done? Some of them, I remember, had great series of photographs and....

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, you ask them to start a picture; and you write about it in its progress. The photographer comes along and takes it in its progress. That was usually what happened. Sometimes it didn't work out that way, because the artist worked too slowly - like Herman Rose. I think there was one picture that he was working on, but I talked about other pictures, too. In case of Vasilieff whom I admired- I didn't know him very well but just knew him- he didn't want to paint in front of me; so he chose a painting that he'd already done in the past and faked the early steps of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Well, you must have really spent a lot of time with these people doing that kind of article.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well I took about a month. I'm very slow. It wouldn't take somebody else a month, but it took me a month.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but still, if somebody was painting and they were doing a large painting...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I mean it might take a month. It might take longer than that before it was done. It might take a year. But I mean my work would be a month of time spread out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, devoted to that one thing.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, thinned out into a year.... or even just go and see them, interview them, and then the picture is done. Then maybe it would take me about two weeks to write the article. I wouldn't do it until the picture was done. I just wrote down what they said, remembered what they said. I was somehow able to do that without shorthand or anything. I somehow was able to. Sometimes when people do that, what comes out the person doesn't like even though its perfectly true. Somehow I never had that difficulty.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I found some of those pieces were really quite illuminating about how the artist works and how he paints. You can learn a lot about what goes on underneath and how things are arrived at. What other kinds of things did you...? you didn't write for anyone else, did you, during that time?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I've written for *Art and Literature* and couple of articles and for *Art in America*. For *Art and Literature* I wrote about [Joseph] Cornel, which took me a yea to get started on. I found that very, very difficult. I didn't know what I was going to say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you happen to write about him then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I was asked by one of the editors of *Art and Literature* if I would like to write about Joseph Cornell. I said yes I would. They wanted an article about him. My connection with *Art and Literature* came about because I knew John Ashbery, who was one of the editors. He first asked me to write something for them, and I wrote a sort of general article.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you've know a lot of poets, too. You mentioned a whole group of them earlier.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still have aesthetic society around?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. James Schuyler lives in our house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well you started showing with Tibor de Nagy in 1951, and you've shown every year since almost?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Almost every year since. I mean there were about two or three years when I didn't show maybe some years when I had a show less than 12 months after the one before.

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PAUL CUMMINGS: You wrote what else for *Art News*, besides reviews and those "so-and-so paints a picture" things?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well then, sometimes I would write a general article on some subject that interested me. I'd ask to do that. And now as a matter of fact, Tom Hess has said he wants me...Every year says: When are you going to write your article this year? This is the first year I haven't written anything for them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find working for them?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It depends on who is the immediate editor. If it's Tom who is the immediate editor, he's very respectful of what I write; and he doesn't change it. Some other people change it. Once there was a managing editor who just thought it was her job to cut everything. She used to cut things up until they were nonsense. I got very angry at her, and then finally she was fired anyway from the magazine. Frankfurter told me about her. I got terribly angry at her, and I wrote a letter to her and to Frankfurter about this. Frankfurter told me, sort of, the next year when I came back that she'd been fired. He said when he hired her he thought she would be food because of her Marxist interests, but he found out that the very people she couldn't get on with were the printers. He said they were just in a state of seething revolt.
It often happens that way. You find out that there's somebody you don't like, and you think you are the person who is the misfit and everybody likes so-and-so and only you don't. Then all of a sudden, it turns out that everybody feels just the way you do. Everybody has been hiding their true feelings.
PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you had the transition to *The Nation*. There you had more choices.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Hatch was there. I liked him as an editor very much. He sometimes didn't want something that I wrote, and he would say I can't accept this for some reason or other.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you had freedom in choosing your own topics?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I liked that very much; I liked that a lot. You never could know what was going to happen. I would sort of plan. Here would be the exhibition this month. I would think: Such and such is important I've got to write about that; this too is important, I've got to write about that; this too is important; such and such I can ignore, it's not going to be interesting. Then I'd go around and look at these important ones, and I'd find that they bored me. And id go to an unimportant one, and I'd find: Umm! Here's something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Here was an exciting one.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. You can't tell.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. You have to really see. So that was a couple of years of writing for *The Nation*?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And then the painting activity started up to you left.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, the painting began to sell. Paintings began to sell enough. *The Nation* doesn't pay very well; they haven't got much money. I was paid forty dollars for every column, and sometimes it takes you a week to do it. So it isn't really worth it financially.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You're a member of the International Association of Art Critics?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What is that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't know. I was invited into that by Tom Hess; but it seems to me that the active members of it are all the Europeans, not the Americans. You get a letter saying: There's going to be a meeting

next July in Saudi Arabia; of course we expect you to come; we hope you will be there. I don't see how anybody can really take it seriously without devoting their life to it. You have to pay your own expenses when you get there, They five you an agenda of what foes on at these meetings. They discuss all kinds of questions which don't interest me at all. I can't even remember what they're about. They're very concerned about art criticism in relation to society in certain ways that couldn't interest me less. So I think it's a mistake to belong to it. If you're a member, you have a card, an International Association of Art Critics card; and if you go abroad, it should help you to get into things that are otherwise closed. But it didn't have any such effect last summer in Italy. I'd show it to people and they'd just be annoyed. They would tell me: You see this place is closed; it means it's closed. Then I'd go to somebody else in Italy and they would see this card- its signed by an Italian art critic. And they'd say: Oh, yes, yes; oh of course, just go to so-and-so. You'd go back to this other place: no. I didn't want to push it. If they didn't want me to see the reason for having it, because I don't get anything from it. I don't give anything either, I give dues, but that's all, a few dollars. I don't really understand it. They're trying to be like The Ten Club, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, the Russian. Do you belong to any other associations?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I belong to a club in New York, the Artists Club. It used to be on Eighth Street. Now I don't know where it is. I don't go to that very much either. I think I will continue to belong to that though for other reasons. I mean, I don't know what reasons they are; but there might come a time when I might want to go there.
I did speak there on a panel recently. I don't know if it was last winter or the winter before. Those panels I don't like very much when I go to them. I don't mind it when I'm the one who is talking, They had one about Pollock, and I jut couldn't bear it. There was so much hostility engendered by I don't quite know what. Everybody wanted to sort of show that he knew what Pollock was really about. At that meeting, they had a priest talk which was very interesting. I was more interested in what he said than in what the painters said. But the attitude of the painters towards him was: What are you doing horning in here. However, I preferred him; he had something new to say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Did you go to many meetings of The Club, the old one?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I went before, long ago. It started as a group of people - de Kooning, Kaldis, Milton Resnick, and maybe a couple of others- who would meet in Washington Square at night after work and then go to Stuart's Cafeteria on Sixth Avenue near Eighth Street. That's what it was in the beginning; then they made it more official. De Dooning asked me to join. I have a feeling that the artists, my contemporaries, had this feeling in Chicago about that Artists Union and also about the abstract expressionists in New York. They were all very patronizing to me - who the hell is he- because I wasn't an abstract expressionist. Except Bill, who knew me, who wasn't that way. I felt just the same towards them. I thought: Who the hell are you; I'm really brighter than you think. So I just sort of keep away from them.
One of the first things I heard there was a talk that Bill wrote out, and he didn't want to give it because of his Dutch accent which he felt self-conscious about. SO Motherwell read it. Motherwell introduced it by talking in this very patronizing way about really how good it is, you know, sort of patting Bill on the back, His attitude sort of disgusted me; because Bill has a connection with reality, a real connection with painting, and Motherwell just came out of a book and courses in philosophy at Columbia or something. That talk was later given at the Museum of Modern Art. I used this thing that Bill said wen he told it to me. In a certain way, it is a motto for me in writing. He said that, after it was given at the Museum of Modern Art, a girl came up to him and said: I didn't quite understand what you said in such and such a place; could you say it to me in other words? And his answer was: it took me two weeks to find out how to say that and now you ask me to say it differently!

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. Well, do you think The Club served a good purpose?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You think it still does then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I sort of think that I have gradually forced people to respect me. I suppose this is a very personal thing. It's probably being the fourth child in a family of five. It's like what Herman Rose said- he understands what I'm talking about - that is, if your brothers and sisters - in this case, of course, it's the abstract expressionists who are my brother- never really respect you. He said that Eisenhower said: My brothers still don't respect me even though I've been President Of the United States.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's funny. Well, you've had a Longview grant, which is that great mysterious foundation.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, that's, I think, Tom Hess and Harold Rosenberg. Well, that was for criticism. That was for that article that I wrote about Bill de Kooning in *The Nation*, a short article.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Have you had any experience with the Longview other than that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It just popped up.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They put out a magazine for a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, a couple of issues or something and went away. Were you living in New York during the time you were writing for *Art News* or where you living in the country?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I was living out here and going into New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have a place in New York to stay?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I did. A place that Water Auerbach had had. It was something like $18 a month. It was on Avenue A at Eleventh Street. The rain came in though the roof, but it had a stove. It was a cold water flat, and writing for *Art News* paid for that. I'd have to stay in town for a week maybe, at most, or three or four days a week. Writing for *Art News*, I liked to do it on its own. Also, it was a way of having a connection with the City.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think the fact that you saw so many Exhibitions and wrote about so many different kinds of things, the fact that you had to think about those things and put them into words and formulate ideas, had nay effect on your own painting, in the development of it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. It did have a lot. It did have an effect on my own painting, not just writing but looking at things. I would think about something that I was writing about and then I would think if this is the way, why are they doing such and such. Then I'd have a look at my own painting and think why am I doing this? Why can't I do it differently?

PAUL CUMMINGS: And what happened? You just kept working. You never were an abstract painter, were you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've always used images and figures?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, in the 30s when we lived outside of New York, I met Clement Greenberg of *Partisan Review*. He asked me then to write something about Bill de Kooning for *Partisan Review*. That was in 1938 or 1939, and I did write something. He was the art editor of *Partisan Review*. He and MacDonald liked it, but the other editor didn't like it. So it came back, although Greenberg said: It's very good; it's better than I could do. He was polite. I sent it to *Kenyon Review*. No. I guess I had written to *Kenyon Review*. They had printed something by Wyndham-Lewis- anti-Picasso- and I wrote a long letter arguing with Wyndham-Lewis. They printed this letter of mine and wrote to me that they hoped I would write something of my own sometime. So I sent them this thing about de Kooning in 1939. They sent it back and said: It's very interesting, but he's an unknown painter, and you haven't sent us any photographs so we can see what his work really looks like, so we can't accept it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Now, they could have had a laurel in their...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. So that sort of ached, you know, that here I wrote something about him before anybody else; and I never got a chance, hardly got a chance to again. Because Hess on *Art News* always... As soon as something important came up about de Kooning, it was his. He dibs that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He owned the rights almost.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there was a time when a lot of the painters felt there was a while conspiracy on Hess' part to promote certain abstract painters and not others. What do you think?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, if he hadn't promoted those abstract painters... I think he did a lot of promoting, yes; but if he hadn't promoted them, nobody else at the time would have. They were painters who should have been promoted. They were the best painters around. The conspiracy was, as far as I can see, that he recognized that they were the best painters around and deserved to be publicized.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And he was in a position to do something.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how about... Greenberg started writing, goodnes, way back somewhere in the 30s?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. One reason I never became an abstract painter is I used to see Greenberg regularly, and we always argues. We always disagreed. Everything that one of us said, the other would say "no" to it. He told me I was very conceited. I thought my opinions were as good as his or better, He once said... I introduced him to de Kooning. He was publicizing Pollock. He said to de Kooning, who was painting the *Women*: You can't paint this way nowadays. I thought who the hell is he to say that? He said: you can't paint figuratively today. I thought, if that's what he says, I think I will do just exactly what he says I can't do. That's all I will do. I mean, I might have become an abstract painter except for that.
Another reason I paint the way I do is that in 1938 we were living in Chicago; and in the Art Institute of Chicago here was an exhibition of Vuillard and Bonnard, both of them. I had never seen so many Vuillards before, or maybe so many Bonnards before. And I looked at the Vuillards and thought [that] maybe it was just a sort of revelation of the obvious and why foes one think of doing anything else when it's so natural to do this.
Once Saul Steinberg said to me at a party: Do you paint the way you do for political reasons? For a person who's a humorist, what a question! So I said: No, I'm not at all. When Bill was first influenced by modern art, it was Picasso that he was emulating. With me, it was Vuillard.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you wrote a book on Eakins.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. You should say Akins [long A].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Akins? Yes, that's right. That's the other pronunciation.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That's the right one. I know because that's what my great-aunt told me and she knew him. You see, she studied with him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: The Braziller Company was putting out a series of books about American painters, and Tom was writing about de Kooning. And who is the former head of the Whitney? Goodrich! Goodrich had already written about Eakins, so he decided he wanted to write about Homer and Ryder. I would have liked de Kooning most of all, and I would have liked Homer next, I guess, not Ryder. But Eakins was what there was. I was told that it would be so much money: $750. So I thought I need money so I'll do it. I remember I didn't like Eakins very much. I think I like him better now. Anyway it was just a potboiler, and I didn't like him in the sense that there was something about him I didn't really like. As I've seen him more and more since, I respect him more and more. But I really didn't get a chance to look at the paintings. I was given this deadline. Frank O'Hara was writing about Pollock. Goossen was writing about Stuart Davis. Tom was writing about de Kooning. Goodrich was writing about Homer and Ryder. I asked for a little more time. "No, you can't have any more time," said Tom Hess. I had my book in at the deadline. And I found out that Tom hadn't even begun. Frank O'Hara had begun his about Pollock but that's all and Goodrich didn't hand in his at all. So I was the only person who adhered to the deadline, because I was told that I must. The other people didn't even pretend to. I realized another time I get something like this I'm not going to pay any attention to it either. I had a feeling that Goodrich felt that Eakins was his man. I wrote to Goodrich; I wanted to quote something. I said can I quote from your book on Eakins? He wrote back and said that it's usual in a case like this to say what you want to quote, give the quotations in full, and the page, and so on and so on, and the line it's on. I didn't know you had to give the quote. So I did that. It seemed as if it was just kind of pedantry because he was jealous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He's very possessive about his information, extraordinarily so. I had occasion to get a kind of benevolent withdrawal of information.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Nobody else is like this.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you find Eakins interesting after writing the book and looking at all the photographs?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I did it from photographs, which you should never do. I had seen almost all of his paintings at one time or another, but you should always see the paintings the last thing before you write something because they're a little different than the photographs. If I had had a little more time, I could have gone to Philadelphia and looked at all the paintings. And some things that I didn't really know until lately. A year ago I was in Philadelphia and saw these things and I saw that Eakins... One thing about him is hat he could not paint a landscape, an outdoor picture. You know, they all look indoors. But that's a minor fault, because his landscapes are a very minor part of his painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. There are very few of them.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: He had no sense of light, or instance, unless it's indoor or artificial light. Even that thing at the Metropolitan, Max somebody or other... The light in that is like the light on the planet Pluto. He had no sense of light.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Everything was scientifically done except the light. His space also is very strange in some of the pictures.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: The light in his pictures... It isn't light that is there; it is darkness that is there. Occasionally there is a little bit of light. It's as though one went around in the outdoors with a flashlight.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very interesting.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: ...in the pervading darkness.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still write poetry?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I'd like to write something on aesthetic theory. In aesthetic theory, by the way, I like Susanne Langer very much. She really writes about the thing; whereas somebody else– Croce, for instance – says that its expression or something. It seems to me that's a very minor aspect, or they gave not looked at anything. I said that to David Smith once and he said yes, that she writes like an artist. So other painters feel the same way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's interesting. A number of painters have become interested in her. Even younger painters, who are usually involved in all kinds of crazy things, found her interesting. What do you feel about the exhibitions that you've had?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I always feel... I've always felt until the very last one that there are some pictures that shouldn't be up,, that I shouldn't show, that I regret having on the wall. I think the last exhibition was the first one that I felt there wasn't anything that I need be ashamed of in it. That's about what I feel. I used to sort of hate to go to an opening in a way because here I am with this shameful stuff all around being exposed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find the pictures change for you when you get hem out of the studio?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They change for me in the course of time. I think that Ingres' remark that "I leave it to time to finish my paintings" is true in a very wide and profound way. I think it's true in many ways. For instance, the paint mellows actually and so it becomes more harmonious. If it's an oil painting, there's a certain flow. There's something psychological, too, which kind of works back toward the painting. Sometimes things that are awkward and out of place, you find out, are no so awkward. They have their place, and it is an integral thing and not a scattered thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean it becomes cohesive?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. When people restore pictures, they ignore that. They think they know in the first place, they can tell by science, what it looked like when it was new; and that's the way it ought to look. This is fallacious, because a work of art does exist in time. It isn't an instantaneous thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It changes.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had mentioned one time your discussion with Elaine de Kooning on Gorky. Did you know Gorky?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I didn't really know him. He knew Bill. They knew each other very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, they shared a studio at some point, I think.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I think he got more from Bill than Bill got from him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I think so. I think Elaine thinks so. I think Bill would say so if... He doesn't think it's important, and he doesn't want to press that point anyway. He knows he got a lot from Gorky.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I know. Well, he has said that many times.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: But Gorky apparently was a difficult person to get on with. Once Bill objected to his being so grouchy. Gorky said that you only have to be with me six hours a day, but I have to be with myself all the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well that's an insight. You know, it seems that Bill de Kooning has been a friend for a long time and a valued person on very many levels as a friend and as a painter.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is there anyone else that you've had a link, close association with that has had values like that for you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I don't see him very much. For quite a while, I haven't seen him very much. Although recently we had some English friends here, and I took them around to see his studio. He's always very welcoming. I suppose I got a great deal from Paul Matik and Fritz Hentzler in Chicago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about other painters?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I get a lot from Alex Katz.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you see him a lot?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I see him. I've gotten a good deal from Larry Rivers, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I never see him because he's always running around the country.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I haven't seen him in quite a while. We don't see each other much. I have, in the past, gotten a lot from him, when I first knew him in 1951 and 1952.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was at Tibor then, wasn't he?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you've gotten very involved with the people in that gallery then, haven't you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I'm not so involved with the people in that gallery then, haven't you?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I'm not so involved with the people in that gallery now. I mean, there's Jane, and Red Grooms I like very much; but I don't see him. Alex isn't in that gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I think Larry….

FAIRFIELD PORTER: yes, Larry is sort of such an egomaniac that he's kind of a strain.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's like having a one-man band at times. Have you done any, what you'd call, experiments with color or new materials or things like that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've really been a straight painter?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you make collages?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. I once made a collage to make a silk screen. I made it by making the collage first. I mean the silk screen didn't interest me particularly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you done any graphics or prints other than that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Lithographs on paper, which were quite nice. I mean, they looked very good, If they were in a group show of prints, they stand out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you do those?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That was about five years ago. Let me see, what was his name? Reginald Palace asked some people to do these things; they were put out in an edition. I made some; other people made some. That was one of the few times that I worked in a way that I don't usually do, which was I got a system. You had to do these things on this sensitized paper, and you mustn't get your fingerprints on it. The first ones did have fingerprints on them, but they looked all right printed. They wanted them to look spontaneous. They didn't want something that you figured out when you did it. So it was a spontaneous sketch. I developed a system of drawing for this, and the system was roughly…. My style was a line that I drew showed a change of color. That was it's meaning, not a change of form. I drew around the different colors; so it has roughly the look of a numbers painting only it's better.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you've never really been interested in doing graphics or things like that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I'd like to sometimes. No, I haven't. Long ago I made a lithograph in Rome, an illustration of Dostoevsky. I thought I would illustrate *The Possessed*. I made just one illustration. I never went any further.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I've noticed drawings of yours here and there over the years. Do you make a not of drawings?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I draw but they're to be for my own use for painting. Maybe that's why I developed this drawing around a color, because it's something to use. I want to use it for something that's going to be colored, so I give myself that information.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Well, the drawings are studies for paintings then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They're studies for paintings or they're not studies for paintings. I think some day I might make a painting of this, or I already have the painting in mind when I make drawings. Usually what I'm thinking of is a painting eventually.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They aren't just drawings as drawings?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: A lot of them don't turn into paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Have you worked from photograph ever? DO you ever do that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No but I did this. I liked the photograph. It was a cover of *Life* a few years ago. I thought it would be useful to get some practice in that, because I'd made a portrait commission. I had to do a lot of it away from the sitter, from drawing and so on; and I thought it would be useful if I had photographs to refer to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you do many portraits, portrait commissions?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I've done twelve altogether in my life, and maybe half of them were successful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It doesn't sound like a very thrilling experience.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, I like it very much. Yes. I like it, but I'm bit terrible good at it. I hope to get better. That's what these were, too. I wanted to get practice doing portraits anyway, and there was a portrait show coming up at the Benson Gallery out here. SO I painted. That was myself and this is another art student. This, which I like best of all, is another art student; and this one up here I Mother. This is the last one, and the one I like best. Mother's is the next to the last, then the one of me. The one of McQueen is the first one and the one I like least.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's a different kind of painting problem, isn't it - when you do a commissioned portrait than just picking something you want to do of things you're interested in?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Koch, who I interviewed, of course does portraits all the time, enormous numbers of them. He still, after all these years, is not too... He would rather really do other things; but this is so lucrative, he's delighted to do them. Well, I'm just curious. With all the writing that you've done over the years, do you keep a diary or notebooks or anything like that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't keep a diary. I used to keep notebooks of notes for reviews, but they're not... If I still have them, it's just because they got abandoned somewhere. If I find them, I'll throw them away. There's nothing of any interest in them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The important thing has been published.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know one thing I'd like to talk about since we've gone through the exhibitions here - what about the group shows? Do they mean anything to you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: The Whitney does.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about the Philadelphia Academy?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I've never been there. It doesn't mean anything to me. The Carnegie means something to me, although I've never been there either. I think of it as having a certain prestige. The Biennial means a lot to me which I'm going to be in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've shown at the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, I've never shown there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't think so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I have a note that you had some pictures in...

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, the gallery, I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There aren't very many museums that are important for you to exhibit in then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Oh, sure! I'm very pleased that the Museum of Modern Art bought one picture of mine - accepted it, in other words, as a gift. I would like it very much if I sold a picture to the Metropolitan. I did sell one to the Cleveland Museum. I was very pleased, because that's a very, very good museum. And the Wadsworth Atheneum is a museum that I like, and they bought two of mine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The collections are important to you, to be in the collections? That's interesting. Once in a while, I find people who have a specific project. They have five museums that they want to have pictures in, and the rest they don't care about.
One thing I like to do- I don't know how well we could do it- is if we could talk about the evolution of the work, the painting, what you started painting, the kind of imagery, how it's changed over the years.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I think I was very influenced always by people's ideas of what paining is, what's important in it, maybe beginning with Berenson's aesthetic ideas and then Benton. When I say that I would like sometime to write something about aesthetic theory, that would be, I suppose, what I finally think is what it's about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you were at the Art Students League, the picture - the drawings and things at school then - were what? Still lifes and figure studies, I suppose.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Figure studies almost entirely and things that I brought in form the outside: landscapes, cityscapes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How were they painted? Were you interested in Cubism? Impressionism?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: They were painted in that Benton manner. HE said reality is a series of hollows and bumps.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened after you left the League? How did things develop?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I still kept on doing things in the way Benton told me to, so to speak.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But in technique or in the imagery?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, his technique was just... He had an elaborate technique which was completely worthless, I think. It had no sense, no relationship to..., no sensuousness as far as the medium is concerned. After all, a painting is made of paint, and Benton is one of those painters who seem to be trying to overcome that as though that were an unfortunate drawback, Sometimes avant garde people say things like that, like Donald Judd who's quoted as saying that the trouble with a painting is it has four corners and it's flat on the wall or something like that, or that it's mounted on stretchers or it hangs up. I think he's being clever or something. It's not very interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: that's true. Well, I'm trying to... I don't know your early paintings. I know things from, say, the mid 50s.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I can show you some.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I suppose what I was thinking of was what I've got to do is learn how to paint, and there isn't anybody who can teach me. I've just got to learn it. I didn't think there was anybody who could teach me, so I just set about copying the way things looked and trying to get the concept of reality down. Franz Kline once told about a class that he had. A lady said to him, "I don't know what to do with this painting." He said, "Well, where you see green, put down green; where you see blue, put down blue." And that is true. It's very hard to do. He hasn't really explained anything, to he's explained everything - one or the other, nothing or everything. But it's hard to know what else you can say.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I'm just trying to think back. I remember a number of interiors that you've done: paintings, interior, and landscapes.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: yes. But what I think now is it doesn't matter much what you do. What matters is the painting. Since a reference to reality is the easiest thing, you just take what's there- for your reference, that is. Then you hope it's significant. Well, what is significant? What counts? It's where this aesthetic theory business comes in. What do you think of?
For instance, I painted this view out here- a great big painting- recently. Its going to be in the Biennale. It's because I looked out this window, and I saw it as if for the first time in a new way. I saw it as something integral. So I put this down on canvas. I'm not quite satisfied with it. In a way I like it. It comes out differently always than you think. Right now I'm look out there now as I'm talking to you, The same thing. Its as though I might as well do it all over again. Why don't I do that? That's like inspiration. Again it interests me to do it; and I would do it differently this time, I hope. What there would be there and what would make it worthwhile if Id done it again is that somehow it would, this time I hope, really hit you like this all at once. It would be there. It would have the all-at-onceness or something.
What I admire in Alex Katz's paintings... I was talking to a young poet, who came around here yesterday. He said he liked my paintings, and he showed me some if his poems. I couldn't explain to him what I liked in Alex or I didn't. He thought of him as simply putting down the "thingness" of things. But it isn't that. Partly what I like in Alex's pictures when I like them is it reminds me of the first experience, of a first experience in nature, the first experience of seeing, That interests me more than... Expressionism doesn't interest me very much, expressionism as a problem. But visualness interests me very much. It must be that first "timeness." The world starts in this picture. That's what I'm interested in doing, guess. I don't know if that get to what you want to know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a new... Even the subject has been growing out there for half a hundred years. It's the way in which it's seen, the new light or the atmosphere.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Elaine de Kooning came around and looked at that picture in the studio. She said that picture interested her, because she never in the world would have thought of painting that. That I took as a great compliment. What I like in Vuillard is that it seems to be ordinary what he's doing, but the extraordinary is everywhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's in how you see things. You have a little landscape up there. Do you work outside on a picture like that?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I did work outside on that. Then I brought it inside and worked on it some more. If I can finish it outside, I'm very glad. Sometimes I can't because there's too much light coming from all direction, and the world is bigger than that. You don't know where to stop. It's hard. That's why it's easier to paint out of a window, because it's something that encloses.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It frames it.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. If you could work outdoors in a tent...

PAUL CUMMINGS: And work through the door.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: A big tent and have a door, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was just wondering if you would make a drawing of an area like that and then do the painting in the studio.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: For instance, this self-portrait... The difficulty with it was that I was too close. It's hard to paint something if you have to look, you know, turn your head. Ideally you should be able to see it all- be far enough away so that you don't have to move your head, your eyes. But what was easy about it was that it was all framed in the frame of that mirror, which isolated it, which made it easier to do than if I'd been standing where that mirror was and there was somebody standing there who wasn't framed in that way. I could paint a person if I painted their image in the mirror more easily than the person directly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that's so?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You think because it cuts off an area? Mechanically or arbitrarily, it gives you a rectangle to work within?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It gives you the relationship of the picture to its edge. It has an edge; you don't have to

imagine the edge, which constantly eludes you. That's partly the reason. I don't think that's the whole reason though.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you always work from a model?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: In drawing, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about in painting? I mean, a model is either a drawing or a photograph or a live person or something.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, yes. A model is either nature or it is some drawings and sketches.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't think I've ever seen any finger paintings like the nudes or something like that.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No. There are a few that I painted, but they aren't very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In one show, you have a number of interiors painted around the house. Do you paint the house a lot? You seem very involved with the environment that you live in.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, that's mostly the house in Maine. I paint that perhaps a little more that I do this one. I think that's because it was built by my father. It's an example of his architecture. In a sense if I paint that house in Maine, I'm also painting a portrait if my father or something like that. This picture, this photograph, this color photograph of Stevenson... I like the color photograph on *Life*. The landscape is Illinois. So it's a kind of return to my native country. It has that meaning for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. It would be very hard for someone to figure that out by looking at that picture unless they had biographical information. It would be an assumption on their part anyway. Your colors seem to have gotten brighter in the last few yeah or clearer.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: As far as I know, that is just because I've tried to do that. I've worked in that direction. I've thought about why they weren't. I wanted them to be brighter. I don't like colors that aren't clear. Although, this picture down here, which isn't very bright, I like. I mean the color; there's nothing dead or nasty in color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I remember there was a show at Tibor when they were on Madison Avenue at 60th something street. The colors seemed drier than these. These seem to have a different.....

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I'm getting more skillful, I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Maybe it's the way one remembers colors, too, which is very tricky. Let's see. You've been to Europe a number of times. You went to Scandinavia one time.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. That was on a North Cape cruise. That was when I was 17. My parents took me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did a lot of traveling when you were young, didn't you?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And Canada. When were you in Canada? Was that early, too?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: That was out of high school, or was it before high school? I guess it was when I was about 12. That was right after the First World War. It was about 1918 or 1919. Father had been to... He knew part of Canadian Rockies very well. He had taken all the other children, older than I and my younger brother, there at different times. He wanted to take us all including John and me. We took a boat from Seattle to Alaska and then took a boat back again to Vancouver and then went to the Canadian Rockies to a camp that was near Lake Louise, a part that Father knew very well. As a matter of fact, he knew it better than the guides who took us there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you been to Canada since then?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still travel much?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, that is, out of the country. Oh, when we took the car to the Pacific Coast in 1939, Anne and Ruth went home from San Francisco; Fritz and I went on down the coast into Mexico, into Ensenada, and then home. So I was in a foreign country jut little bit, just for lunch. Then last summer, which was quite a long time after, we went to Italy, France, and Great Britain.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What part of the year do you spend in Maine? Do you still go there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Two months, yes. I'm going in a couple of weeks when school is out for two-and -a-half months. It's the public school vacation from here. That's the time of year I like best, and I do the most painting. I don't do anything else practically.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where in Maine is this?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: An island in Penobscot Bay. My father bought it in 1912, and 1913 was the first summer we spent there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's really an isolated place then, isn't it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Get away from telephones and everything. Do you spend a winter there ever?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It would be pretty cold.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I don't think it's so very cold on the coast. Inland it's very cold, just 15 miles inland. It goes down to 40 below quite regularly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have a studio there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Just a porch in this house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you work outside?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I work in a screened porch and away from the house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Would you do a painting like the landscape there?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. In my last show here in New York, I had a big painting of a young man and a girl. The girl is my daughter, Lizzie; and the young man is James Schuyler - just sitting in the porch where I paint. I wanted to do a big painting and wanted to have figures in it, and that was the easiest thing to do. The light was pretty good. It isn't very good on this porch, because the skylight is all around. I could get it the proper distance, and I could do it just straight from the models. As for what it is, it just means this environment to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you do a painting like the self-portrait, do you arrange all the things that are in it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Not very much, no. I see an arrangement I like. All I did was to arrange that chair for me to put one hand on. I thought of that. The rag on the floor was there and I liked it. Almost always in still lifes, I don't arrange them. This still like was arranged but usually just the way the dishes are on the table at the end of the meal strikes me suddenly. So I paint it. Part of my idea or my feeling about form that's interesting is that it is discovered. It's the effect of something unconscious like the dishes are in a certain arrangement at the end of a meal because people without thinking have moved things and then have gone away. I think it's impossible not to get some sort of form if you don't think about it. If you do think about it, you can get chaos; but if you don't think about it, you get form.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting because it's a very kind of arbitrary....You rely on a lot of arbitrary actions of other people.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I have a great deal of personal evidence to support that theory of mine like one thing that I like to tell often when I talk to art students:
In Maine, there are a lot of maps around of the islands and the islands we live on. They have a certain beauty, and they're very accurate. They're done by the Coast and Geodetic Survey. (My father sometimes enlarged them just making the island. When he was enlarging and writing titles, his hands sort of trembled so they all kind of shake a little.) Anyway, these maps are all done according to a system. They're done scientifically. They surveying is done according to a definite scientific system, and there it is.
Then after the war, my brother-in-law, who is in the government, got hold of some aerial photographs of the same place. An airplane flying above just took these islands form above. I looked at them and I saw that the curves of the shore, the beaches, the different colors of the water, the streak of foam or tidal currents all had a relationship to each other. It was artistic, and it was completely accidental. Whereas, these things done according to a system by surveyors are completely chaotic. I mean, in a very small way, they're chaotic. They're chaotic in a large way, I mean. You might say there's this and there's this and that balances. But if you look at it

in detail, the details somehow don't have the sequential logic. But in the photograph they do.
Well, that's one bit of evidence. In other words, nature- in that case the camera- is unconscious; and it shows you that here is form. You never could have arrived at it; people cannot arrive at it deliberately by using their intelligence.
Another bit of evidence that I think of is... I remember studying when I was on high school, doing algebra or something. It was very hard and making a doodle as one does when one is thinking and bored. Then I would see the doodle and I would like the way it looked. It had a certain spontaneity and freshness. It had a certain shape. I would think: I'll do it again; I'll copy that because I like it. I would copy it, but the copy didn't have that freshness. It was only chaotic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it follows really a kind of feeling, an emotional expression rather than an intellectual choice?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: It comes from the unconscious. Once I was psychoanalyzed. In psychoanalysis, of course, you follow your free associations without criticism. What you get when you're all through.. You're never all through; you're not all through until your dead, of course. I mean you stop. ....is you get yourself. This is your shape. You get it by following - not by ordering the thing and using your head but by being unconscious.. Form psychoanalysis, I got this idea about these forms. What you get is simply what you are. What you are is not something that you can say like I am A,B,C,D so-and-so. I have such and such complexes. That wouldn't be it. That would be a little bit off eveywhere. What you are is simply what you've been saying all this time, not any less than that. And not only that is what you are, but you are somebody who other people recognize as you. You say something and that is you or it's characteristic. But if you think carefully, you are in danger of people saying that he is not being direct, he's not being sincere, he's not being simple, it's not himself, that isn't he. In other words, what is the form is what is real; and that is something that you can't get outside or in psychoanalysis or in art.
One of the troubles with the world today- the pollution problems and so on- is that scientists or engineers do not sufficiently understand that the world that they are studying is not outside themselves, but they are part of it. It's bigger than themselves. They can't enclose it in their own minds because then it would be smaller than their own minds and it wouldn't be the totality of the world. In a sense, the value of art today is that it shows people- the was science doesn't- that what is real is everything and nothing less.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have never tried to write your aesthetic theory?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, I have, parts of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And are you happy or is it....?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. I'm happy as far as it goes. One thing I wrote for *Art and Literature* was- the first thing that I wrote, not about Cornell... I called it "Against Idealism." I meant by that against the Platonic notion that what is real is an idea, That is not what is real. Plato is wrong, he's completely wrong. And that has nothing to do with art. What is real is not an idea; it is not that. It's specific and it's total. It's both specific and total. Once I said that at Kent State University. I was on a panel with these other artists in which we also talked to philosophy students. That was what I said to them: that Plato is completely wrong, that art is not ideal, It's material and specific and actual. It's not an idea.
And only ideas can be manipulated completely, I mean. They're invisible; they don't exist. There's a book that I just read called *A Mathematician's Apology* by apparently a great British mathematician, He said that he once spoke to some scientists, and he said the difference between mathematics and science is that a mathematician has a closer connection with reality. His point was that you talk about such and such a law, which is only approximate; but when I say that 317 is a prime number, it is so because it is so. You can't get away from it. It's absolute. Well, that kind of reality is not the kind of reality that art is about. That's a mathematician's reality.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Don't you think all those areas of life have their own degrees of reality and heir own kind of reality?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that different people see different parts of the elephant as the joke goes. You think really then that painting is more of an emotional thing than an intellectual thing?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No, I don't think it's more emotional or more intellectual. I think it's a way of making the connection between yourself and everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you mean "and everything"?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well I mean "and reality" which is everything. In other words, you connect yourself to everything which includes yourself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Through the painting?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, by the process of painting; and the person who looks at it gets it vicariously. If you follow music, you vicariously live the composer's efforts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, don't you think the person who looks at a painting has an entirely different relationship to it than the person who's painted it?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, for one thing they see something that is hard for the person who's painted it to see. They see the person who has painted it and they see his emotions which maybe he doesn't see. They are communicated with. When they say they don't like such and such are, what they don't like is something that is really there. It isn't that's imagined. If somebody says to me, "I don't like abstract painting. What's the matte with me?" I say, "Well you don't like it because you don't like what you see there. What you see there is really there and you don't like that. It's up to you. You don't have to like it."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. There's still some choice left.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: yes. Or you don't like realistic painting. I don't like Andrew Wyeth's paintings, for instance; and I think it would be very hard for me to say why. I could maybe give all kind of rationalizations and say it isn't artistic or something like that. But I think really the reason is that there's something that he communicates to me which is disagreeable to me. I get something from him which I dislike.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean in subject, or color?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: In him. You see the painter; you see the artist in the work. Ad Reinhardt, for instance. People see his paintings at a show, and it makes them very angry very often. Well, Ad Reinhardt was an infuriating man, and he got that into his paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But very calculatedly so sometimes.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Right. That's what was infuriating, that calculation

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it was part of his humor, too, you know.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He knew it aggravated people and it amused him. I suppose that's what it is. How then would you account for the popularity of somebody like Wyeth?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Because there's something there that people do like. I think if I wanted to put him down, I would say they like him because he gives them something that they approve of rather than what they spontaneously like. He backs up for them. He supports for them things that they can't easily tak but that they think they should. People look at Bonnard who don't like him, or maybe like him but have second thoughts about it. They said its too nice. What do they mean by that? They mean it's too pretty. They might mean that it's saccharine. They might also mean that they can't approve of the emotion that it gives them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's true. I think there are many people who... I have a wall of drawings at home, and there are all kinds- figurative drawing, abstract drawings, geometric. People will come and they'll look and they'll fall in love with one and hate the one next to it. Yet there are people who will come in and say, "well, nobody else would have picked out those drawings."

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they'll say, "Well, you picked all those out, but that was a gift and that was a gift."

FAIRFIELD PORTER: And are they right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pretty much so.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, my psychiatrist's office had some pictures around, little sketches and so on. I was talking about them once. He said, "What do you think of these?" I said that I like some of them and some of them I don't like. I like the total. I like the whole collection. I like the fact that they're there, that what I see is that you like them and they have a real meaning that way. He said, "Yes, every one has a meaning for me." You don't go there for the Mona Lisa; you want to see the person, the person that's in the collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You have lots of pictures and prints and things. Have you always had those? Do you change them?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I change them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They come and go?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. Some of them stay for quite a long time. I like that Mercedes Carles particularly. But the people in it are just nothing. They're not there. I suppose they're models, but they're not in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's the cars; it's the fins.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. And the people are just... Well, they're skinny models, who are fashionable. The people are part of it. I wouldn't like it so well if there weren't people there, but psychologically they're not taking part.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Well, let's see. You mentioned Alex Katz and a couple of other people. Are there any other younger painters who you see much of or that interest you particularly?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, usually I like to see what John Button is doing. I like Joe Fiore; I like to see what he's doing. I don't know; I don't go around so much anymore. Now if I go into town and see shows, I've a feeling I've go to see this and this and this show; because I know those people and I don't search for new things. This boy who is coming around to show me another picture... The other day he brought me a couple fo paintings, and they were... I always thought he was very talented; but these pictures when I looked at them, I liked in themselves, not just because he did them. These are things I'd really like to look at, so in a sense he and gone further.

PAUL CUMMINGS: DO you read any of the art magazines any more?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I just look at *Art News* just because my fiends work for it. Otherwise, I don't think I would. I never read any art criticism until then. After Berenson, I never read any criticism again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then all of a sudden you started in quite a different world from what Berenson was talking to or about even.

FAIRFIELD PORTER: I read some Adrian Stokes, whom I think is very good- about the Renaissance. Hen he wrote some things I was interested in because I disagreed with it. I thought he missed the point which was called Color and Form, or in British Colour and Form.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. DO you have in your paintings, you know...You just mentioned color and this reminds me again. Do you have any theories about color, about the use of color?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes, but it isn't....It's always specific. Well, I'll show you a painting. I like this painting; I like this relationship. That has what I mean, but it lacks substantiality. See, this ought to be.. The sky has substance and so should this just as much. Maybe it's something like what Alex Katz does. He says the paint has to go across the canvas. The paint doesn't quite go across the canvas on the left-hand side. It drops away.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you don't really have an overall kind of program or idea that you follow?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Well, I think that color should be alive. I agree with the remark of Matisse that he use to make to his pupils that every corner of the canvas should be alive. That's a matter of the inner relationships of the areas to each other, and it's also a matter of contours. They've got to be alive. It's a matter of both drawing and color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you like drawing?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Yes. But I don't care about separating it from painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you do a painting like this, do you draw first and then paint?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: This was from a sketch in a sketchbook.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about the other paintings?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: Those others, those were just from a model.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I mean you don't draw first and then paint?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: If it's the city, I can't paint there; or at least I haven't got the courage to do that. So I make a drawing, take it home, and then I don't remember enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think there's any area that we should talk about that we haven't come across?

FAIRFIELD PORTER: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: We've covered a lot. I don't think there are really any more questions that I could ask here.

END OF INTERVIEW

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